SPIRIT, SURVIVAL AND A STAND-OFF: STORYTELLING RESEARCH

THROUGH VIDEO ANIMATION WITH YELLOW QUILL FIRST NATION

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WHY DID WE DO THIS RESEARCH?

Reserve communities and water researchers are recognizing the importance of applying Indigenous approaches to water challenges in Canada. Learning how to share co-produced knowledge in culturally respectful ways is a challenge for researchers and partners working to reconcile past colonial approaches such as publishing scientific papers and not making knowledge relevant for community members. Currently, there are few well-tested methods of knowledge co-production that blend traditional practices, research methods and technology.

This project was developed in response to a request from Yellow Quill First Nation (YQFN) to share Elders' lived experiences of water on a reserve as a story, and reveal how those experiences influenced the state of the water today. Elders, community leaders, youth and researchers built relationships through a process of creating an empowering art-animation video that embodied the six "Rs" of research with Indigenous people: respect, relevance, reciprocity, responsibility, relationality and reconciliation.



WHAT DID WE DO?

We co-created an artistic animated video that engaged Elders, community leaders, youth and researchers. Together, we analyzed previously recorded interviews and chose symbolic representations of common themes. An artist drew out the story using willow charcoal and was videotaped during this process. Once the artwork was finished, youth narrated the story under the direction of the Elders and post-production effects were added.

VIEW THE VIDEO

The story had three main themes:

Spirit: Water is a sacred, spiritual essence that contributes to community wellbeing and is the women's responsibility to protect.

Survival: Water is needed by all creatures. Settlers' overpowering need for convenience, utility and control over water resources have dominated.

Stand-Offs: Historically, decision processes took away Indigenous people's ability to advocate for treaty rights, including water.

WHAT DID WE FIND?

Draft segments were edited carefully to:

- → Show respect
- → Allow ongoing community reflection
- → Give the community control of video production

The video was well-received and led to stronger relationships among the researchers and community partners. The video is a legacy art piece that is used in the local school's curriculum.

The project boosted technological capacity for those involved and inspired new water stewardship goals. Further grant applications were successful.

The video is also a tool for sharing YQFN's lived experiences with industry partners and researchers seeking reconciliation.

WHAT DO DECISION-MAKERS NEED TO KNOW?

Successful partnerships with Indigenous people are fostered when discussions about how to share co-produced knowledge are emphasized at the outset of relationship building. Storytelling using videos is culturally-relevant and appropriate for building understanding of community concerns about water. Knowledge co-production is an act of reconciliation for researchers and an opportunity to focus on long-term relationships and shared mutual interests with Indigenous people.

YQFN created legacy artwork and developed new capacity in research analysis and translation through this project. Chiefs, and Elders from other Indigenous communities can draw from this project to share their stories and enrich their water stewardship. By enhancing knowledge co-production skills, researchers and partners can contribute to better water governance overall.

