

## **Bridging Epistemologies: Indigenous Methodologies and Western Journal Practices**

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### **Recommended Citation**

Heinrich, E., Hill, G., Kelder, J., & Picard, M. (2024). Bridging epistemologies: Indigenous methodologies and Western journal practices, 5(1), 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.59197/asrhe.v5i1.11103>

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## **Bridging Epistemologies: Indigenous Methodologies and Western Journal Practices**

**Eva Heinrich, Geof Hill, Jo-Anne Kelder, and Michelle Picard**

### **Abstract**

This editorial reflects on the role of academic journals in supporting and disseminating Indigenous research. It is inspired by Dr Paul Callaghan's invited article published in this issue of *Advancing Scholarship and Research in Higher Education (ASRHE)*, which extends on his keynote presentation at the 2024 HERDSA Conference. Callaghan outlines the fundamental differences between Western and Aboriginal culture, pedagogy, epistemology, ontology, and axiology, and suggests how universities can leverage their positions of influence to create improved wellbeing for Aboriginal people and the nation as a whole. The editorial explores prior literature, including the 2021 HERD Special Issue on Indigenous voices, and identifies challenges in reviewing Indigenous research using Western frameworks. It advocates for more flexible journal formats that allow Indigenous researchers to present their work authentically, without conforming to Western ways of researching and publishing. An 'open' article category, supported by an exegesis, is proposed, to facilitate a more inclusive and multifaceted understanding of research. The editorial calls for feedback and collaboration to shape a future where journal publishing truly embraces diverse research traditions.

### **Keywords**

Indigenous research, Indigenous epistemologies, Western journal frameworks, journal formats, exegesis in journal publishing

### **Introduction**

Following an initiative started in 2023 with the publication of Mollie Dollinger's (2023) article, we invited the keynote presenters of the 2024 HERDSA Conference to submit to *Advancing Scholarship and Research in Higher Education (ASRHE)*. The first of the resulting invited articles, published in this issue, is by Dr Paul Callaghan and focuses on the roles universities could and should play in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Following on from Paul's powerful address at the conference, we are proud to make his thoughts available to a wider readership.

Paul compares Western with Aboriginal ways of knowing, being, and doing in the context of course enrolment and completions; he reviews the impact of culturally appropriate learning environments on the learning journeys of Indigenous higher education students. Study of Paul's exposition of the differences between Aboriginal and Western epistemology, ontology, and axiology caused us to reflect on the role of higher education journals in disseminating Indigenous research. How can higher education journals provide suitable author guidelines and ensure appropriate editorial and review processes? How can culturally appropriate journal environments be created? How is Indigenous research presented?

### **Indigenous research shaped to meet Western journal requirements**

To inform our thinking, we explored journal articles framed from Indigenous perspectives, for example, by studying the articles published in the 2021 HERD Special Issue, 'Ō tātou reo, Na domoda, Kuruwilang birad: Indigenous voices in higher education'. Our findings overlap with Dawson et al. (2017), who conducted a systematic review of Indigenous research methods and identified variations on Indigenous research frameworks and Indigenous methodologies supported by either Indigenous or Western methods. Some of the studies, for example, Bullen and Roberts's (2021) scoping review and Naepi et al.'s (2021) numeric analysis, used 'standard' Western research approaches in exploring situations or concerns of Indigenous communities. We suggest that such studies present conventional review challenges.

We found studies strongly influenced by Indigenous concerns and frameworks. For example, Smith et al. (2021) contextualized their work in theories of whiteness and settler colonialism, whereas Bryers et al. (2021) worked from a Kaupapa Māori research position. Many studies applied Indigenous research methodologies or methods. While talanoa was widely used (Baice et al., 2021; Naepi, 2021; November et al., 2021; Thomson et al., 2021), others employed yarning circles (Uink et al., 2021), masi (Naepi, 2021), or vā-kā methodologies (Smith & Wolfgramm-Foliak, 2021). While those Indigenous approaches affected several of the research parameters, such as research questions, participant selection, or relationships between researchers and participants, much was familiar from the standard Western approaches. For example, data analysis was guided by thematic analysis, supported by well-known references to Clarke and Braun, and participant quotes were presented as common in qualitative studies. Again, we suggest that reviewers accustomed to qualitative work can review these articles with Indigenous research perspectives confidently. ASRHE review groups are particularly well placed, based on bringing reviewers from multiple perspectives together and routinely probing for theoretical and methodological biases.

Where we see particular challenges is in dealing fairly with articles that do not explain their research approaches comprehensively. While reviewers can fill the gaps when dealing with standard Western methodologies and methods, this is not the case when lesser-known Indigenous approaches are used, tipping the balance in decision making. This can lead to the rejection of work based on a lack of understanding, paired with unfair or unhelpful feedback.

On the other hand, a lack of familiarity paired with a desire to support Indigenous research might cause reviewers and editors to glance over methodological weaknesses, resulting in the publication of articles that do not display the rigour required of research-based contributions to knowledge.

We also examined the articles published in the HERD special issue regarding article structures and potential inclusion of non-text-based material. We found that all articles conform to traditions of Western journal publishing. This is evident from the article structures, largely following the common sequence of context, literature, methodology, findings, discussion, and conclusions. All articles are fully text-based, written in an academic language we are used to from journal publishing. How might Indigenous research be presented if it had not been shaped according to the norms of journals accustomed to Western-style work? What opportunities might arise if journals modified their rulebooks instead of asking Indigenous researchers to conform?

### **New formats to embrace new thinking in journal publications**

We suggest that there is plenty yet unfulfilled scope to move beyond current approaches of journal publishing. In their editorial for the special issue, 'Beyond Western Notions of Creativity in Education: Toward a Trans-Epistemological Approach', for the Journal of Creative Behaviour, Mehta et al. (2024) discuss the challenges of attracting submissions. In response, the special issue editors changed their call to be more open, seeking proposals and conversations to help prospective authors "to better align their work with the special issue" (Mehta et al., 2024, p. 2). While this shows the willingness to make changes, it also demonstrates the mindset of asking the Indigenous researchers to fit in with the Western framework set by the journal. In their editorial for the special issue, 'Decolonising Educational Technology', Koole et al. (2024, p. 2) write about the necessity of breaking away "from hegemonic Eurocentric paradigms", yet found themselves assessing submissions through "Western-trained lenses" and asking "writers to conform to various language, methodological, and writing norms" (Koole et al., 2024, p. 7).

To gain further insights we studied the 'About' and 'Author guidelines' sections of Indigenous journals: AlterNative: International Journal of Indigenous Peoples; International Indigenous Policy Journal; Journal of American Indian Education; MAI Journal, A New Zealand Journal of Indigenous Scholarship; and The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education. We found little guidance regarding Indigenous research approaches. Statements welcoming Indigenous research methodologies are included but lack explanation on how this might express itself in a journal article. The instructions to authors are not different to those from non-Indigenous journals as are the peer review details, referring to traditional double-anonymous reviews by two separate researchers and editorial decision making. It appears that journals focused on Indigenous research closely follow the formats and procedures set by Western-dominated journals.

While we have seen that Indigenous research can be shaped into standard Western article formats, we are interested in exploring truly different approaches. What about removing all explicit and implicit rules on article formats and research ‘must haves’ and leaving it up to Indigenous researchers to present their work as they see fit? What about adding an exegesis that explains the research process, presentation, and contributions? Could such an approach facilitate discussion and allow researchers from different traditions to work together towards a more multifaceted understanding of research?

### **Proposing an ‘open’ journal article category**

The way forward for ASRHE could be to seek contributions under a new ‘open’ article category that accompanies the main research work - expressed in format, media, and content as chosen by the submitting authors - with an exegesis that guides our review groups in developing new appreciations. Callaghan (2024) emphasises the importance of oral traditions and knowledge bases, of being experiential and drawing on stories to express the messages. The open article category might allow Indigenous researchers to shape a new way of expressing their work and help us all to extend our understanding.

As ASRHE editors, we are looking forward to feedback on our proposal and can be contacted via our email address ([editors@asrhe.org](mailto:editors@asrhe.org)). We hope to be working with our Indigenous and Western research colleagues on shaping a new and exciting future for journal publishing.

### **Notes on AI use**

After writing the editorial, we asked Co-Pilot for title suggestions and an abstract draft. We used the suggestions to shape the final title and edited the abstract draft to its current form.

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