

**Reciprocity in Indigenous educational research: Beyond compensation, towards  
decolonizing**

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**Abstract:** With questions about what it means to conduct educational research in Indigenous contexts based on reciprocal relationships, we review key contributions to the literature from Indigenous and qualitative methodologists. We identify four dimensions of reciprocity, extending the notion of reciprocity as transaction or compensation. To design research that fulfills decolonizing commitments, we find resonance with the conceptualization of reciprocity as a “stance” (Trainor and Bouchard 2012), rather than being achieved through any particular method.

**Key Words:** reciprocity; decolonizing; research methodologies; Indigenous education

**Running Head:** Reciprocity in Indigenous educational research

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## **Introduction**

As researchers, we (the authors) actively and continuously participate in learning to undertake, and teach about, university- *and* community- recognized research that centres decolonizing commitments. To us, decolonizing refers to ongoing processes of coming to know the ways that colonizing relations have shaped the conditions of Indigenous and non-Indigenous lives and relationships to land in the present. This knowing must be accompanied by actions to account for those conditions, actions that seek ethical relationality (Donald 2012a) and re-centre the interests of Indigenous peoples. We believe that research, and its methodologies, require decolonizing, and can potentially contribute to decolonizing within and outside of academic institutions.

We begin by looking for guidance from literature in Indigenous education research. Verna J. Kirkness and Ray Barnhardt's "First Nations and Higher Education: The Four R's-- Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, Responsibility" (1991) is one of the first and most influential articles in education literature on university reform to benefit Indigenous peoples. Our academic lineages include ties to both Kirkness and Barnhardt<sup>1</sup>; thus, beginning with their work honours the places and relationships that have shaped our learning. The emphasis Kirkness and Barnhardt place on reciprocity calls on us. In this article, we raise and explore questions about what a commitment to reciprocity in decolonizing research methodologies implies for researchers.

Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) imagined the following possibilities associated with pursuing reciprocity in the university:

Faculty members and students in such a reciprocal relationship are in a position to create a new kind of education, to formulate new paradigms or explanatory

frameworks that help us establish a greater equilibrium and congruence between the literate view of the world and the reality we encounter when we step outside the walls of the ‘Ivory Tower’ (11).

While this quote is about teaching and learning, it can be extrapolated to research. Reciprocity might produce greater equilibrium and congruence between researchers affiliated with the academy and their research participants, often affiliated with the community—recognizing there are many variations within, between and beyond these categories.

Furthermore, Kirkness and Barnhardt’s (1991) conceptualization of reciprocity addresses the “role dichotomy” between the “producers and consumers” of knowledge by creating more “personalized ‘human’ relationships,” offering “give-and-take,” and expecting university professors/researchers to be more “accessible and ‘vulnerable’” rather than “protect[ing] themselves behind a veneer of academic aloofness and obfuscation” (9-10). In this representation of reciprocity, there is explicit reference to relationships with all their associated complexities (e.g., vulnerability), and the implication of ongoing exchange and negotiation.

Below we outline selections from the proliferation of work since 1991 concerning how to collapse the gulf between views of research in the university and community, with particular attention to reciprocity. Many Indigenous scholars, Indigenous graduate students and ally scholars or graduate students of other ancestries have referenced “The Four R’s” in their theoretical and methodological frameworks for Indigenous education research.<sup>2</sup> Proportionally however, there is less explicit theoretical and practical detail available in the literature about the importance, distinctiveness, and implications associated with theorizing and enacting reciprocity. And, despite this proliferation we remain cognizant that Indigenous peoples are still highlighting that what is often produced by research—putting it generally—is incongruence and

disequilibrium (see for example: Marker 2003; Smith 1999/2012, 2008; Tuck and Yang 2014). Supplementing Indigenous scholars with other perspectives, we summarize four dimensions of reciprocity, finding resonance with the conceptualization of reciprocity as a “stance” (Trainor and Bouchard 2012) taken throughout a research journey, rather than being achieved through any particular method. As our analysis unfolds, the concept of a stance of reciprocity, and its constitutive dimensions in relation to decolonizing aims for research will unfold as well.

As a caveat to this introduction and framing, within the bounds of this relatively short article we cannot comprehensively refer to scholarship by Indigenous researchers and theorists who have developed and advanced a range of methodologies that pursue, and accomplish, reciprocal and/or decolonizing relations with Indigenous communities. We by no means intend to communicate that only the authors cited here are worth mentioning when it comes to Indigenous or decolonizing research. Rather, we are interested in shining a spotlight on the literature through which explicit and specific conceptualizations of reciprocity are emerging.

### **Questions and problems of reciprocity**

According to the Canadian Oxford Dictionary (2005), the word reciprocity comes from “reciprocal,” an adjective to describe something that is “in return,” “mutual,” or “inversely correspondent; complementary.” Its origin is the French *réciprocité*, which comes from the Latin *reciprocus*, consisting of *re-* (back) + *pro* (forward). Reciprocity can be understood etymologically as moving backwards and forwards. In other words, the benefit of research should move backwards and forwards between those who design the research and those who are affected by it.

Providing this definition is not intended to pre-emptively circumscribe what counts as reciprocity, or even confine it. These meanings may offer a few traces of how it has come to be listed amongst other important words beginning with “R” in the literature on Indigenous education research. We caution, however, that a single English word may not have the conceptual flexibility that Indigenous languages can convey. And, as will be seen below, the binary nature of exchange based on a two-directional flow of value can be problematic for Indigenous peoples. For example, referring to Julie Cruikshank’s (1990, 21) research, when “stories,” as Tagish and Tlingit Elder Angela Sidney says, are “her wealth” how can an equivalent exchange be enacted?

Chapter 9 of Canada’s *Tri-Council Policy Statement*, called *Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (2014) says the following about reciprocity with Indigenous communities:

First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities have unique histories, cultures and traditions. They also share some core values such as reciprocity—the obligation to give something back in return for gifts received—which they advance as the necessary basis for relationships that can benefit both Aboriginal and research communities. (Preamble)

The Tri-Council recommends researchers conduct “participatory research,” “based on respect, relevance, reciprocity and mutual responsibility” (Article 9.12). While other actions around collaboration and mutual benefits in research are explicit in the Tri-Council policy statement, these are the only instances when reciprocity is mentioned specifically.

Drawing on resources such as the Tri-Council policy statement, we wonder if an increasingly common understanding of reciprocity is “the obligation to give something back in return for gifts received,” to individual research participants or to a community at the end of the

research? Representations of reciprocity that emphasize the exchange of gifts led us to wonder whether it is being simplified and conflated with Western notions of compensation or one-to-one, “fair” exchange. Perhaps this is hardly surprising, finding ourselves downstream from Cartesianism, colonization and Lockean value systems emphasizing work and exchange. But, recognizing that these pervasive assumptions have proven toxic to Indigenous economies and ecologies, is this interpretation detrimental to other forms of reciprocity?

There is no clean promontory for viewing reciprocity between the researcher and the researching with Indigenous peoples. It is a swampy forest; we make our way through this landscape slowly and carefully knowing that we carry along power, history, and colonization as both maps and encumbrances.

Evidently, we find that a commitment to reciprocity in research raises many questions: When does reciprocity begin and end? How is it measured and according to what criteria? Whose expectations for reciprocity are most important to fulfill—those of the research participants, the community to which they belong, the academic institution or research ethics board, or the researcher themselves? Do people from the university ever really offer people from the community something they need? As Smith asked, “Can they fix up our generator?” (1999/2012, 44). Are the potential implications associated with reciprocity sidelined when conversations are confined to the idea and gesture of a compensatory “gift”? What is to be done and said if and when reciprocity becomes an impossibility—when researchers simply cannot give back in equal measure what was given to them? Indeed, is achieving reciprocity even a possibility in research? We also wonder how reciprocity may be understood and enacted (differently?) by non-Indigenous researchers working with Indigenous peoples and in Indigenous contexts? These questions come together under the larger question: How might attending to

reciprocity closely and constantly during the methodological design of research change what is produced by that research?

Reciprocity may be pursued in transactions with participants, sometimes after the research is completed (i.e. the “give back”), but end up hidden to those who later read the resulting research. Conversely, reciprocity may be pursued through guiding concepts and decisions in the theoretical and methodological design phases of research, and yet end up hidden to participants directly affected. Not all research has human participants—historical research based on archival or documentary sources may be designed with reciprocity in mind, or research may pursue reciprocity with the land (for example, Ostertag 2015) or other beings. How might we address these gradations of explicitness and transparency in how reciprocity is represented and enacted? How might we better attend to reciprocity, considering its potential for advancing decolonizing imperatives within research and as a result of it?

### **Indigenous theories of reciprocity in research**

We begin our depiction of the prevailing conceptualization of reciprocity by reviewing key contributions to the literature on Indigenous education research, looking for how Kirkness and Barnhardt’s (1991) introduction of the imperative to reciprocity has been taken up. We selected literature in recognition of the places and relationships of our own research, and those that reveal different interpretations of reciprocity in an effort to begin drawing a map of the conceptual territory. We do not account comprehensively for related concepts such as solidarity (Gaztambide-Fernandez 2012) and ethical relationality (Donald 2012a, 2012b; Ermine 2007).

The meaning and interpretation of the Four R’s cannot be taken for granted. As Michael (Marker 2004) has argued elsewhere, to integrate the Four R’s as they are understood by

Indigenous peoples, those who are involved “must confront the ways in which academic culture has controlled the meaning of terms” and “either invent new words and then struggle against the current to wedge them into the academic lexicon, or expand the meaning of conventional terms to include Indigenous perspectives” (176). An Indigenous conceptualization of reciprocity may be subject to processes by which deep and complex thoughts rooted in paradigms that differ significantly from the culture of the university, are simplified, essentialized, sedimented or conflated. In other words, what is understood as reciprocity outside the academy, such as in particular Indigenous communities, changes when it comes inside the academy.

There is undoubtedly a limit to what we can understand about Indigenous perspectives on reciprocity as they manifest in every place, or in every research project. Reciprocity must be situated with place. We might draw a parallel with the ways many Indigenous hunters attempted to gain favour with animal spirits by fasting and seeking visions or dreams of where the animals might be on the landscape. Each animal is unique, and each place is made real in the moment. Access to the animal, where they can be taken in a good way, requires a kind of prayer and promise to perform an act of reciprocity. Often the reciprocity is in the speaking of the power of the animal and offering a story to honour the ancestors of that animal at a public gathering.

Michael (Marker 2004) has also written about how reciprocity may begin before the research itself, through a preparatory process that makes learning in the context of the research possible. He shares the example of being expected to work for his grandfather—cleaning out the shed on the farm—before being told the things he wanted to know about. Michael noted that, “it was a test of my sincerity about wanting to learn something” producing a context where “I learned not only what I wanted to know, but I also learned how to clean a shed” and likewise it “provided my grandfather with both a clean shed and an attentive student” (2004, 180).

### ***Reciprocity as giving back***

Margaret Kovach (2009) does not draw directly from Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991), although like them, she describes reciprocity as inseparable from responsibility and respect. Ethics, relationships, and “giving back” are central in her discussion of Indigenous research, as she asserts that seeking knowledge “ought not to be extractive but reciprocal, to ensure an ecological and cosmological balance” (57). Kovach outlines examples, expectations, and strategies to facilitate “giving back,” pointing out that “[h]aving a pre-existing and ongoing relationship with participants is an accepted characteristic of research according to tribal paradigms” (51). She highlights that practices of “critically reflective self-location” in research can “keep us aware of the power dynamic flowing back and forth between researcher and participant” (112). She notes that deciding on a topic or purpose of research should reflect the individual researcher’s capacity to give back and assist their people. Kovach places emphasis on the point that reciprocity is often achieved through cultural protocols specific to a tribe, such as the Cree practice of giving tobacco as a gift signifying respect and reciprocity (127; see also Ellis and Early 2006).

### ***Reciprocity as sharing knowledge***

Jo-ann Archibald (2008) acknowledges Kirkness and Barnhardt, and uses similar and expanded principles from her own Stó:lō cultural teachings to frame her Indigenous research methodology. They are: respect, reverence, responsibility, reciprocity, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy. Archibald articulates reciprocity primarily as the “hands back, hands forward” teaching she received from Musqueam Elder Dr. Vincent Stogan (48-50). This signifies a

cyclical and circulating responsibility to teach what one has learned, passing on knowledge between generations. Archibald emphasizes that to receive teachings, and pass them forward, one must be culturally and holistically “ready,” or “worthy,” “to fully absorb cultural knowledge” (41). Similar to the emphasis on “giving back” found in a great deal of Indigenous education research literature, Archibald’s final chapter is entitled “A Give-Away,” again invoking the concept of sharing knowledge according to the principle of reciprocity.

### ***Reciprocity leading to relational accountability***

In Shawn Wilson’s (2008) detailed account of determining how epistemological, ontological, methodological and axiological imperatives of research can be rethought in the interests of Indigenous communities, relationship precedes, and forms, both self and research (76). He draws from Cora Weber-Pillwax to signal that reciprocity is more than the giving of a gift (58). Wilson references three R’s—respect, reciprocity and relationality—bringing them together in his concept of “relational accountability” (99). In practice, relational accountability means that researchers consider their relations in choosing topics to research, in the methods used to collect data/build relationships, in how analysis is carried out, and finally in the way outcomes of the research are presented. Without reciprocity, he says, “one side of the relationship may gain power and substance at the expense of the other,” and “[t]he responsibility to ensure respectful and reciprocal relationships becomes the axiology” of the researcher (79). The strategies associated with each of the three R’s Wilson identifies blend together and become more than the sum of their parts in his description of Indigenous research methodology, making it difficult to disentangle them. That reciprocity is difficult to tease out from relational

accountability is instructive to researchers: in its pursuit we must be prepared to go beyond notions of compensation.

### ***Circular and continuous reciprocity***

Introducing the “logic of the gift” theory as a way to think about the integration of Indigenous epistememes into the university, Rauna Kuokkanen (2007) explains that generally Western ideas about reciprocity, both economic and anthropological, are predicated on the binary of exchange. Reciprocity is largely contained by individual self-interest, and the ethos that it is ultimately undesirable to be dependent on or responsible to others (36-37). In contrast, Kuokkanen presents Indigenous views of reciprocity in the “circular form.” Circular reciprocity is not for the accumulation of gifts or insurance of countergifts later on, as in the modern economy, but rather to keep gifts circulating, to “actively acknowledge kinship and coexistence with the world” (38). The land is also part of reciprocal relations, usually acknowledged in “life renewing” reciprocity ceremonies. The “strings” attached to gifts, if there are any, is the need to look after others in a community (145).

Kuokkanen asserts that the principle of giving back through research is now part of the broader decolonizing movement. This may include: taking the concerns of the community into account when formulating a research agenda, reporting back, sharing the benefits, and bringing new knowledge or vital information to the community (44). Kuokkanen goes on to explain: “This kind of reciprocity implies *response-ability*—that is, an ability to respond, to remain attuned to the world beyond oneself, as well as willingness to recognize its existence through the giving of gifts” (39). She extends reciprocity beyond consideration of one researcher’s agenda in relation to their participants, towards a willingness to contribute to changing what it means to

participate in the university and in research altogether. Kuokkanen argues, “the gift is a continuous process and practice of reciprocation, recognition, and negotiation without closure” (154).

### *Complex dimensions of reciprocity and decolonizing the academy*

Enacting reciprocity is not only a matter of knowing that giving back is a researcher’s responsibility. Figuring out what, how, when, why and to whom to give is hardly simple. Dealing with the moments when reciprocity goes awry—such as when gifts are not received in the way we intend—is part and parcel of human relationships in all their complexity.

In contrast to the potential for affirmation associated with gift-giving, Kuokkanen (2007) points out that gifts can produce ambivalence; indeed, that they have been interpreted as a form of threat (45), particularly when they undermine prevailing modernist-capitalist economic creeds. Further, she identifies the importance of bringing differing notions of reciprocity into the university, in service to the project of transforming the university itself. The potential for reciprocity to arise between individuals, between communities, and between the community and the academy, are predicated on recognition and response-ability, according to Kuokkanen. This, in turn, is dependent on epistemic recognition; something that Indigenous peoples have not fully received from the university. Processes of reciprocity and decolonizing, then, are deeply intertwined.

Researchers cannot always fulfill expectations held by Indigenous communities and individuals, and what results may be a clash that goes unresolved. In Michael’s teaching and supervision, many graduate students report that they experience supreme dissonance and discouragement trying to navigate the contradiction between how universities validate research

exchange relationships, and the delicate cultural negotiations expected in Indigenous communities. Traditional gifts within ceremonial contexts become controversial in the culture contrast zones between universities and Indigenous communities. The ceremonial giving of Tobacco has been one of the most contentious entities in this realm. Institutions have normative expectations and, as I have explained, “Giving gifts in exchange for the gift of knowledge is an unacceptable methodology to the university except when the participants are paid in a fashion that is consistent with the university’s administrative and cultural standards” (Marker 2004, 179).

One of the most difficult tensions to mediate is the way Indigenous reciprocities are fundamentally metaphysical. They are negotiated through ecologies that are not restricted to the human, but rather acknowledge and enact exchange with the more-than-human. Tuck and McKenzie (2015) make this point saying, “reciprocity in Indigenous methodologies takes a different tenor because of its cosmological connotation, concerned with maintaining balance not just between humans, but with energies that connect and thread through all entities in the universe” (95). This underscores reciprocity as a disposition and as a practice, rather than a contractual arrangement. The question about how to enact this practice in the complex world of university research projects remains a river that takes many channels and a conversation of many connected stories. What is clear is that for university-based researchers to pursue reciprocity with Indigenous communities at a deep level, they must be prepared to face processes of decolonizing methodologies and institutions.

### ***Connections in qualitative methodologies***

Indigenous research is not the only area where reciprocity theory can be found in the field of education, or qualitative research methodologies broadly speaking. Some qualitative

researchers look to reciprocity instrumentally, as an avenue by which to “get better data with which to construct more trustworthy accounts” (Harrison, MacGibbon and Morton 2001, 325). The idea of reciprocity leading to “better data” seems potentially contradictory to the relational and holistic sense of reciprocity communicated by Indigenous scholars above. However, one problematic dimension of non-reciprocal research would certainly be the quality of the data, if it is collected under circumstances in which relationships were non-transparent, non-beneficial or even harmful, to participants or those affected by the research. Using reciprocity as a criterion by which to assess validity, or the “fit” between questions, methods, data, and conclusions, could be generative—though not a silver bullet—in aiming towards decolonizing research, especially if it is pursued recursively at multiple stages of research.

Participatory action research (PAR), predicated on the value of shared authority, seems an obvious field in which to look for theories of reciprocity. However, as Audrey Trainor and Kate Ahgren Bouchard (2012) point out, there are circumstances in which researchers must pursue single authorship or where it is not appropriate or pragmatic to conduct PAR—such as for completion of a doctorate or in some forms of historical research. Rather than relying on one methodology (i.e., PAR) to present solutions to researchers in pursuit of reciprocity, we are interested in understanding how reciprocity may shape, and reshape, any methodological design.

Most usefully, Trainor and Bouchard (2012) discuss reciprocity in qualitative special education research as, “an ethical stance, rather than a simplistic exchange of goods or tolerance” (2). Thus the “stance” is more holistic than any one method, much as communicated by Wilson (2008) and Kuokkanen (2007). They add that it is important to describe in detail, and *without smoothing out the complexity*, how relationships contribute to a research study. For example, one challenge appears in a fieldnote following an interaction between Bouchard and a colleague-

teacher-participant. Bouchard was attempting to offer reciprocity in the form of support for the participant's teaching practice, as a counterbalance for the participant's involvement in her research. She quotes the participant as saying, "Oh honey... that's all okay. But we just want to help you finish your paper" and Bouchard writes in her fieldnote, "we were two teachers, steeped in our 'helping' profession, each believing we are 'helping' each other!" (10). This shows that what counts as reciprocity, and who interprets the offering of gifts, matters differently in different contexts. Trainor and Bouchard offer a conclusion that echoes scholars working in Indigenous education research about the complexities that arise in pursuit of reciprocity. They place emphasis on researchers interrogating our biases and assumptions, finding creative spaces to hold conflict, honouring the contributions of participants in personal ways, and becoming available and vulnerable to participants in research.

### **Expanding an understanding of reciprocity**

Accepting the complexities that condition our capacity to enact reciprocity, and are sometimes beyond our planning or control, how can researchers proceed to design methodologies with a commitment to reciprocity? First, it is too limiting to subsume ideas and actions associated with research relationships under the exchange model of reciprocity.

A give-and-take approach that is conceived of as transactional, measurable, direct, and time-limited is unlikely to respond to the complexity of research relationships and the vulnerability inevitable in them. However, if one moves towards a circular model, other problems emerge. For example, how can a researcher proceed when cultural protocols, where they exist and can be identified, do not fit the context of the research? Or what if local ceremonies of reciprocity cannot be enacted or must be adapted because of the identity of the

researcher? Or what if academic institutional regulations prevent those protocols? What if reciprocity becomes a burden, if the participants or communities ask more of the researcher than they can offer? The questionableness of *achieving* reciprocity must be acknowledged, especially when it comes to decolonizing research in which a perpetual risk is that the research will actually reify legacies of colonizing.

The expanding understanding of reciprocity we are generating here moves from thinking of reciprocity as a concept to which methods can be matched, to thinking of it as the stance (Trainor and Bouchard 2012) the researcher takes, over and over throughout a journey. This stance is comprised of four dimensions, all of which must be interpreted and adapted to fit local conditions. They include: 1) Recognizing relationships that make research possible at a particular time and place through offering gifts that have meaning or purpose; 2) Participating in local ways of teaching, circulating or sharing knowledge, and preparing oneself accordingly; 3) Enacting response-ability towards others through continuous practices of openness, recognition and negotiation without closure; 4) Pursuing a stance of reciprocity even while maintaining an awareness of its tenuousness—that a gift will be interpreted as a threat, that a gift will not be accepted, or that a gift will not be enough. Perhaps we might think of reciprocity as a journey, and not a fixed point on a map.

### ***Decolonizing Research***

How might this conceptualization of reciprocity contribute to decolonizing research and decolonizing education? It is impossible to provide a single answer to this question while also acknowledging the situatedness of relationships, especially following Indigenous ontologies. We provide no recipe, no list of “ten steps.” Our imaginations cannot account for the complexities in

your place, and the ones we have faced or think we have resolved will inevitably be different from yours in your here and now. We assert, though, that in decolonizing research ethical complexities must be accounted for. Research, like reality itself, is paradoxical and so we are all immersed in this paradoxical human condition across zones of culture, power, and history. Decolonizing researchers must simultaneously accept responsibility for the authorship of their work and stand aside to allow the voices of others to be amplified. They must know the mistakes made by researchers before and acknowledge they will become one of the mistake-makers. Taking a stance of reciprocity, the researcher negotiates the participants' visions and dreams for the research as much as they do their own. Keeping one's eyes and spirit open to the connections to be made, remade, unmade and not made in research makes researchers vulnerable. But it makes them more vulnerable not to. Perhaps undertaking decolonizing research with a commitment to reciprocity should be understood as the sensing and witnessing of a path through dense spaces; let it be a path that is more creative and more intimate than the paths laid out before.

The decolonizing researcher concerned with reciprocity might find that the directives of their university ethics review board contradict the stated interests or protocols of the community. They might find that it is not the right time in the community, politically or otherwise, for the research they have in mind. They might find that they cannot fulfill the relationship-building expectations of the Elders, or the participants they have in mind are too busy for research. They might find it is best not to proceed, rather best to pull back and conduct research drawing on existing resources, such as documents or archived materials. They might find that *they* must change, rather than ask more of others. With nimble openness researchers might find new paths to follow, new people and places to visit or old people and places to visit anew.

To determine the methodology that will allow for reciprocity that facilitates decolonizing and vice versa is to face a tangled river bottom of politics and conditions that cannot be bracketed out. Decolonizing research resists academic expectations for some form of objectivity; indeed, it resists the desirability of “a” methodology, as such. Reaching across divided cultures, power differentials and epistemological schisms, reciprocity and the research that follows from it are a kind of mystery revealed in the unfolding of time. And so we say, let this mystery, and your experience of it, become part of your path, your story. Yes, it takes more time to propose, to read, to understand, to evaluate, to approve, to produce and to publish.

Reciprocity through decolonizing research methodologies may contribute to Indigenous reclamation of land, promotion of language, pursuit of self-governance, tracing of dominance, reform of the academy or retelling of history, among so many other crucial projects. We advise that researchers support each other in this endeavour. Let us not add to the vulnerability by perpetuating unnecessarily constrictive expectations that researchers establish a methodological design and plan and never deviate from it in response to community/participant wishes, or continue plastering over any changes we make, tucking away problems that arise. Infidelity to one’s plan is not failure if and when researchers show how ethical relations emerge from research that is attuned to those served by it.

Indigenous faculty and graduate students are an emergent intellectual community, inserting tribal epistemologies into academic literatures. They are blurring lines, breaching walls, and exposing hegemonies deep within academic traditions. Their moves resist the colonizer within while trying to architect an ancient amalgam of creativity focused on the metaphysics of place. Indigenous scholars often experience self as a form of otherness in academic spaces, while struggling to produce the counternarratives of their communities’ experiences.

Concurrently, non-Indigenous researchers should be just as interested in themselves (or in the non-Indigenous societies implicated in their research) as they are in Indigenous people or communities (Marker 2000, 31; 2003, 367; 2006, 483; McGregor 2015). Taking this critical ethnographic approach, a clearer cross-cultural comparison can be achieved, leading to a dialectical horizon. As we approach this horizon, shapes and sequences of human choices are more discernable; the stories of a landscape divided by colonization. These stories are the negotiated spaces where the metaphysical and physical forms of reality flow over, around, and into each other from an Indigenous perspective. Well-told stories bind multiple realities together and can illuminate complex relationships in settings that are historically animated and framed by colonization. Being mindful of power and the conditions under which information is acquired is, in a sense, a form of *thinking back* as a resistance move toward reciprocity. We then demand more from the research because we are sending the critical Indigenous questioning toward the unfiltered and unchallenged condition of the data.

### **Reflections on reciprocity to give away**

We identified four dimensions of reciprocity that are evident from conceptualizations in Indigenous education research as well as the language Trainor and Bouchard (2012) use—reciprocity as a stance. Reciprocity is complicated, and it depends on local understandings of respect, responsibility, benefit and other principles associated with research. Continuous practices of assessing our capacity and opportunity to appropriately recognize and uphold the relationships that make research possible in any given place and time are essential. To constantly keep in mind the tenuousness and fallibility of reciprocity, the vulnerability associated with attempting to enact it, and to address our mistakes and failures, is to increase the possibility of

reciprocity. A useful goal might be to continuously keep one's stance of reciprocity in mind, informing a researcher's ability to *respond*—that is, the response-ability (Kuokkanen 2007)—associated with changes in context, changes in participants, or changes in methodological design. This is not only to advocate reciprocity for its own sake, but as a pathway to pursue many of the interconnected goals of Indigenizing and decolonizing research, as called for by Indigenous scholars and communities around the world.

Meaningful and purposeful offerings of recognition, gifts, and the sharing of knowledge, will then become more likely to benefit those directly affected by research, and contribute to decolonizing research at the same time. We hope to participate in more conversations about moving from simplified or implicit conceptualizations of reciprocity to more complex ones, without being immobilized by that complexity.

## Notes

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1. By this we signal several things in addition to theoretical alignment with Kirkness and Barnhardt's work: Michael studied directly and closely with both Kirkness and Barnhardt over many years, with Barnhardt serving on his Ph.D. supervisory committee. Heather's parents studied with Barnhardt at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, and Heather's mother travelled on a cultural exchange with Kirkness. Barnhardt acted as external examiner for Heather's dissertation, completed at the University of British Columbia where Verna Kirkness worked for many years.
2. A search in 'Google Scholar' for citations of Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) returned 331 results.

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