


Making the Most of Culture and Context When Eliciting Indigenous Resilience Insights

Prof Liesel Ebersöhn
Dr Marilize Malan-Van Rooyen

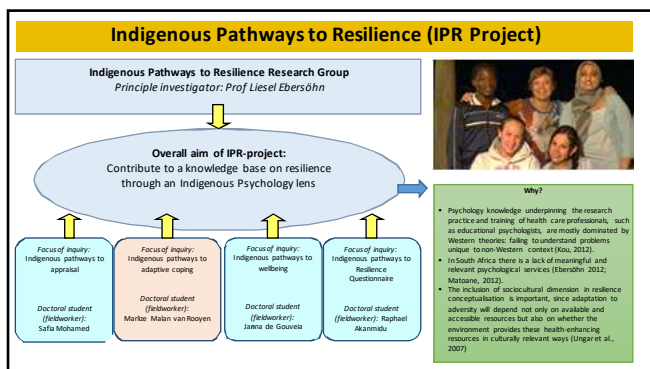
12th Educational Psychology Forum
Massey University Palmerston North,
New Zealand

Background

- The Centre of the Study of Resilience
 - Director: Prof Liesel Ebersöhn
 - University of Pretoria South Africa.
 - <https://www.up.ac.za/centre-of-the-study-of-resilience>
 - Vision: To be a knowledge generation platform of merit that makes a meaningful contribution to generating knowledge on Global South Resilience




Global south transdisciplinary knowledge generation on high risk, high need, adaptation and high performance




Research sites

- Two bounded cases of high risk, high need and non-Western worldviews.
- Convenience sampling through existing research partnerships.
- Limpopo research site:
 - On boundary of the Kruger National Park, close to Zimbabwean and Mozambique borders.
 - Considered to be one of the poorest districts in South Africa.
 - Language – Tshivenda
- Mpumalanga research site:
 - Close to Swaziland border
 - Language – SiSwati




Research sites and Participants in IPR

Limpopo Research site



Comparative case study design

Mpumalanga Research site



Examples of chronic and cumulative adversities:

- Geographical isolation
- Poverty
- Sparsely populated areas
- Inadequate funding
- Lack of infrastructure
- Limited access to health care

Research Participants

Limpopo Participants

Demographic information	Descriptions	Percentage
Gender	Male	44%
	Female	56%
Age group in years	18-25	59%
	26-35	7%
	36-45	26%
	46-55	4%
	55+	4%
	None	4%
Education	Some secondary	4%
	Completed secondary	4%
	Some high school	63%
	Completed high school	24%
	Higher education	0%

- Local partners assisted with the purposive selection of participants.
- Criteria
 - Participants must be either Tshivenda- or SiSwati Speaking.
 - Live within the risk context.
- The sample (n=72) was stratified for age (youth=48, elders=24) and gender (women=41, men=31).

Mpumalanga participants

Demographic information	Descriptions	Percentage
Gender	Male	13%
	Female	88%
Age group in years	18-25	38%
	26-35	25%
	36-45	25%
	46-55	6%
	55+	6%
Education	None	0%
	Some secondary	0%
	Completed secondary	6%
	Some high school	25%
Completed high school	56%	
	Higher education	6%

Joining a global movement of documenting and uplifting indigenous knowledge systems

- The documentation of indigenous knowledge systems will challenge most modern concepts of knowing and being, as well as knowledge creation, knowledge application, and meaning making (Smith, Maxwell, Puke, & Temara, 2016).
- Indigenous knowledge reflects indigenous culture (Nilsson, 2008) and is used to manage the environment (Odora Hoppers, 2008).

"To be indigenous is to be resilient. The maintenance and evolution identity and culture of indigenous people in communities is premised on such resilience. Resilience thinkers have much to learn from the ways locally-based societies manage and respond to their local ecologies and natural resource perturbations" (Rotarangi and Russel 2009, p. 209)

Nurturing relationships as a pathway to relevant and meaningful psychology



Naku te rourou nau te rourou ka ora
all te iwi
(Maori proverb)
With your basket and my basket, the
people will live/thrive



About the article

Objective of the article

- Describe an exemplar of participatory inquiry to document indigenous knowledge.
- Discuss the need for indigenous psychology.
- Explain the relevance of elicitation methods to document indigenous knowledge with marginalised populations.
- Provide examples of participatory, elicitation methods that leverage characteristics of culture and context.

Focus of the presentation

- Provide examples of Participatory methods that:
 - make the most of often silenced non-Western sociocultural strengths and
 - create opportunities for participation despite barriers due to inequality.

Ebersöhn, L., & Malan-Van Rooyen, M. (2018). Making the most of culture and context: Sociocultural strengths and contextual vulnerability when eliciting indigenous resilience insights with remote South African elders and young people. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 17(1), 1609406918798434.

Methodological considerations:

Which methods will:

- Accommodate illiteracy?
- Reflect sensitivity to heightened vulnerability due to poverty and isolation in a society that is already highly unequal?
- Acknowledge sociocultural diversities related to age, gender and governance hierarchies?
- Honour a variety of spoken languages?
- Provide opportunities for mainstream sociocultural perspectives to be elicited?
- Include relevant collectivist modes?

What we wanted from our methodology:

- Wanted to create a space that would enable participants to contribute from a power base of strength.
- To elicit socio-cultural strengths rather than portraying participants as vulnerable victims of inequality.

Using Participatory methods

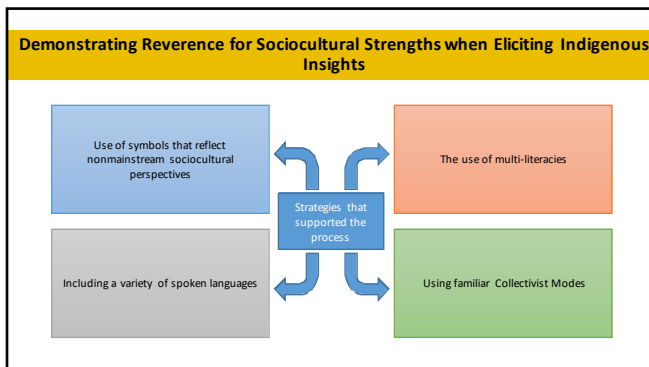
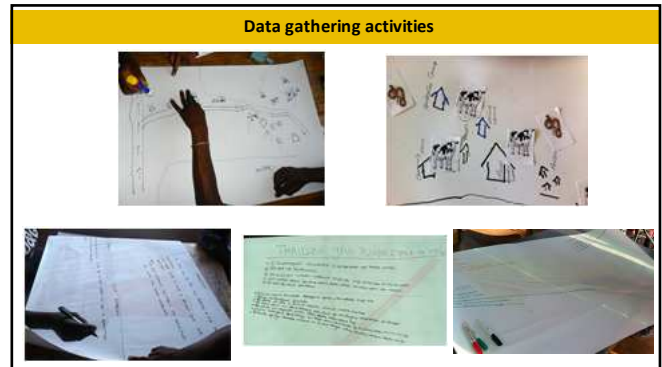
- Creating a space for conversation **led by indigenous knowledge drivers** (Braun et.al., 2013).
- Guides non-indigenous drivers to acknowledge **values and worldviews** different from their own (Braun et. Al., 2013).
- Honours the **relational ontology** often associated with indigenous cultures (Chalmers, 2017).

Mapping and Diagramming

- Participants draw maps and diagrams and then discuss among themselves what their life expressions means (Chambers, 2007; Khodamoradi & Abedi, 2011).
- Promotes collaboration.
- Participants = experts.
- Facilitate exploration and expression of unconscious thoughts, beliefs and assumptions (Mazetti & Blekinsopp, 2012).
- Allows for knowledge to be shared through storytelling congruent with indigenous culture (Kovach, 2010).



Data gathering activities: 4 Activities (Documented as audio, visual and textual data including translations)	
Activity	Prompt
Activity 1: Community map	Imagine you are a bird and you are flying over your community. Think about everything that you would be able to see and draw that for us on your page.
Activity 2: Solving a past problem	The next thing I would like you to share with me is how you have solved a problem in the past. Was there any problem you have solved in the past that you would like to share with me? I am really interested in how you solved it.
Activity 3: Solving a future problem	How would your community solve a future problem
Activity 4: What does a good/happy community look like?	So, if you go to bed at night, and you close your eyes, and you go to sleep, and you think of everything that has happened in that day, what makes you think this was a good day? That thing happened, I saw these people or I thought about that, or I was feeling this, what makes a day a good day? Everything that you feel makes you happy. You can write, it can be a story or things that happened, whatever you choose. If someone passes away, and we are at the funeral of that person, how do we know that that woman or that man had a good life? What made their life a good life? So it's everything that if we think of a person's life we think this person had a good life, this happened to this person, it was a good life. So these things are all the same, sometimes it happens in a day, sometimes it happens in a lifetime, the things that make us happy and that make our life good.



The use of symbols that reflect nonmainstream sociocultural perspectives

- Contextually and socio-culturally familiar symbols.
- Identified through collaboration with local partners of previous research projects.
- Helped to elicit group conversations on indigenous pathways to resilience.
- Allowed for valuable contributions irrespective of skills, age, gender and language of the participants.

The use of familiar multi-literacies

- African culture is rich in indigenous stories and symbolism (Mkabela, 2007).
- Visual image are often used in indigenous communities (Liebenberg, 2009).
- Sharing through drawing and stories.

Including a variety of spoken languages throughout the process.

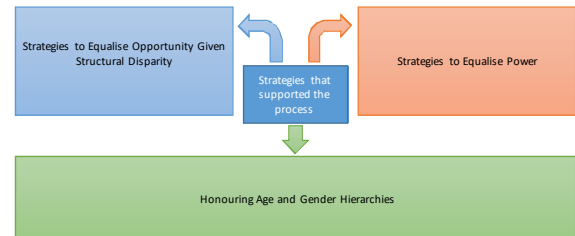
- Translators = key role
- More than switching between languages:
 - mediating between cultural worlds of the research team and participants (Wong & Poon, 2010).
 - considering cultural nuances (Chen & Boor, 2010).
- Limit miscommunication:
 - Spend time building relationship with translator.
 - Role clarification to prevent adding interpretation and views other than those of the participants.
- Translations of documented data.
- Member checking – continued collaboration.

Using Familiar Collectivist Modes

- Groups instead of individuals.
- Instruction to all groups.
- Discussion and consensus before sharing with fieldworker.
- After each activity, the respective groups gave verbal feedback to other groups through presentations.
- Collaboration and sharing were promoted by respecting several voices (Chambers, 2010).



Being Sensitive to Contextual Vulnerabilities When Eliciting Indigenous Insights



Strategies to Equalise Opportunity Given Structural Disparity

- Limited access to transport.
 - Meetings close to their homes.
 - Organised transport where needed.
- Food scarcity
 - Sharing meals in a way that considers timing and that mirrors relevant sociocultural practices.
- Employment scarcity
 - Flexibility around the data gathering schedule—example of social grants pay out.
 - Respect for voluntary nature of research—example of participants having to leave earlier.
 - Having a co-research and translator available to accommodate participants that come late or have to leave early.
 - Above all = respect for participants' livelihood, and structural disparity that affects it.



Strategies to Equalise Power

- Awareness:
 - Researcher's presence would remind community members of a continuum of advantage and disadvantaged.
 - Accepting our "otherness".
- Investing time to build rapport:
 - Relationships before research agenda.
- Maintaining rapport:
 - Having the same researcher work with the same group for the entire research project.
- Accommodating potential issues related to power inherent in age and gender:
 - Dividing groups according to their age and gender.
- Leveraging existing partnerships:
 - Some of the partnerships have been existing for over a decade.
 - Falling under the auspices of another long-term collaboration.

Honouring Age and Gender Hierarchies

- Stratification had respect inherent social and cultural power structures.
- Sample stratification guided by local partners.
- Reason for stratification was twofold:
 - Avoid disrupting gender and age hierarchies.
 - Space to feel safe and comfortable to share without judgement.
- Research sites needed to provide adequate physical space.



Accepting fallibility and the humility of eliciting indigenous knowledge.

- Awareness that the nature of research reaffirms power differentials.
- Lack of understanding of what living in the participating communities actually entails.
- Documenting the elicited insights reiterated the presence of different roles and benefits – a ultimately power.
- Limitations in understanding the dynamics of participants as well as the subtleties, nuances, and significance of interactions of what is shared.
- The documented indigenous knowledge does not necessarily portray the complexity there of. Not all values, beliefs and thoughts that stem from long term contextual engagement are captured.
- Richness of the documented indigenous knowledge is dependent on and limited by the time spent in the field.
- A collective approach does not necessarily include individual views certain participants might have.
- Caution to assume that the documented knowledge did not portray the translators' interpretation to a certain degree.



Importance of value driven research

- Research is done “with” rather than “on” indigenous people (Drawson, Toombs & Mushquash, 2017).
- Respect that the drivers of indigenous knowledge decide what to share.
- The participants remain the experts and holders of indigenous knowledge.

GUIDED BY COLLECTIVE VALUES (Louis, 2007):

- **Relational accountability** – Prioritising and respecting the centrality of positive relationships.
- **Respectful representation** – viewing clients as the experts of their lives and making sure they what they share is understood correctly.
- **Reciprocal appropriation** – Wellbeing of all parties are considered.
- **Rights and regulations** – Ensuring ethical and safe conduct for all.

Conclusion

- Indigenous research involves much more than merely using indigenous methods in indigenous contexts to access and document indigenous knowledge.
- It is not as simple as finding the best suited method.
- It comes down to intention, values and relationships.
- Indigenous research comes down to the intention of researchers to document indigenous knowledge and their ability to constructively collaborate with the true drivers of indigenous knowledge.
- It is the researchers’ responsibility to ensure that the research process serves the needs and interests of the communities to which indigenous knowledge belongs.

Additional resources

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- <https://www.up.ac.za/centre-of-the-study-of-resilience>

Contact details

- Prof Liesel Ebersöhn:
liesel.ebersohn@up.ac.za
- Dr Marlize Malan-Van Rooyen:
marlize.malanvanrooyen@education.govt.nz

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Thank you.

Ngiyabonga (SiSwati)
Ndi a livhuwa (Tshivenda)
Baie dankie (Afrikaans)