Decolonial Publishing House ?

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Old Ways of Knowing, New Ways of Playing: The potential of collaborative game design to empower Indigenous Sámi
by Outi Laiti

From the chapter: 1.4 The researcher's position — Sámi researcher and Indigenous worldview

The concept of participation is central in Indigenous research (Smith 2012; Wilson 2008). In this regard, it is important to address the position of the researcher, as I am a member of an Indigenous community. My study is based on Indigenous methodologies (Kuokkanen 2009; Smith 2012; Wilson 2008), which I refer to with the term Indigenous worldview. An Indigenous worldview is more than just a way of knowing: it is all the ways of knowing, the systems of arranging information, and the relationships between them. It includes, for example, entire cultures, ways of conceptualising the world, languages, history, and the connection of Indigenous peoples to nature (Kuokkanen 2009; Wilson 2008). In this study, the relationship between Indigenous worldview and Sámi worldview is parallel. This is based on two aspects. First, the work of previous Indigenous researchers reflects the world of an Indigenous researcher, as Indigenous experiences are not isolated from each other, or the world for that matter (Bishop 2020). I saw me and my experiences being reflected when reading Indigenous research literature. This leads to the second aspect of Indigenous methodologies; the common practice is a mixture of existing Indigenous methodological approaches, as well as more localized practices (Smith 1999). These aspects make Indigenous worldview what it is: a dialectic process. Therefore, in this research the terms Indigenous and Sámi are seen as parallel.

In the Indigenous worldview, truth is not an external object (Wilson 2008), because the worldview concentrates more on the relationship between the individual and the topic, object, or phenomenon. For example, the Indigenous Australians have adjusted the concept of knowledge of digital databases to better correspond to their conception of knowledge, which relies on the relative manifestation of knowledge rather than the contents of the word as such (Christie 2005a & b; Christie & Verran 2013; Verran & Christie 2007). For Sámi culture knowledge as such is not a goal, but rather its utility value is. The production and distribution of knowledge, then, is the responsibility of all Sámi people (Helander & Kailo 1999, 233). As a result, knowledge and its practical adaptation go hand in hand (Keskitalo 2010). Correspondingly, knowledge is interpreted as useful for the community if, and only if, it is genuinely useful from the Indigenous community's point of view (Wilson 2008).

When describing the starting point of a research setting, it is important to distinguish between research conducted among and in collaboration with the Indigenous people and communities, and research that uses the Indigenous people as objects (Wilson 2008). Stevenson (1996) presents examples of the values that govern the Western and traditional worldviews (table 2). The table presents examples of these values, which function as the basis for the legalities by which these different worldviews function and form knowledge. Stevenson (1996) maintains that the table is a generalised presentation of its subject matter. For example, a researcher may adhere to an Indigenous worldview while also pursuing other values (Kuokkanen 2009; Stevenson 1996). This categorisation nevertheless helps us interpret the Indigenous researcher's worldview (Kuokkanen 2009).

Table 2. Indigenous worldview (Stevenson 1996)

Indigenous values and orientations	Western values and orientations
individual, extended family, and group concern	individual and immediate family concern
small group size	large group size
cooperation	competition
holistic view of nature	homocentric view of nature
partnership with nature	exploitation of nature
renewable resource economy	non-renewable resource economy
shared, communal treatment of land and resources	private ownership of land and resources
sharing and wealth distribution	saving and wealth accumulation
focus on the present	focus on the future
non-materialistic orientation	materialistic orientation
time measurement in natural cycles, e.g. seasons	time measurement in small, arbitrary units
practical, intuitive thinking	theoretical thinking, prone to abstraction
face-to-face government and politics	representative democracy
egalitarian organisation	hierarchical organisation
age and wisdom are valued	youth and beauty are valued
high group esteem, lower self-esteem	high self-esteem, lower group esteem
modesty and reserve	confidence and noisiness
patience: problems will be resolved in time	impatience: problems will be resolved quickly

My values adhere to the Indigenous worldview with one exception: I define my orientation as history-aware and living in the present, but ultimately future-oriented. Polarisations are not a part of my worldview; instead, I appreciate that different worldviews can support each other. The Indigenous standpoint is not meant to belittle other ways of producing knowledge through juxtaposition (Kuokkanen 2009; Wilson 2008, 35). However, this connection between supporting and juxtaposing needs to be clarified with three aspects. First, this means that in this study my standpoint is to motivate and justify the methods I have used, not to argue why something is left out. Second, I see that the field of game studies is asking for perspectives. As game studies can involve research on a wide range, from players and communities to technology and games (Mäyrä & Sotamaa 2017), the educational aspects of games are mostly addressed by other research fields (Meriläinen 2020). In my opinion, Indigenous worldview has a lot to offer, bringing perspectives on to the table. These perspectives can also have a wide range from Indigenous education to Indigenous game design. However, this cannot be done by highlighting the Western over Indigenous or by seeking bridges between these two worlds. The expectations, and the challenge, of walking two paths is Indigenous reality in our daily lives. In research this can mean that Indigenous research is expected to reach out by uplifting, explaining, and normalizing the Indigenous ways, in relation to the main cultures that often are white (Brown 2010.). As it can be seen in the table presented by Stevenson (1996), walking these two paths at the same time is not possible, as these worldviews are based on different epistemologies and ontologies (Wilson 2008). Thus, the expectation of a walk in two paths can easily turn as a walk on the self-colonization road instead of uplifting Indigenous methodology. Therefore, the third aspect is that in this study I see the other road, and I am curious of it, but I have chosen to walk on the road of my ancestors and other Indigenous researchers.

Indigenous researchers can also be positioned on the optimist–pessimist axis, for example by stating that those with a positive outlook of the future are optimists whereas pessimists would believe that Indigenous peoples will be destroyed (Smith 2012). On this axis, I am an optimist. In this case I see that the optimistic view focuses on the possibilities of games whereas the pessimistic view would concentrate more on the negative impact that digitalization might have upon Indigenous cultures.

An Indigenous identity in and of itself does not define any researcher nor a research project Indigenous. After all, intra-cultural points of view vary, and the Indigenous methodology is not tied to one's identity as an Indigenous person (Porsanger 2004). More importantly, the research should adhere to the Indigenous researcher's guidelines. The Indigenous researcher's guidelines can be summarised by the three Rs: relationality, reciprocity, and respect (Weber-Pillwax 2001; Wilson 2008, 77).

Using these concepts, I can define my position as the researcher conducting this study, for, in addition to the knowledge obtained through my Indigenous worldview, the Indigenous methodology stresses that understanding these core concepts is essential (Porsanger 2004).

As a member of an Indigenous people, I have a great responsibility to not harm my culture through my research. As a member of the community I study, I may not have had to strive to gain the trust of the participants in conducting the research, but I do feel a pressure to live up to their trust. I have a responsibility to honour the relationships I had before, during, and after the research project, and to support the formation of a solid relationship with my study topic and between the participants. Furthermore, I also express relational accountability in this thesis by mentioning the full name of some of the relations built during this research. As a researcher, I recognise the need to follow the principle of reciprocity, and to carefully reflect on the subjects, phenomena, and relationships that I will offer to my community reciprocally, both now and later (Smith 2012). I respect my community, and I need to organise the methods I use in a way that promotes reciprocal sharing, growth, and learning in the framework of this study. It is my aim to produce the results from a perspective that describes and portrays my culture and community in a way its members can identify with rather than to produce a collection of stereotypical representations compiled by a researcher who has observed the community from the outside, depicting the Sámi as an abstract idea (Kuokkanen 2002) and stressing the aspect of otherness (Keskitalo, Määttä & Uusiautti 2013; Smith 2012).

For these reasons, relatedness is an essential component of Indigenous research (Porsanger 2004; Smith 2012; Wilson 2008) and plays in central role in my study. I am a member of the community I study, so I could not have positioned myself outside it. This is also because the people in the Sámi community tend to know each other, and some of the people who participated in my study I considered to be my friends even before the research project. The membership of the community is a strength for the Indigenous researcher: it is important that Indigenous research is managed from within the community (Wilson 2008, 108). Belonging to a community can also facilitate criticism from the inside, where scholar-members of the community are criticised on the basis of the community's Indigenous criteria: lineage, age, family background, political interests, gender, or a supposed hidden agenda. The researchers belonging to an Indigenous people strike a balance between internal and external factors when choosing Indigenous research: the internal challenges related to conducting research from within the community as a member of the community, and the external challenges related to, for example, the Western educational background and its effects on the Indigenous point of view. (Smith 2012.) Fear of critique from within the community may lead to excessive caution or short-sightedness on the part of the researcher. Wilson (2008), for one, has paid attention to the trend among Indigenous researchers to examine their subjects in a positive light (Wilson 2008, 109).

The internal and external challenges related to my research include my relatively extensive Western educational background of computer science engineer and Master of Education, and for that I admittedly can be judged. However, my family history includes many other formally learned people. Consider, for example, Dávvet-Ásllat, or Aslak Laiti, who lived in the 19th century and made his living as a teacher, a translator, and as the first Sámi official in the Finnish government, among other occupations (Hirvonen 2018; Muranen 2009). My experience is that my Western educational background has not forced me to make compromises concerning my values and worldview, but has rather expanded them — computer science, educational sciences, and the Indigenous worldview have given me the kind of multi-perspectivism that are required in this research.

Indigenous women face discrimination based on, for example, age, gender, and ethnicity, but they are also carriers of culture (Hirvonen 1999; UN 2010). Sámi women in particular are more marginalised than Sámi in general, as historically the Sámi community has been studied mainly through the words and activities of its male members. Narrative literature by Sámi women became more common only as late as in the 1970s (Hirvonen 1999). The Sámi identity cannot always be formed painlessly (Hirvonen 1999), and I pay attention to this in the later chapters of my dissertation. However, when it comes to my own identity, the meta-work has already been done. I grew up in a multicultural home, in which my father was Finnish and my mother Sámi. My close relatives are either Finnish or Sámi from either Finland or Norway. Back in his day, my father worked for the Finnish Air Force as a major of a transport squadron, and I have often thought that I inherited his big wings as well as my mother's sturdy Sámi roots. My identity has been affected by the shame of being imperfect, as well as by the ridicule for my ethnicity in my early years, but those factors have never defined or controlled me. I am an Indigenous, relatively young woman in the field of game studies, and the process of ending up in this setting could not possibly have been simple nor pain-free.