Métissage methodology for qualitative research

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There is a lack of Métis-specific research methodologies that can be drawn upon in academia by Métis[1] scholars and emerging academics such as master's and Ph.D. students. This paper outlines an exploratory research methodology used by a Ph.D. student in educational studies for a qualitative study on reconciliation through Métissage[2] in higher education. The study was designed to build a conceptual framework[3] that answers the following question: "How have university courses and learning experiences impacted Métis peoples' understandings of their cultural identities, the role of Métis-specific knowledge in higher education curricula and policies, and Métis perspectives on reconciliation in Canadian universities?" This exploratory methodology allows for a deeper understanding of Métis peoples' experiences in university classrooms. Like the mixed worldview of the Métis people, a mix of grounded theory and Indigenous Métissage methodology has provided an innovative way for one Métis Ph.D. candidate to attempt to ground their research within their culture. In particular, the application of grounded theory and the sharing of stories through the conversational method are used in this study. The use of narratives also contributes to a rich set of methods, allowing auto-ethnography to be woven throughout the research methodology.

Grounded Theory Methodology and Indigenous Métissage Methodology

The aim of the study is to use grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) as the primary research methodology; however, as a Métis-specific research study, the inclusion of a Métissage research paradigm was required to assist in capturing the worldview presented by the Métis

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[1] Using the Canadian Encyclopedia's (2007) definition, the term "Métis" is used to describe people of mixed European and Indigenous ancestry.

[2] Métissage is a blend of European and Métis perspectives.

[3] The purpose of this paper is to describe an exploratory research methodology. The conceptual framework can be located on this page: https://knowledgecommons.lakeheadu.ca/bitstream/handle/2453/4802/ScottB2021d-1a.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y Scott, B. (2021). Reconciliation through Métissage in higher education [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Faculty of Education, Lakehead University.

research participants. Wilson (2008) argues that Indigenous methodology should be used in all Indigenous research. As a result, this qualitative research study grew to include the use of a blended methodology based on grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and Métissage (Donald, 2009).

As the study developed, there was reliance on the coding process of grounded theory to identify key concepts; this flexibility was an important factor in why the grounded theory methodology was employed. Grounded theory supported the Indigenous approach taken for the research. In line with a Métissage research paradigm, the combination of the European research methods of grounded theory and Indigenous methodology allows for the use of both processes to conduct this research. In this paper, there is a description of the significance of both types of methodologies and how they were used in this study.

Grounded Theory

Ground theory originated with Glaser and Strauss's (1967) seminal work *The discovery of grounded theory*. It is both a method and a methodology that "involves generating theory and doing social research [as] two parts of the same process" (Glaser, 1978, p. 2). In grounded theory, "theory may be generated initially from the data, or if existing (grounded) theories seem appropriate to the area of investigation, then these may be elaborated and modified as incoming data is meticulously played against them" (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 273). Moreover, it allows researchers to learn what they can from participants' interpretations and perspectives, and in turn, these interpretations and perspectives become the researcher's conceptualizations (p. 280). This study used the technique of word counting and the coding process of grounded theory to identify key concepts in the research participants' stories. This method assisted in identifying the words that appeared most often, thus leading to key concept identification. Moreover, grounded theory also promotes the exploration of multiple aspects during research inquiry (p. 280). For this reason,

the multiple perspectives of Métis students, alumni, community members, and the personal story of the researcher were included.

Indigenous Métissage Methodology

The literature on Métissage as an Indigenous research methodology is underdeveloped, and this research contributes to the exploratory use of a Métissage methodology, thus representing one population's experience of Métis people. This study employed a Métis-specific approach to analyze the data and incorporate the blended worldview of the researcher into the research and methodology. The researcher wanted to utilize all that was available by combining their personal stance, research questions, literature review, theory, participants, fieldwork, data collection methods, and analysis to focus on improving Métis education. The Métissage approach was used to discuss ways to enhance Métis education, to further develop Métissage as a methodology, and to assist research participants in reclaiming Métis education. There are limitations imposed by using Western research methodologies, and Indigenous research methodologies are not specific to the Métis people.

Blended Research Methodology

Using a blend of Western (grounded theory) and Indigenous methodologies (conversational method and the sharing of stories) supports a new research methodology to explore research on reconciliation with Métis perspectives. The grounded theory research design encompasses the concepts in this paper, including the research method that occurred in three phases: 1) purposive sampling, initial coding, ongoing data collection and generation, constant comparative analysis (the generation of a conceptual framework), and category identification; 2) theoretical sensitivity, intermediate or selective coding, selection of core categories, and theoretical saturation; and 3) advanced or theoretical coding and theoretical integration.

Throughout, there was also engagement in memo writing (Birks & Mills, 2015, p. 14) and the creation of fieldnotes.

The Researcher

It is challenging as a Métis person to write and research higher education, especially when there is no Métis worldview or framework accepted in academia: "The notion that empirical evidence is sounder than cultural knowledge permeates western thought but alienates many Indigenous scholars" (Wilson, 2008, p. 58). The research argues that cultural knowledge supports their conceptualization as a Métis researcher: She claims her Métis identity, which is deeply connected to a historical base located within Northwestern Ontario and the larger Métis Nation. Her family's history is substantiated through their genealogy as post-contact people dating back to the 1800s. As a contributing member of my historic Métis community today, the kinship connections, values, and beliefs held are my Métis knowledge system's grounded roots. As a Métis person, the researcher has a voice as a legal, political, and cultural rights-bearing Indigenous person living on this land, now known as Canada.

In addition, the researcher's worldview is rooted in their identity, where they focus on the Métis knowledge of my family and community, giving them credit as the first teachers in her educational journey. Researching within the broader Métis community allows the community to share their stories among generations. It is the voice of the community being engaged within the Métis research that is a "life-changing ceremony" (Wilson, 2008, p. 61) to be shared with future generations of Métis learners.

Study Participants

The sample was drawn from self-identified Métis participants who volunteered for the study. "Qualitative studies typically use some form of purposeful sampling" (Hood, 2007, p. 157). In this study, there was no age restriction or degree requirement for the participants, but they all

had to be Métis people living in the province of Ontario. People who currently attend the site (the same university as the researcher) or who had graduated were the ideal participants for a purposeful sample. Métis community members working in education were also a major asset to the study. The knowledge and contribution of the larger Métis community are in line with the *Tri-council policy statement* on Research involving First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples of Canada (Government of Canada, 2018) – in that it signifies "a collaborative relationship between the researcher and community … [signifying the community] acknowledges [the research] and registers no objection to it" (p. 112). The research participants were Métis people, either currently enrolled or alumni, or those who held master's degrees in social justice, social work, law, and education. It is noted that only Métis women volunteered for the study, although it would have been suitable to have a blend of female and male participants.

Data Collection

Consistent with grounded theory, this study used a variety of methods to collect data. "All is data" (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 188), meaning that "data include[s] everything related to the topic the researchers encounter when engaging in the research study" (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 188). During the dissertation, the researcher was employed at a university and was a member of that university's Indigenous Content Requirement (ICR) committee. She also attended the university as a student; hence, it was beneficial to this research to ensure that the data included all these experiences as autoethnography, which "is a form of autobiographical narrative that explores the writer's own experiences of life" (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 201). Their intent as the researcher is to ensure that the study reflects a Métissage research methodology; therefore, a description of the researcher's narrative and one-to-one interviews used as storytelling through an Indigenous lens follows.

Importance of the Researcher's Narrative

The researcher collected a variety of autobiographical artifacts that represent critical moments in my Métis education and included them as data. In developing the methodology, there was a draw from personal experience, including Métis culture and student experience. This information has been included as an autoethnography, as history told by the researcher (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). In engaging Métissage as a research praxis, a researcher, inspired by authors such as Chambers et al. (2008) and Donald (2012), can explore ways to "weave the repressed languages and traditions of local cultures and vernaculars (particularly incorporating autobiographical material and local oral traditions and stories) with the dominant (often colonial) languages and traditions of literacy" (Chambers et al., 2008, p. 142).

In fact, academics who use this approach blend their life experiences in an autobiographical context, using colonial and academic discourse to deliver impactful messages. Neither do they sacrifice their identities as researchers, nor are they forced to use specific research methodologies. This method attempts to disrupt colonial systems of academia that continue to overlook or neglect Métis knowledge. There are moments of contentious decision-making situations within academic work that do not allow for the mixing of perspectives, as there is no academic term to describe this blend. Often, a choice needs to be made between Western research methodologies and Indigenous methodologies without the flexibility of combining the two. As a Ph.D. candidate embarking on research with mixed-cultured students (Métis), it is appropriate to reflect on one's own academic journey and include it in the research as an auto-ethnography.

Storytelling

Personal stories were shared through interviews and written submissions and participants were contacted when further clarification was required. The reconciliation process allows for relationships to be worked on, to grow, to develop, and "to help with rereading, reframing, and reimagining the relationships connecting Indigenous peoples and Canadians, and thus facilitating

the decolonization process in educational contexts" (Donald, 2009, p. 5). Within this context, the storytelling (narrative approach) was employed to better understand, in their own words, each Métis research participant's experiences in education and to address the goal of reclaiming reconciliation in higher education. Furthermore, Savin-Baden and Major (2013) describe narrative approaches in research "as the way in which researchers conceive, capture, and convey the stories and experiences of individuals" (p. 231). Stories were collected to understand the students' experiences, how events unfolded, and the meanings drawn from the stories (p. 231).

The participants' retelling of experiences in narrative form, with the participants explaining their interpretation of events, was inclusive of the stories that were shared. Collecting the stories of the Métis students' experiences in higher education played a vital role in the study. These participants were actively involved in academia and concurrently experienced institutional practices. As Bishop et al. (2019) describe, a Métis voice was created "through the practice of weaving together multiple stories" in that "Métissage celebrates non-linearity and disruption while finding common threads across stories, which serves to honor both unity and diversity in the individual and the collective" (p. 2).

Braiding narratives is representative of the historic sash worn by the Métis; various narratives were used (colorful strands of yarn—that is, stories woven together) to create a comprehensive representation (Métis sash) of the Métis students' experiences of reconciliation in higher education. Traditionally, Métis men wear this sash, which has had many practical uses throughout history. This imagery is reflective of my research vision, which allows various students (strands of yarn) to gather and share their unique experiences (narratives), thus creating a beautiful story represented by the sash. As Kovach (2009) posits, stories are an Indigenous methodology and "remind us of who we are and of our belonging. Stories hold within them knowledge while simultaneously signifying relationships. In oral tradition, stories can never be

decontextualized from the teller" (p. 94). My story has similarly included educational experiences as part of this complete narrative assemblage.

The use of storytelling with Métis research participants marks a return to the cultural and traditional ways of education that Métis people are most familiar with concerning learning and knowledge keeping. The Métis have a long history of using stories to transmit beliefs and values to teach life lessons to children; stories were intergenerational and often told by elders and parents to children to reinforce identity and prepare the young for adulthood (Prefontaine, n.d.). Using narratives through shared stories of the Métis participants both empowered the research participants and reclaimed the oral tradition of sharing sacred information while also incorporating a Métissage methodology into the research.

Data Analysis

Participants' stories (one-to-one interview transcripts), written submissions, and the researcher's narrative were paired with key texts (meeting minutes, memos, and notes) and used as data that were then explored through the grounded theory approach. This method provided the researcher with the flexibility to investigate the Métis participants' experiences without the constraints of the research methods, which could impede the meeting of research goals. The data were coded to bring forward common words used to describe the participants' perspectives and to analyze their amalgamated experiences. *Coding* is a crucial feature of data collection in grounded theory: it "is an analytical process used to identify concepts, similarities, and conceptual reoccurrences in data …and is a procedure for developing categories of information" (Tie et al., 2019, p. 4). Coding the data allowed the researcher to take all the data apart while looking for commonalities and differences, as "the purpose of this process is to count numbers of codes once the coding process is finished for all relevant data" (Kelle, 2007, p. 193).

Conclusion

This study allows for Métis knowledge to be used in an exploratory way as a research methodology. Further research can explore and expand on these ideas. The development of a Métis-knowledge research approach must be supported as an "acceptable" or trustworthy and recognizable form of Indigenous research within the academy. As the presence of academic Indigenous researchers (Absolon, 2011; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008) and the number of Indigenous and Métis scholars in Canadian universities continue to grow, Métis master's and doctoral students must fit their research methodology and methods into either Western or Indigenous (primarily First Nations) approaches. Donald (2012) used "Métissage as a decolonizing research sensibility" to connect historic and contemporary Indigenous peoples and Canadians within a decolonizing context (p. 534). Further, Lowan-Trudeau (2012) developed an approach that he termed "methodological métissage," combining Indigenous and interpretive traditions for research in Canadian environmental education (p. 113). However, there is no Métis research methodology that is recognizable, discussed, or taught within higher education. As Métis researchers continue to work toward a model of research for their people and with Métis communities, this lack of a Métis-specific set of principles or conceptual frameworks needs to be demonstrated and opened for Métis perspectives to improve the academic freedom and environment for research from within a Métis worldview. A Métis-specific research methodology adds a culturally reflective approach to qualitative research and advances Métis research in Canada.

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