

# Foreword and Conclusion



This section is written in order to provide some context for the reader. Through anticipating and responding to the concerns of academics accustomed to the dominant system's method of research presentation, I hope in this foreword to make the book more readable and more understandable. Research is all about unanswered questions, but it also reveals our unquestioned answers. It is my hope that readers of this book will begin to question some of their own beliefs about the way research needs to be conducted and presented, so that they can recognize the importance of developing alternative ways of answering questions.

Stories go in circles. They don't go in straight lines. It helps if you listen in circles because there are stories inside and between stories, and finding your way through them is as easy and as hard as finding your way home. Part of finding is getting lost, and when you are lost you start to open up and listen. (Tafoya, 1995, p. 12)

It is my intention to build a relationship between the readers of this story, myself as the storyteller and the ideas I present. This relationship needs to be formed in order for an understanding of an Indigenous research paradigm to develop. This paradigm must hold true to its principles of relationality and relational accountability. As I cannot know beforehand who will read this book, I cannot be sure of the relationships that readers might hold with me or the ideas I share. So, I will start from scratch just to make sure that we begin this book from a common ground.

Finding this common ground is one of the struggles of cross-cultural communication. Yet it is necessary so that both sides in the communication process can begin to see or understand the same things. When communicating with like-minded others, we often take many things for granted. There is an expression: "If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, I wouldn't have believed it." The opposite holds just as true: "If I hadn't believed it, I wouldn't have seen it." When talking or writing, we usually expect others to make the same jumps

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in logic, to follow the same patterns of communication and to have similar terms of reference. The reader must be able to comprehend the writer's beliefs in order to see what the writer sees. When this is not happening, miscommunication is inevitable.

So in addition to explaining the aim of the book, this foreword explains a bit about how my logic works, the pattern my cultural style of communication follows, some of the terms of reference I use and my role in this process. As Terry Tafoya (1995) said, when speaking with people from another culture it often takes longer to explain the context, background or meaning of a story than it does to actually tell the story. On the other hand, when communicating with people who share the same culture, too much explanation or background detailing could be seen as disrespectful of the intelligence of the listener. Since I have no way of knowing if the reader is from the same culture as me, I hope I will be excused if I am being insensitive in this foreword. I come to you with a good heart.

This book describes one view of an Indigenous research paradigm, in the process answering the following questions:

- What are the shared aspects of the ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodology of research conducted by Indigenous scholars in Australia and Canada?
- How can these aspects of an Indigenous research paradigm be put into practice to support other Indigenous people in their own research?

I put forward in the book that: 1. the shared aspect of an Indigenous ontology and epistemology is relationality (relationships do not merely shape reality, they *are* reality). The shared aspect of an Indigenous axiology and methodology is accountability to relationships. 2. The shared aspects of relationality and relational accountability can be put into practice through choice of research topic, methods of data collection, form of analysis and presentation of information.

While this paradigm has developed from working with Indigenous scholars in Canada and Australia, it is by no means intended to be exclusive to these groups. Indigenous scholars from other countries and homelands (especially some phenomenal Native Hawaiians) have read this manuscript and taken part in discussions of our paradigms, as have many non-Indigenous academics, and have confirmed that their own worldviews are compatible.. So I must apologize for leaving out any groups of peoples with my research questions. These were merely intended to provide some boundaries for the sake of my own research, not to limit the use of this paradigm. It is my hope that my continuing journey of learning in this area will allow me to incorporate the words of many more Indigenous scholars from around the world into this paradigm.

## Research Is Ceremony

The view I present here was developed in several ways. My lifelong participant observation as an Indigenous person has formed my worldview in general and my beliefs about Indigenous research more specifically. It is through my life experiences as an Indigenous scholar and researcher that most of these ideas developed. The more formal aspects of the participant observation in this research project happened at Indigenous units within universities in Brisbane, Queensland, in Australia and Edmonton, Alberta, in Canada. I also held focus group and individual discussions with Indigenous scholars in both these cities. Feedback and discussion of the ideas were shared experiences that took place with all the participants. The observations and discussions were held over a period of four years.

The significance of this research is explained in the literature review through a chronology of research conducted on, and *by* Indigenous peoples in light of the political and social context in which it was situated. As we Indigenous scholars have begun to assert our power, we are no longer allowing others to speak in our stead. We are beginning to articulate our own research paradigms and to demand that research conducted in our communities follows our codes of conduct and honours our systems of knowledge and worldviews. Research by and for Indigenous peoples is a ceremony that brings relationships together.

## My Writing Style

You will notice that the book is typeset in two different fonts: the main font denotes a more “academic” style; a different font is used for the personal narrative sections, which are initially addressed to my sons, Julius, Max and Falco. When I was originally writing my doctoral thesis, which led to this book, I felt that the dominant style of writing to an anonymous reader did not live up to the standards of relational accountability I was proposing. Indigenous epistemology is all about ideas developing through the formation of relationships. An idea cannot be taken out of this relational context and still maintain its shape. Terry Tafoya (1995) describes this in his *Principle of Uncertainty*. Just as Heisenberg theorizes in his *Theory of Uncertainty* in physics, that it is impossible to know both the velocity and the location of an electron at the same time (you would have to stop it to measure its location, or you would lose its location if it maintains its velocity), Tafoya postulates that it is not possible to know exactly both the context and definition of an idea at the same time. The closer you get to defining something, the more it loses its context. Conversely, the more something is put into context, the more it loses a specific definition.

So I was faced with the problem of trying to define or describe the ideas when doing so would take them out of their relational context. In an oral tradition, this problem is overcome by utilizing the direct relationship

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between storyteller and listener. Each recognizes the other's role in shaping both the content and process. Addressing parts of the book to Julius, Max and Falco became a device for me to try to provide both context and definition. Instead of writing directly to readers, which is difficult without knowing their culture and context, I chose to write to my children. I further develop the relationships I have with the ideas through my relationship with my sons. I hope that this literary tool allows you to develop your own relationships both with me and with the in this book.

In my current thinking and writing process it would probably make the most sense to address the entire book to my sons, but I have purposefully not gone back into my writing to switch it all to this style. As this foreword was one of the last things written in the preparation of this book, I am now at a point where I can address you directly. The writing process took me several years, and you may notice that my writing style changes, maybe matures, as the book progresses through the chapters. The chapters (other than this foreword) were pretty much written in the order they are presented: so in addition to putting forward ideas, they also represent a chronology of my maturation as a writer and Indigenous researcher.

The two "voices" may initially seem disjointed. Oftentimes they either cover entirely different material, but they may repeat one another. It was my intention that they cover more or less the same ground, but with two different emphasises—one academic and one more personal. As my writing and thinking progressed, these voices became less and less distinct. Maybe I was finally beginning to internalize what it was that I was theorizing about. In final editing of the book, I tried to make a change so that the letters to Julius, Max and Falco begin to directly address you. By chapter four the difference between the voices becomes less clear. By chapter five, you might notice that I have more or less switched to one voice that incorporates both the personal and theoretical but can't decide which font to use. Perhaps the book should switch to an entirely different font here, but I think that might be too confusing. Anyway I hope that by then you will have internalized enough of the ideas to allow me to write the last parts (including this foreword) in a style that mixes the personal with the theoretical.

## Sequencing of the Book

Now that you understand about the style in which the book is written, I must explain that the ordering of the book does not follow the usual linear model either. After the title page, table of contents, abstract and acknowledgements, it is usual for theses to be presented as:

- a. Introduction
- b. Review of literature

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- c. Research procedure
- d. Data presentation and analysis
- e. Findings
- f. Summary and conclusions
- g. References

While this book evolved from my doctoral thesis and contains all of this information in generally this format, I have tried to present in such a way as to honour and build relationships with the ideas that it presents. I have situated myself in the research process by giving a detailed explanation of my background. This is required by the Indigenous axiology and methodology of relational accountability. The research procedure has been divided into two parts: chapter two discusses the general strategy of inquiry; chapter seven discusses the specific methods. I have done this so that you will have a greater understanding of an Indigenous research paradigm with which to view how I conducted the research process, that is, I hope that you will gain an understanding of an Indigenous methodology before you read about the methods that I used.

The information I am sharing (data presentation and analysis) has been separated into three parts. The fourth chapter goes into detail about the entities that make up an Indigenous research paradigm, namely the ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodology. Chapter five discusses some of the varied aspects of relationality. Chapter six carries this discussion further and develops ideas on how to put relational accountability into practice.

Chapter four differs from the dominant style of presentation. Rather than a brief discussion about the demographics or sampling procedure used to select participants, this chapter directly introduces you to the co-researchers. While most dominant research maintains the anonymity of participants, relational accountability requires me to name the co-researchers who worked with me on this project and who wished to be named. It is my hope that this chapter helps you to form your own relationships with the co-researchers, rather than merely allowing you to see the relationships that we share among ourselves.

Chapter six, like chapter four, also varies from the usual style of analysis or presentation of findings. The form of analysis that I chose to use was cumulative and collaborative. All of the co-researchers in this project informed and helped in the analysis and therefore directly shaped the process and the outcome of the research. Although the discussions did not always follow a formalized talking circle format, the analysis followed a circular method in that each co-researcher was allowed to build upon the ideas of the others. I was a full participant in all of the discussions, sharing what I had learned from the others, and both giving and receiving feedback in a more or less

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continuous manner. All of us as co-researchers came to a mutual understanding of what an Indigenous research paradigm is.

So chapter six may serve two purposes (and I hope that it serves even more with further reading and insight). It is in itself an analysis of the ideas that developed through this research. In this sense it may stand alone as a presentation of research findings. It is also meant to be an example of the process. Here too it may stand alone as something like a transcript of a discussion. But as both process (or context) and analysis (or definition) together, it is my hope that it helps to tread the fine line between context and definition that Tafoya (1995) talks about in his Principle of Uncertainty.

Chapter seven finishes off the book by using my own research process as an example of an Indigenous research paradigm in action. It discusses how I chose the topic, the methods used, the ways that ideas were analyzed and the style of presentation. It goes over some of the methodological and axiological problems I faced (and maybe overcame) in the process. It discusses how the relationships I made have in turn shaped me and the conclusions that these relationships allowed me to form, and it attempts to look into the future. I close the book by writing again to Julius, Max, and Falco.

In the typical circular style common to many Indigenous peoples, this foreword is really more like a summary and conclusions chapter. Maybe there are other reasons why it needed to go first, but as I said at the beginning, it is intended to acquaint you with my style of presentation and with the ideas themselves so that you will understand where I am coming from, or where I am going, in this writing. Perhaps it would be a good idea to re-read this section again at the end, so that your reading process in itself will complete the circle.

So you have now become embroiled in the relationships that go into making up an Indigenous research paradigm. I believe that Indigenous epistemology and ontology are based upon relationality. Our axiology and methodology are based upon maintaining relational accountability. With a deeper understanding of these concepts, I hope that you will come to see that research is a ceremony. The purpose of any ceremony is to build stronger relationships or bridge the distance between aspects of our cosmos and ourselves. The research that we do as Indigenous people is a ceremony that allows us a raised level of consciousness and insight into our world. Let us go forward together with open minds and good hearts as we further take part in this ceremony.