Methods-in-Place: “Art Voice” as a Locally and Culturally Relevant Method to Study Traditional Medicine Programs in Manitoulin Island, Ontario, Canada

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Abstract
A collaborative research project with Noojmowin Teg Health Centre on Manitoulin Island, Ontario, examined the impacts of traditional medicine workshops on participants’ perceptions of culture, health, and environment. Methods used in this research turned out to be as revealing as the results themselves. This article examines how geography and the social, physical, and affective elements of place inform research methodology and challenges the idea that qualitative methods can be applied generically irrespective of the context. While researchers reflect on the role of (social) place in influencing the research process and results, we argue that the place of research should also be taken into account to adopt and develop methodologies and data collection methods that are locally and culturally relevant. We discuss how “art voice” was a highly appropriate method in a community that has a rich history and contemporary culture of visual art. This article contributes to the growing movement toward seeking culturally relevant, community-based decolonizing methods, particularly in the context of Indigenous health research.

Keywords
art voice, place-based methods, decolonizing methods, Indigenous worldview, Indigenous health

Introduction
Researchers in geography and the social sciences commonly acknowledge their positionality in qualitative research, understanding that knowledge is situated, that intersections of identity impact both researcher and subject, and thus that the social and cultural implications of “place” influence research findings (Cannella & Manuelito, 2008; Lavallée, 2009; Sin, 2003). Yet while these works have acted to symbolically situate the researcher and the participant (e.g., insider/outside, colonizer/indigene, self/other), little consideration has been given to the physical “where of methods” (Anderson, Adley, & Bevan, 2010, p. 590). According to Anderson and Jones (2009), “[w]hen it comes to research approaches, geographers have largely failed to take the difference that place makes to methodology seriously” (p. 292). We believe that in the existing body of research, there has been even less reflection on how place and context, both physical and social, may influence the choice of research methods. We argue that not only does the place of research impact results but place of research should also determine the methods used.

This article is based on a broader project investigating the role that self-care through traditional medicine gathering plays in determining health and well-being, particularly among Indigenous youth (Barwin et al., 2014). Our goal was to examine how traditional teaching workshops offered by Noojmowin Teg Health Centre on Manitoulin Island, Ontario, can contribute to individual and community health via self-care and in turn to the rebuilding of capacity in these and other communities. We also investigated how the act of being out on the land gathering medicines leads to a greater connection with (and care for) Mother Earth. While conducting research, the success of our unique choice of methods, particularly art voice,

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prompted us to take a reflexive look at the methodology and subsequently to ask key informants how they felt about the research process itself. Our aim in this instance was to gather ideas that could reflect alternative research paradigms and worldviews that may be more relevant to Indigenous communities, with the ultimate intention of drawing out meaningful and practically applicable results.

We argue that tailoring methodology according to the place of research is a culturally and locally relevant way to attain meaningful results. The terms culturally and locally relevant are used together throughout this article to stress the importance of methods that are place-based, factoring in the local context. Each research “site” is a place filled with meanings, and participants in any research project are influenced by and situated according to physical environment and cultural context. Research that is attentive to these local and cultural contexts fosters a connection between researchers and community members and acts to enhance community strengths.

This article represents a reflection on how geography and the social, physical, and affective elements of place inform research methodology and actively contribute to the growing trend toward decolonizing methods. To do this, we begin by describing the community, research, and methodological context of our project, including a discussion of trends in decolonizing methodologies and geographical and anthropological interpretations of place and place-based methods. We propose that incorporating these approaches into research methodology facilitates culturally and locally relevant research. We then discuss two sets of findings that illustrate the role of place in the research process. First, we demonstrate how the use of art voice reflects the way place influences methods and how place-specific methods can be adopted to better represent Indigenous worldviews in culturally relevant ways. Second, we examine how the various places of this project may have influenced researcher and participants and consequently the data collected. Finally, we reflect on how lessons learned regarding methods in-place may contribute to the choosing of innovative research methods in the future.

Approaches to Understanding Health in Place

Health data are not typically gathered using epistemological approaches that represent Indigenous worldviews (Kovach, 2009; S. Wilson, 2008). Many geographers and social scientists have been scrutinizing the research process itself (Cloke et al., 2004; Moss, 2002). To this end, there is a growing movement in global Indigenous research that challenges colonial academic approaches and that aims to promote decolonizing methodologies that respect and acknowledge Indigenous knowledge and interests (Denzin, Lincoln, & Tukkwii Smith, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 1999). In other words, this means incorporating Indigenous knowledge (Lavallée, 2009, p. 23) throughout the whole research process. Actively engaging the community in an inclusive way means recognizing that the community is not homogenous or culturally fixed and thus that different worldviews will coexist. Choosing methods that are specific to given places ensures that the beliefs, values, and cultural practices of a given Indigenous worldview are taken into account.

One example of such a methodology is community-based participatory research (CBPR). CBPR is an approach to research whereby projects are conducted as collaborations between researchers and communities in a mutually respectful and transparent fashion, with control ultimately resting in the hands of the community throughout the research process (Israel, Eng, Schulz, & Parker, 2005). Another community-driven methodology is known as problem-based learning communities (PbLCs). These “are dialogue-based networks that support people by responding to their needs, developing a capacity to generate their own research projects, and creating supportive relationships with other researchers to coproduce locally relevant knowledge” (Anderson, Pakula, Smye, Peters, & Schroeder, 2011, p. 43). While philosophically and methodologically similar to CBPR, PbLCs diverge in the explicit reference to place-based differences in knowledge and may consequently be better equipped to directly address each community’s particular needs. Here, traditional knowledge is valued and researchers recognize not only that methods should be culture and place specific but also that interpretation and transmission of this knowledge need to be done in a culturally and locally relevant way.

Indigenous worldviews and cultural context are increasingly being incorporated into the research process (Ermine, 2007; Lavallée, 2009; Richmond & Ross, 2009; Smith, 1999). An example is seen in Anishnabe researcher Lynn Lavallée’s study looking at the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual impacts of a martial arts program at a Native Canadian Centre in Toronto. She made use of two Indigenous methods including “sharing circles” and “symbol-based reflection.” The sharing circle is similar to a focus group but makes use of culturally specific traditions such as smudging, passing the eagle feather, and allowing for issues of a spiritual nature to be included in discussion. Symbol-based reflection, an art-based method, encourages participants to infuse art objects which they create with symbolic meaning as a form of expression. Identifying and incorporating culturally and locally relevant methods such as those used by Lavallée requires an openness and awareness of local contexts and traditions and a flexibility of approach (Kovach, 2009). Flexible methods chosen according to place of research contribute to the breaking down of power dynamics experienced in conventional research paradigms.

The importance of place as a factor that may impact research results is becoming better understood (Anderson & Jones, 2009). However, there has been little discussion on how methods can be catered to suit people who reside in particular places. Some of the earlier writings on place come from geographers Edward Relph (1976) and John Agnew (1987) who broke down the concept of place according to, respectively, physical setting, activities, and meanings and location, locale, and sense-of-place. Place as location is the physical, tangible place or coordinates on a map, while locale encompasses the social aspects of place and provides a given location with context or meaning. It is
understood that a particular locale is associated with certain behaviors and power structures within a built environment, such as teacher or student interactions in the locale of a classroom. Sense-of-place is a subjective view of place, how places make us feel, and how we connect with them; it is often associated with the places where we were born, we grew up, or currently live (Cresswell, 2004). Spiritual connections to place are likened to sense-of-place and have been explored in depth in literature related to Indigenous ties to place (Davidson-Hunt & O’Flaherty, 2007; Richmond, Elliot, Matthews, & Elliot, 2005; K. Wilson, 2000, 2003). Place has also been divided according to self, environment, and others which are akin to the spiritual, physical, and social aspects of place (Gustafson, 2001). People attribute both different meanings and different degrees of meaning (sometimes no meaning) to specific places—and these meanings are not fixed (Gustafson, 2001). While most research tends to focus on one aspect of place, it is important to consider all three dimensions of place, no matter what we name them, to provide a holistic understanding of how a given place is experienced and perceived. It is from this angle that we now turn to the specific context of place in our study on Manitoulin Island.

Community Context

Given our emphasis on the importance of place on determining the choice of methodology, it is necessary to provide some background about the place of our research. Manitoulin Island is the largest freshwater island in the world located at the northern tip of Lake Huron in north–central Ontario, Canada (Figure 1). Of the over 12,000 permanent residents on the island, 38% are Aboriginal1—primarily Anishnabe—from 7 different First Nations spread across the island. The two First Nations communities that participated in this research are on different parts of the island and differ significantly in their population size and in their degree of isolation. Both communities make use of traditional medicine programs offered by the Noojmowin Teg Health Centre, which was central to our project, but each offers a different perspective as a result of their different physical locations and particular local contexts.

Noojmowin Teg Health Centre, located in Aundeck Omni Kaning, provides services for all seven First Nations on Manitoulin Island. This provincially funded health facility offers primary health care, including nurse practitioners, dieticians, and

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1 The word Aboriginal in this context refers to the three distinct groups who are the descendants of the original inhabitants of North America—First Nations, Métis, and Inuit—recognized under the Canadian Constitution (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2012). The term was chosen over Indigenous in this case to reflect the political and geographical designation of First Nations groups on Manitoulin Island. A recent trend toward the use of the word Indigenous follows an evolution of self-identification which moved through the terms Indian, Native, then Aboriginal demonstrating a taking-back of the language by Indigenous peoples. This may be a result of a “movement where communities are putting forth language that they feel describes who they are in a particular place and time.” Many groups have taken this further and reverted to using Indigenous language names for communities that had been anglicized during colonization (Julian Robbins, personal communication, February 17, 2015). The use of the word Indigenous has been favored throughout this article to acknowledge this preference as it better encompasses an ideological, symbolic, and philosophical reclaiming of traditional languages, lands, and practices.
nutritionists, psychologists as well as programs in child nutrition, fetal alcohol syndrome treatment, and traditional medical services (Aundeck Omni Kaning, 2011; Manitowabi, 2009). As the traditional coordinator, Marjory Shawande oversaw the traditional services offered through Noojmowin Teg Health Centre. These services include collaboration with other primary health programs to offer integrative care, facilitation of community cultural events and workshops, overseeing and provision of healers and traditional teachers for individual clients, Indian residential schools (IRSs) support services, and gathering and preparing of traditional medicines (Manitowabi, 2009). Traditional workshops are offered by the Centre on request from special interest groups such as youth, parents, and Elders groups or are provided as outreach through life-skills teachings such as self-care (Noojmowin Teg, 2010/2011). It is this last aspect of the program that our research project was designed to examine.

The choice of our research methods was influenced significantly by the history and current significance of art for local Indigenous people. The historical context of symbolism in Anishnabe culture depicts expressions through art. Literature suggests that much of the earliest “art” came in the form of sketches etched onto bark scrolls using stone tools or bone, the primary purpose being to tell stories, leave messages, or relate everyday experiences (Devine, 2009). Specific patterns of forms, dots, and lines communicated particular meanings and significance and carried with them serious sacred responsibilities. These scrolls were believed to inspire famous Anishnabe artist Norval Morrisseau in terms of spiritual themes and content that he brought into his work but also through the aesthetics of their lines and form. Morrisseau also saw his paintings as a way to preserve and pass down traditional knowledge that may otherwise have been lost (Cinader, 1987).

Local pictographs demonstrate that the ancestors of the people of Manitoulin Island utilized this method of communication. Pictographs were used for spiritual purposes to transfer religious experiences such as dream images and for nonspiritual functions to transmit information such as maps, messages, or storytelling, intended to be seen by all. “Originally pictography assisted in the transfer of power ( . . . ) The Ojibwe image maker is a specially skilled teacher, a link between the past and the present, between the Elders and his own community” (McLuhan, 1978, p. 20). This link between past and present is still evident today in the contemporary Anishnabe art created on the Island.

Manitoulin Island also has a rich current culture of fine arts. In 1966, the Manitoulin Arts Foundation was founded, inspired by a movement where young Indigenous people in Canada were looking to embrace their cultural identity and reject colonialism. It received funding in 1971 to recruit 40 young native art students from across Ontario to learn with established native artists such as Daphne Odjig and Norval Morrisseau. Some of the students from this school, including Blaire and Blake Debassige, Shirley Cheechoo, and Leland Bell, are prominent artists today. In 1974, the founding of the Ojibwe Cultural Foundation (OCF) in M’Chigeeng First Nation (see Figure 1), which is still a thriving hub of native art, culture, and traditional teachings today, solidified the view of Manitoulin Island as a place of artists. The “Manitoulin school” has often been lumped into the Woodland School of Art, but Alan Corbiere, past executive director of the OCF, contends that artists of the Manitoulin School of Art have a unique style that is ever evolving and not fixed in time (Little, 2009). According to Leland Bell, a Wikwemikong artist whose distinctive style is known worldwide, the Anishnabe “come from a long line of creativity; our civilization goes way back. What we practice is creativity; it’s in our tradition” (Little, 2009, p. 28). Art is an integral part of Anishnabe culture on Manitoulin Island and choosing research methods that incorporate this form of expression was a natural fit for our project.

Methodology

Two First Nations communities were selected due to their interest in traditional medicine programs and their long-standing relationship with project collaborator and traditional coordinator of Noojmowin Teg, Marjory Shawande, through whom entrance into the communities was made possible. Guided by Ownerships, Control, Access, and Possession principles (NAHO, 2007), a culturally appropriate research protocol was followed, and ethics approval was received from both the University of Ottawa’s Research Ethics Review Board and the Manitoulin Anishnabek Research Review Committee. Fieldwork was conducted in the two communities between July and September 2010 employing a variety of qualitative research methods. It has been shown that the adoption of multiple qualitative research methods can contribute to building the trust essential in a community-based project (Denzin et al., 2008). In addition, using multiple methods provides more than a duplication and triangulation of data. It allows for tapping into opinions that may not be expressed through one data-gathering tool alone, especially when working with children (Darbyshire, MacDougall, & Schiller, 2005).

In the first stage, we conducted three workshops in the two communities over a 3-day period. Invitations to attend an information-gathering workshop were made to former youth participants of traditional programming at Noojmowin Teg by health workers and via a recruitment poster provided to band offices and posted in a local newsletter. A total of 15 participants attended, including 7 adults (2 men and 5 women) and 8 youth aged 4–17 years (3 boys and 5 girls). The workshops included a traditional teaching with Marjory Shawande, an art voice session with an art facilitator, and a focus group. The format of the workshop was developed based on a “healing through art” program offered at Noojmowin Teg to address the lasting and intergenerational damage done by IRSs. An art facilitator from this program assisted us in our data collection by doing a “gathering of information” session utilizing art as responses to our research questions which we developed in collaboration with Noojmowin Teg’s traditional coordinator. Four questions related to self-care, traditional medicine workshops, sharing, and the environment were asked of participants both in the art component, where they were invited to draw
pictures as their answers, and in the focus groups, where they had the opportunity to elaborate verbally about their pictures. Over 50 drawings were gathered and analyzed. Focus groups were recorded with permission and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Consent was given for the use of all drawings and transcripts (written consent from adults and verbal consent from children in presence of parents).

After completing the first stage, it became clear that the art voice method was an ideal choice to use with communities on Manitoulin Island, and consequently, we began to reflect on locally and culturally relevant research methods. The purpose of the second stage was then to discuss the four questions addressed in earlier focus groups as well as to inquire about thoughts on the research process itself. During the second stage, which took place 2 months after the first, we conducted eight in-depth interviews with key informants (six women and two men) among Band Council members from both communities and with health workers from Noojmowin Teg and Naandwegamik Health Centres. Prospective key informants were proposed by Marjory Shawande and were asked directly in person, by e-mail, or by telephone if they wanted to participate in the project. Interviews ranged in length from 30 min to 2 hr, and they were digitally recorded with permission (written consent) and later transcribed verbatim for analysis. Pseudonyms were created for all participants to protect anonymity. Data from both stages were deductively coded and analyzed using NVivo 8 qualitative data analysis software. The major themes (self-care, sharing knowledge, and the environment) were based on the research questions developed in collaboration with Noojmowin Teg’s traditional coordinator, and a number of new themes also emerged upon analysis, such as the role of language and Aboriginal worldviews.

Teachings Around Traditional Medicine Gathering and Self-Care on Manitoulin Island

Our main project findings centered on themes relating to traditional medicine workshops, issues of self-care, and the key informants’ views about the research process. The results revealed a need to approach traditional teachings, health programs, and research from an Indigenous worldview. It was also suggested that more frequent workshops are required to encourage youth and adults to practice and share traditional knowledge. Furthermore, we found that a continuum exists in which the interest in language, culture, and tradition increases with age. Capacity can therefore be rebuilt over time within communities promoting autonomy and self-determination through self-care. More broadly, these findings enhanced our understanding of the role that traditional medicine, as one element of self-care, plays in determining Indigenous health at both the individual and the community level (see reference withheld for blind review).

In the remainder of the article, we reflect on our research methods and discuss how place informs the research process. First, we explain and illustrate how we came to adopt art voice as a method for our project. Given the importance of art in Manitoulin Island and the community interest in using art as a healing tool, art voice was identified as a valuable method-in-place. We argue that taking place into consideration is critical in the development of culturally and locally relevant methods. Second, we discuss how the different aspects of place (physical, social, and affective) can influence the experience of both researcher and participants and thus the research outcomes. Our aim is to challenge readers to consider questions such as What are culturally relevant methods-in-place? How might we best choose methods to suit each particular place? How might place influence the research process and outcomes?

Reflections on the Use of Art Voice as a Method-in-Place on Manitoulin Island

In the design phase of the project, we initially looked into the conventional toolkit for methods (e.g., focus groups and personal interviews) to gather information about the experiences of the participating communities in the distinct place which is Manitoulin Island. But once the project was underway, we realized that these proposed methods did not adequately speak to the community or capture ideas about traditional medicine workshops effectively. In the process, we discovered that art voice was an appropriate technique to collect data for our project because of the cultural and historical context of Manitoulin Island: Indigenous art culture is still prevalent today, and making art is a familiar activity for the local Anishnabek population. Subsequently, we reflect on the process that led us to consider a methods-in-place approach. To do so, we first provide an overview of the literature on art as a method before elaborating on how we used it in our research context.

Art voice is loosely based on the better-known method, photovoice, in which research participants take photos on a theme and then discuss their choices of photos in interviews (Castelden, Gavin, & Huu-ay-aht First Nation, 2008). While photos, pictures, or artistic expressions can be useful on their own for understanding the phenomena being studied, combined with an oral explanation, they provide a more in-depth view of the participants’ ideas, perceptions, and meanings and therefore enable a deeper understanding of the issues at hand.

Interpretation of art voice results can be informed by the art therapy literature (Edwards, 2004; Ferrara, 2004). Junge and Linesch (1993) argue that art therapy tools are well aligned for qualitative inquiry but that art therapists were initially leery of entering into research, since therapists emphasize the human experience while empirical research has traditionally emphasized objectivity. Art therapy works in part because the act of creating the art is therapeutic and further healing can occur when patients discuss their art pieces with therapists (Ferrara, 2004). Art is useful for therapy and research because patients can translate the psychological expressions through their bodies using art (Koch & Fuchs, 2011). These ideas are in line with some Indigenous spiritual worldviews, which propose that objects can be infused with the spirit of those that created them and therefore that artistic works can reflect symbolic meaning beyond words (Lavallée, 2009).
Art voice as a research tool may also be informed by literature on arts-based research (ABR), a diverse and evolving methodology that uses various forms of artistic expression including creative writing, photography, painting, theater, film, dance, music, and so on to collect data or perform analysis (Leavy, 2009). ABR is practiced today in education research and beyond and includes new methods such as poetry-based research where data collected are transformed into original poetry and ethnodrama where ethnography and theater are combined (Leavy, 2009). Our research supports these bodies of work by incorporating ideas around methods-in-place: The place of research can play a significant role in the choices of methods and subsequently in the research results.

Moreover, art voice appeared as an appropriate tool for our project since research shows that Indigenous people may have a different relationship with using art as a form of expression in comparison to non-Indigenous people (Devine, 2009; Little, 2009); they do not differentiate art from other forms of expression and do not see it as something that only “experts” or talented individuals do (Ferrara, 2004). The ability to engage in the process of making art rather than toward an outcome may allow Anishnabe to benefit from research that uses art for expression. In a different context, Ingold (2000) suggests that it is the act of doing, staying in touch with the nonhuman environment that enables Inuit to know the environment. The creation of art is just another way of moving about in the environment and learning from it, and there is no pressure to create a “product.”

Some of our research participants were already comfortable with expressing their feelings using art, given their recent experience with the IRS healing-through-art program in the Traditional Medicine Program of Noojmowin Teg Health Centre. Many well-established Manitoulin artists see how their struggles to make sense of the suffering they and their families experienced as a result of residential schools have led them on a journey through which they discovered art to reconnect with their Anishnabe identity. Given the historical significance of art in Manitoulin Island and its role as a conduit toward healing (Little, 2009), art can be adopted as a useful method for both therapy and research in helping to understand individual and community health. One adult participant in our project, Mike, had also been part of an IRS healing-through-art program and commented on the benefits of using art to reconcile issues from the past:

Have I utilized this information for my self-care? . . . this was from the art therapy—and I put a life line—it’s [art therapy] very helpful in seeing how life has gone for you so far. It’s pretty much that way you know, how you could change your life line in the past [and] in the future . . . and then the one you’re doing now—who do I share it with? I share it with all people that need help . . . (Mike, adult focus group participant)

This excerpt illustrates Mike’s comfort in using art to describe his thoughts and answer questions about traditional knowledge based on his past experience of using art to express himself (specifically having learned how to create a “life line” in art therapy sessions).

The relevance of art voice in Anishnabe communities is seen in its ability to tap into significance and meanings that are “beyond words.” The essence of participants’ opinions, their connection to the land and their feelings about spirituality and the creator, cannot be described by words alone, and ABR is a step toward capturing this essence (Lavallée, 2009; K. Wilson, 2000). The “art space” itself interacts with physical, mental, and social spaces. In the physical space, the art is created in an environment of trust using concrete material (e.g., paper and paints). The mental art space encompasses the imaginative and emotional processes involved in creating art, and the social space is the conversational nature of the therapeutic or art voice process. When the art therapist or researcher speaks with the “artist” about his or her art piece, he or she is engaging in the social practice of dialogue and interpretation by both parties.

Art therapy is doubly effective as a result of the therapeutic experience of creating art and subsequently the value to the patient of the “epiphany” moment in which they talk about it and better understand it themselves (Ferrara, 2004). So too can art voice have a dual effect as research participants answer questions and understand their feelings on multiple levels, through the creation of art and via discussion about it. There were moments during the art voice sessions of our project when participants were silently drawing or coloring, immersed in the process. Thus, allowing for reflection during research enables elements of the process itself to impact research findings.

Given subsequently is the art voice account (Figure 2) that one adult participant, Tanya, drew to answer the question: “How does gathering medicine make you think of protecting and being in harmony with Mother Earth?”

When asked to further explain the picture during the focus group component of the workshop, Tanya responded:

I put that bubble there to show that [Mother Earth is] fragile, that there’s all these forces that can contaminate [Mother Earth] so easily and break [her] . . . it’s not even just the garbage that we see . . . but it’s even how we change the environment ourselves. You know like we’ll drain swamps . . . I was thinking that even where I went for that [plant], it’s supposed to grow in certain areas and now these areas are being destroyed . . . we’re actually destroying some of our medicine areas, or building them up . . . there’s so much influence that can cost . . . that fragile bubble. (Tanya, adult focus group participant)

Tanya was able to work through her ideas while she drew, representing them pictorially before offering an oral response. From this example, we can see how the degree of meaning is augmented by the use of art to answer the question. Tanya makes explicit links between the well-being of the environment, gathering medicine, and her community’s well-being.

The analysis of our data also reveals that art voice enables some participants to express themselves with drawings in a way they could not through conventional qualitative methods. This was especially noticeable with children who participated in the
workshops; some were too shy to speak more than a sentence or two but were comfortable drawing pictures to answer research questions. The following quotation illustrates how one young art voice participant, 11-year-old Becky (through her mother who was also participating), drew a picture to answer the question: “What have I learned from past herbal workshops?”

Becky’s Mom: [Do] you want me to read yours?
PI: It’s up to you. (Becky agrees shyly and whispers to her mom)
Becky’s Mom: She drew a tea kettle and a tea cup and it says “I learned how to make teas . . . and it smells good.” (Becky and her mom, focus group participants)

While Becky was comfortable drawing a picture, when it came time to explain her picture in the focus group, she was too shy, but her mother was able to step in. It is difficult to know whether Becky would have spoken at all had her mother not been present or had she not been part of a focus group with so many others’ present. Nevertheless, this example underscores the usefulness of art voice when working with youth. It can serve to give them a voice, to express their worldview, and to make room to communicate their own meanings in an otherwise adult-oriented environment.

In this project, art voice was a method that could tie together the physical, social, and affective places that are Manitoulin Island. Coupled with the history and culture of art with which most participants were familiar through their lived experiences, the process of doing art voice is an experiential, sensory activity. This process helped to answer our research questions, but it has the potential to accomplish much more. Through its sensory nature, using art to answer research questions may allow Anishnabek to connect to both historical expressions of art such as pictographs and to the current culture of art. Art voice was a particularly effective method on Manitoulin and could have potential in other Indigenous communities where art is also a strong part of the culture. From this research, we learned to be flexible and open to choosing new methods according to local context. By considering the complex nature of the places where research is conducted, researchers can be better equipped to answer questions in a way that is culturally and locally relevant.

**The Places of Research and Data Collection**

The places or sites where data are collected also play a role in the research process. We consider the importance of being sensitive to the complex nature of place and how it combines with research methods in an effort to unpack issues regarding subjectivity, positionality, and power relations in research pursuits. As researchers, we are influenced by the places where we conduct research and can learn from the perspectives of participants as they interact with their environment. Each place has the potential to affect the choice of methods such as interviews and focus groups based on social dynamics, physical constraints, and comfort level of both researchers and respondents. While the physical, affective, and social places of research may impact our choice of data collection methods (as explained earlier), the subjectivity of both researcher and participant also plays a role in shaping the research results due to the fact that reality is socially constructed through their interactions. Subsequently, we examine some of these tensions with an account of our experience in conducting research and collecting data in different types of places on Manitoulin Island.

According to Agnew’s (1987) definition, a given place is comprised of different layers of physical (location), social (locale), and affective (sense-of-place) spaces and encompasses a range of spatial scales from the microenvironment of the self to the macroenvironment of the universe. Research for our project was conducted in two different First Nations communities located on opposite sides of the Island, one community smaller and more remote than the other. We strived to contribute to our participants’ level of comfort by organizing each art voice session, interview, and focus group in their own community. Being in the local community was especially important, given the focus on traditional medicine gathering, an activity more likely to be done in one’s home community. As well, traditional practices are typically rooted in a connection to the land; according to Robbins and Dewar (2011, p. 2), “traditional knowledge and Indigenous spirituality hinges on the maintenance and renewal of relationships to the land.

![Figure 2. Tanya’s art voice answer to question: “How does gathering medicine make you think of protecting and being in harmony with Mother Earth?”](image-url)
Indigenous land bases and the environment as a whole remain vitally important to the practice of traditional healing.” Thus a focus on conducting research on local territory may support a physical and spiritual connection to the land, establishing a methodology which was locally and culturally relevant for this project and further allowed participants to maintain a connection to their land, culture, and place physically, socially, and spiritually.

At a smaller scale, data were collected in numerous different settings, including the boardroom of a health center, a tipi at a community fairground, Band Council offices, a community center, a daycare, and individuals’ homes. We cannot easily assess how the physical elements of these settings affected or contributed to the participants’ responses, since participants may have been influenced by their prior relationships with these places. We noticed, however, significant differences between indoor and outdoor locations that demonstrate how different places may influence research methods and results. Our three art voice workshops began indoors (two were held in a boardroom and one in a community center) where teaching and discussion about the use of plants—dried and stored in paper bags—and participants’ relationships with them took place. This exercise was rather constrained and abstract compared to the outdoors sessions. Once outside, young people appeared more at ease; they could run around and were no longer confined to chairs. As we wandered around looking for wild plants, the youth were more engaged in the activity and appeared to be more comfortable speaking about their understanding of the various medicines. The workshop that took place in the community center of the more remote community also felt more comfortable, as children were coming in and out and food was being shared. One participant came into the center to visit his father who was taking part in the workshop and decided to stay and contribute via his drawings. This type of “recruitment” felt more natural with youth participating only when they felt comfortable. This example illustrates how the physical place of research can impact the degree of participation and in turn the results.

Although this example speaks to how physical location may influence research results, the impact of locale was also at play; a given location usually comes with preconceived ideas around how it is to be used. Being in different locales throughout this project impacted the research process at a localized and personal level: It affected how and when questions were asked as well as the duration of the interviews. Also, social spaces created by children differ from those created by adults in terms of the volume of conversations, the mood, and the degree of participation. For example, two art voice sessions took place in the boardroom of the local health center. Given the formality of the room, these sessions felt less relaxed than the art voice session in the community center. The boardroom was a setting less suitable for young people who may have viewed this place as an “adult space,” with its high-backed chairs and large conference table; youth did not have the physical space to run around, and some appeared to be more inhibited or intimidated when answering questions.

In our project, we also noted the impact of structural and social power relations on the development of social interactions in various spatial settings. This was especially the case between the researcher(s) and the participating adults. In some instances, we were on equal footing—as parents of young children, interested in issues around Indigenous health, of a similar demographic and socioeconomic position. In other ways, however, we were separated by different cultural and geographic backgrounds and places. It can be expected that this influenced how and what we communicated, and the extent to which we shared ideas, perceptions, and feelings. One example of this occurred during a key informant interview where the principal investigator and the respondent were conversing in a casual way. We both were of a similar age and had children of similar ages; we were thus able to relate to each other on many levels. But while discussing issues around cultural protocol with Elders, the participant realized that the researcher was not of First Nations ancestry as she had assumed. An awkward moment followed as both women apologized for the misunderstanding, and it took some time before they could settle into easy conversation again as they needed to reframe their positions within the interview.

Interviews conducted at the participants’ home were the most casual although the researcher was “out of place” and the participant was “in place” and therefore comfortable and in control of his or her domain. In the words of Anderson and Jones (2009), this unfamiliar space had the effect of “destabilizing the authority of the researcher” (p. 296) leaving her less at ease. Thus, the varying locales in which this project took place, the social context of constructed environments, evidently affected the outcomes of this project.

Finally, sense of place impacts research results including how participants identify with places and move about in them. Comfort in their communities differed between participants, some being lifelong residents, some moving back after leaving for education, and some being newcomers. This emotional and spiritual aspect of place is more difficult to identify because of its personal and subjective nature, where one person may have a strong sense of place, relate, and feel connected and another may not. For example, during a culture days harvest celebration, one key informant was interviewed in a tipi which had been erected for the festivities. The tipi as an interview site may not be spiritual in the research context, but in a different context, such as during a ceremony, it could be a very spiritual place. During the interview, youth were being taught to drum by a local Elder right outside the tipi. When that particular interview was being transcribed, the sound of the loud drumming made it exceedingly difficult, impossible at times, to listen to the recording and to transcribe it. It did, however, contribute to the feel of the interview and the mood of the place. For the researcher, this made the interview feel “otherworldly,” as the drone of the drums took over the space, not at all like previous meetings, and seemed to capture a sense of place which influenced the results. In this case, the timing and location of the interview made some parts impossible to transcribe and yet perhaps the feelings, the sense of place, was
better captured without the accompanying words, and the gist of the participant’s message was sufficiently clear. Indeed, the responses of the Elder during the interview in the tipi reveal how participants may be able to provide more relevant information when they can connect with their environment and culture. When asked about methods that most effectively engage youth in traditional practices, the Elder responded:

So, with the youths right now it’s really hard to kind of get in touch with them … I think more hands on stuff … I can see them doing more hands on rather than just sitting back and just me yakking away … And umm, they retain it more too.

(Emphasis added)

This key informant may have been more likely to answer this way since we were in an environment where youth were learning about their culture literally hands-on (the drum).

Further, discussions that took place with youth and adults while we were learning about medicines outdoors may have been more meaningful and even transformative for some, perhaps influenced by smell, taste, or other sensory characteristics. Tapping into the sensory nature of places when doing research in situ will certainly influence participants’ perception of their surroundings and thus how they answer research questions. Compared to talking about gathering medicine in the boardroom, being in the field is conducive to a much richer experience and sharing of knowledge as participants live through the experience and can share it “live” with the researcher. Anderson and Jones (2009) speak about the sensory experiences of “sitting on damp grass … getting muddy, smelling petrol fumes” (p. 299). One workshop participant discussed his connection to the land and plants on his property in sensorial terms:

There’s lots of thistles there so you do have to wear your boots there- but otherwise, it’s a big plant fest out there—I like to see that and [we] took a lot of garbage away from the previous owner … old oil tanks … old metal things that he had laying in the grass … That’s what I think about, when I think about this gathering medicine, being in a place where you could go barefoot all the time and not worry about steppin’ on glass and tin cans that are rusting and all that stuff so I’ve made a real effort in the last few months since all the snow’s been gone to go out and pick up all … the barbed wire from an old fence … to get rid of it eh- and make it so that it’s more green and blue and less … angular and metal and wire and all … (Mike, art voice participant)

This participant’s description is an example of how one’s connection to a particular place is affective, and sense of place can even be a tactile experience. Through his words, we can imagine what his home once looked like and what it looks like now.

Furthermore, using art voice as a data collection method, the act of producing art is a sensory, tactile, and arguably a spiritual experience. When participants are in the place of art voice, these “moments of creation” (Anderson & Jones, 2009, p. 291), they are demonstrating the experiential nature of methods-in-place. Thus, coupled with his oral description, art voice enabled this participant to go one step further, with an actual visual depiction of his surroundings, showing his house with blues and greens and softer angles (Figure 3).

We want to stress that researchers themselves are not impervious to the effects of place. In this case, each site of our research had a unique feel and offered varying degrees of comfort. Acknowledging this subjectivity of place in the research process, being reflexive about the role of location, locale, and sense of place can only increase our depth of understanding of the unique places in which we work and their influence upon us and in turn can enhance the quality of the research process and ultimately the results.

**Conclusion**

Investigating self-care and traditional medicine workshops on Manitoulin Island revealed more than just answers to the original research questions posed by the local health center. This project also provided a new appreciation of the value of being flexible and adaptable as researchers, allowing the context and circumstances (in this case, the place of research) to shape the
evolution of a project. Using art voice as a method was not part of the original research design; however, a number of circumstances precipitated its use, including the presence of an art therapist at the research site, the participation of youth in the project, and perhaps most significantly a recognition of the long tradition of art among the Anishnabe of Manitoulin Island. Once this method of gathering information was employed, considering the ways place contributed to research methodology became an exciting new avenue to explore.

It was from this perspective that we came to recognize the advantages of art voice in this particular social, geographical, and cultural context. Many of the advantages are generic to the method itself including its capacity to tap into expressions that sometimes cannot be communicated through words alone, make people feel at ease answering questions, and make research pursuits appear less daunting and more accessible due to the nature of the medium (see Edwards, 2004; Ferrara, 2004; Junge & Linesch, 1993; Lavallée, 2009; Leavy, 2009). In this case, using art voice proved advantageous, given the existence of a strong tradition of art in Anishnabe culture on Manitoulin Island and the previous experience among some community members using art as a therapeutic tool. Art voice also involves youth in research who might otherwise be intimidated by the power dynamics between them and outside adult researchers. We feel that these factors, combined, made art voice a particularly appropriate method in the context of our research.

This article examined the three dimensions of place—the physical, social and affective elements—and asserted the importance of considering all three elements when analyzing and interpreting results. As researchers, situating ourselves physically, socially, and emotionally and situating those with whom we interact as well as considering the ways different places may alter research findings can contribute to a set of deeper and more robust conclusions. That said, there are challenges in negotiating collaborations between academic researchers and Indigenous community partners. While we try to minimize these challenges through building trust, acknowledging who we are and where we come from and striving to use community-based, culturally sensitive and relevant methods, it is impossible to fully avoid insider/outside tensions or the need to navigate the spaces between epistemologies (Fine, 1994; Jones & Jenkins, 2008). A new wave of Indigenous researchers is bridging this gap, doing work in their own communities and “speaking the language” in both linguistic and cultural senses. While decolonizing methods such as those discussed in this article are not enough to adequately capture the essence of a community, they are useful for creating dialogue and mutual respect in collaborative research projects.

Our examination of culturally and locally relevant place-based methods aims to inspire ideas that could be applied to future research. This work could encourage future Indigenous health researchers to consider place as a part of methodological design, thereby contributing to the growing body of decolonizing community-based methods. As researchers, we need to get creative in our choice of methods, engage communities in the process, ask individuals how we could best appreciate local knowledge and find ways to uncover new methods-in-place. While working in academia involves the ongoing challenge of reconciling Indigenous frameworks with the expectations of funding agencies and ethics boards, allowing place to guide our research methods may be a good starting point for decolonizing methodologies.

Authors’ Note
Marjory Shawande was a member of the Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve on Manitoulin Island, Ontario, Canada. She was the coordinator of the Traditional Aboriginal Medicine Program at the Noojomowin Teg Health Centre and a member of the Manitoulin Anishnabek Research Review Committee, an Aboriginal research ethics board on Manitoulin Island. Marjory passed away on April 2nd, 2013. She is greatly missed.

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