

## Book Review

### ***Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations and Contexts***

By Margaret Kovach

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**Reviewed by Helen J. Brown**

In *Indigenous Methodologies* Margaret Kovach invites the reader to join her in a thoughtful and critical exploration of the place of Indigenous inquiry within contemporary academic contexts. Orienting the reader to praxis and social justice in the opening chapter, she outlines the need for research that honours Indigenous knowledge systems and their tribal epistemological basis. Kovach describes how the very notion of research poses questions, many of which have not yet been pursued — in particular, how the ideology of knowledge production within Eurocentric academic contexts ascribes positional authority to Western research paradigms, thereby marginalizing the Indigenous approach to inquiry. Claiming a place for Indigenous methodologies, she asserts, requires us to grapple with the politics of knowledge production and the rightful place of tribal epistemologies within the academy.

In chapter 2 Kovach provides a critical and thoughtful scrutiny of the field of qualitative research, indicating the connections, intersections, and disconnections among tribal epistemologies and those underpinning qualitative research in the “seventh moment.” She skilfully navigates the tensions and the possibilities for locating Indigenous methodologies both inside and outside of qualitative research paradigms, resisting the need to categorize within dominant academic discourse. While Kovach distinguishes Indigenous and qualitative methodologies at the level of epistemology in this chapter, she demonstrates a sophisticated handling of the challenges arising from positioning Indigenous methodologies through a politics of difference. She carefully examines intersecting and unique concepts, process and practices of Indigenous methodologies, and qualitative approaches by teasing out their epistemological similarities and differences. In fact, Kovach delivers on distinguishing and relating both research traditions and their relational, pragmatic, and process/content orientation. The reader glimpses the “both/and” intersections in Indigenous and qualitative inquiry while also seeing how and why tribal

knowledge is not Western knowledge. Kovach considers the goal of equity within the sphere of knowledge construction in stating that “an environment, research or otherwise, that allows for equitable valuing of ideas and relationships in understanding the world, and the living entities within it, is necessary for relational approaches such as indigenous methodologies to thrive” (p. 38).

In chapter 3 Kovach tackles what constitutes the conventional research framework. In indicating how Western cognitive imperialism underpins the role of theory in academic inquiry, she describes the ways in which research frameworks in Indigenous approaches are relational, storied, and experiential rather than purely cognitive. She discusses the interconnections among postcolonial, critical, narrative, and interpretive perspectives and Indigenous methodologies while also noting the distinct contribution of tribal epistemologies. Kovach explains that Indigenous methodologies go beyond the “human centric” and “non-animistic” epistemological claims underlying qualitative approaches. To illustrate the contribution of tribal epistemologies to research frameworks, she shows how Nêhiyaw epistemology locates language, place, values, customs, and sacred ceremony as integral methodologies within research. An interview with Michael Hart, a Cree scholar, demonstrates how Indigenous methodology is fundamentally about relating to self, elders, ceremony, and one’s academic life, to bring greater consciousness to the place and politics of knowing, being, and researching.

Kovach claims that all researchers have a responsibility to open up space for decolonizing lenses in Indigenous research frameworks. In chapter 4 she revisits the marginalization of Indigenous knowledge within Western research processes: “colonial interruptions of Indigenous culture continue, and there is no way to address tribal epistemologies and Indigenous research frameworks without considering these relations” (p. 76). She maintains that the suppression of Indigenous knowledge is an instrument of colonial-settler relations that is anything but “post.” Focusing on issues of representation and voice within the power/knowledge nexus, Kovach describes the various challenges, complexities, and contradictions that are inherent in decolonizing inquiry. The reader is, then, well prepared, in chapter 5, to move on to a more detailed exploration of methods and the place of oral history, narrative, and story in Indigenous inquiry. The text of an interview with Jeannine Carriere reveals how story is both method and meaning within a holistic epistemology.

In chapter 6 Kovach shifts to the preparatory considerations for Indigenous inquiry. She describes how the epistemic is enacted methodologically, indicating that self-location, purpose, and culture are the grounding for reflexive research processes. Kovach carefully navigates the

subjectivity and knowing interface and positions truth claims as inseparable from both the politics and the personal process of knowledge construction. In chapter 7 she extends the discussion to knowledge-gathering methods, sampling, protocols, data analysis, and “meaning making” with tribal interpretations. This shift to “application” reflects Kovach’s praxis intent. When describing open-ended data-collection methods, the author makes an important distinction between engaging in conversation as method and conventional qualitative interviews. Eliciting stories is the basis for research-sharing circles within Indigenous methodologies. Kovach describes the relational context and reciprocity of relationship as foundational to sampling and analytical decisions and processes. This chapter provides readers with strategies and process for engaging in the analytical (meaning making) process of Indigenous methodologies, primarily observation, sensory experience, contextual knowledge, and pattern recognition.

Returning to a central premise of the book, Kovach outlines how societal and institutional structures manifest power dynamics that can be traced to historical and current Indigenous-settler relations. She then turns to the topic of research ethics. In chapter 8 she describes Indigenous research ethics as integral to methodologies guided by tribal epistemologies. In examining how ethical conduct, principles, guidelines, and protocols have evolved in Canada, Kovach provides a synthesis of protocol documents, such as OCAP principles (ownership, access, control, and possession) and ethical practice of research in Indigenous communities outlined by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research in 2007. She reminds the reader that such documents are guidelines, not policy statements, and that it is the responsibility of each researcher to carefully consider how each moment of research is an ethical endeavour. Kovach connects values and ethics espoused within Cree traditions to illustrate this critical element of Indigenous approaches. Kovach again delivers on the practical implications of Indigenous ethics by describing the nuances of confidentiality and validity when the goal is to honour truth and knowledge in stories and in the *miyo*, or “giving back,” ethic in Cree tradition.

Chapter 9 draws the insights from the entire book into a thoughtful and provocative call for situating Indigenous research within the academy. Kovach argues for always locating Indigenous methodologies against the backdrop of historical influence of Indigenous-settler relations for educational policy, practice, and research. Ongoing recognition of the uniqueness of Indigenous people from other minority groups is described as central to this effort. Outlining the colonial context of education policy, in the final chapter the author points to the need for a decolonization of research practices and academic relations. Kovach’s concluding discussion

on Indigenous graduate education brings the book's critical insights to fruition. She reminds Indigenous graduate students of the critical role of Indigenous knowing and inquiry as decisions are made about method, committee, supervision, and so forth. The suggestion that non-Indigenous scholars engage with Indigenous research offers a principled means of transcending the "us-other/other-us" dynamic of relations described throughout the book. The goal of creating a "decolonizing academy" implicates everyone, and Kovach's book goes far enough to chart the territory but not so far as to prescribe a route for advancing Indigenous methodologies; however, the obligations and responsibilities of those working within academic structures and contexts are undeniably clear.

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*Helen J. Brown, RN, PhD, is Assistant Professor, School of Nursing, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada.*