

Heeding the Voice of Mishtamek^u Collaborative Ethics and the Evaluation of Research in Aboriginal Contexts Reflection on A Field Experience

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Abstract

One of the main issues facing the evaluation of research—as well as collaborative ethics—involves the negotiation of power. *Heeding the Voice of Mishtamek^u* describes our field experience, which consisted of implementing shared collaborative ethics in a team we formed to evaluate certain research activities. In this context, our team also experimented with a collaborative evaluation process in Innu and Atikamekw territory. This field experience story is complemented by our reflection on the manner in which some of the issues and challenges specific to collaborative ethics in the evaluation of research in Aboriginal contexts may be



identified. This experience allowed us to gain more insight into the role of evaluation in collaborative ethics and the potential of a collaboration agreement as a research evaluation tool. Through an approach aimed at creating conditions favourable to the realization of a multi-voice evaluation process equitable to every actor, is it possible to rebalancing the scales of power?

Keywords

Ethics; Collaboration; Indigenous; Aboriginal; Research; Research-creation; Evaluation

Introduction

Whale,
Of mighty oceans.
You have seen it all.
Secrets of the ages are
Heard within your call.
Teach me how to hear your words,
The very roots of history.
Of when our world began.
Whale Medicine Card
(Sams and Carson, 2000)

One of the main issues facing the evaluation of research—as well as collaborative ethics—involves the negotiation of power. What is *the* truth brought to light during the evaluation? Who evaluates what, according to which criteria, for whom and for what purpose? What are the *truths*: those we want to hear (be heard) and those we leave silent? In the context of collaborative research in Aboriginal environments, which story will the evaluative assessment tell about what has been *done together*?

*Heeding the Voice of Mishtamek*¹ describes the field experience we shared with our teammate, Dominic Bizot.² We spoke on this topic during the 3rd *Seminar on the Ethics of Research With Aboriginal Research* in Val d'Or, Quebec, in 2014.³ In this article, we will expand on this field experience and our reflection on the manner in which some of the issues and challenges associated with collaborative ethics in the evaluation of research in Aboriginal contexts may be identified.

¹ Mishtamek^u means "whale" in Innu-Aimun (the language of the Innu people).

² Shan dak and Louise, co-leads of Mamu minu-tutamutau, served as research partners, and Claudia as research assistant, within the scope of the field experience described herein. Dominic Bizot was the co-researcher originally responsible for the evaluation under the host research project.

³ Absent from the seminar for health reasons, Dominic declined our invitation to participate in writing this article.

The field experience in question involved implementing shared collaborative ethics in a team we formed to evaluate research activities within the scope of a Community-University Research Alliance.⁴ It was within the context of the CURA Design and Material Culture II⁵ program that our team experimented with a collaborative evaluation process of research in Aboriginal territory with a group of Quebec university researchers, along with a few representatives and members of Innu and Atikamekw communities (First Nations of Quebec).⁶ While carrying out the evaluation, our team was guided by the need to hear what the different partners, in particular the representatives of the Aboriginal communities and organizations involved, had to say. We then reflected on the approaches that could stimulate (inter) culturally safe ethical dialogue—to foster listening, respect, freedom of speech and action, inclusion, trust and mutual understanding—for when we, *all together*, review collaborative research activities in Aboriginal contexts.⁷ In seeking to answer this question through concrete action, we felt it was necessary to stay at arm's length from, though not disregard, evaluation accountability⁸ requirements for academic or funding agencies, with their occasional demands for

⁴ A Community-University Research Alliance (CURA) was a research program by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). The SSHRC is a federal agency that encourages and supports university research and research training. The CURA program, whose last competition was in 2009, was intended "to support the creation of alliances between community organizations and postsecondary institutions which, through a process of ongoing collaboration and mutual learning, will foster innovative research, training and the creation of new knowledge in areas of importance for the social, cultural or economic development of Canadian communities." For specific program objectives and other information, go to: <http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/programmes-programmes/cura-aruc-eng.aspx#a2>

⁵ The CURA Design and Material Culture II (CURA DMC II, 2009–2014) is a research program directed by Élisabeth Kaine of UQAC (Université du Québec à Chicoutimi). The goal of the program is to understand the effects of creative actions on individuals and communities. CURA DMC II, like certain other university/Aboriginal partnerships, is part of the ongoing activities of the Design and Material Culture (DMC) working group and the previous CURA (*Community Development and Aboriginal Culture*, 2003–2009). Unless otherwise noted, the acronym CURA will hereafter refer to CURA DMC II.

⁶ Although no official definition exists for the term "First Nation" in Canada, this term first appeared in the 1970s to replace the word "Indian." The federal government recognizes 618 First Nations in Canada, and the Quebec government 11: the Inuit, Naskapi, Cree, Anishinabeg, Mi'gmaq, Malecite, Abenaki, Mohawk, Wendat, Innu and Atikamekw. Several Aboriginal communities refer to themselves as First Nations, but specify their cultural identity. According to the Indian Register kept by Indigenous Affairs and Northern Canada (INAC), the Innu nation comprises about 18 800 individuals, and the Atikamekw nation slightly more than 7000 (AANDC, 2012).

⁷ The field experience on which this article is based took place in Quebec under the broader context of Canadian research policy (*cf.* EPTC, 2014). The term Aboriginal contexts recognizes and celebrates the diversity of Aboriginal cultures in Canada.

⁸ Research accountability, to be distinguished from the restitution of research findings possibly included therein (but not exclusively so), refers primarily to every follow-up carried out to respect funding agency requirements, as well as those of the university and community organizations involved in the research project (for example, see note 25 on page 12).

authoritative discourse and success stories. Instead, we sought to adopt a stance that would allow us to listen to the voices, stories and languages that, we feel, are less often heard, especially during research, and give a greater place to more diversified perspectives and content. To what extent would this *bias* in favour of Aboriginal communities, if bias it is, have allowed each partner involved to be heard, to hear the voice of the other and to have the impression that he or she was heard? Through an approach aimed at establishing conditions conducive to realizing a multiple-voice evaluative assessment⁹ that would benefit every actor, would we have contributed to rebalancing the scales of power?

In parallel to these research activities, our team experimented with a collaboration agreement, a tool we used iteratively for our work and that served as its RAM. We opted for an approach based on the collaborative ethics and critical stance at the heart of Mamu minu-tutamutau, a research, creation and activist collective for training and exchange.¹⁰ From the outset, the team wanted to work collaboratively by harmonizing the general objectives of this CURA with the evaluation activities of Mamu minu-tutamutau.¹¹ With a desire to promote mutual learning and see our respective interests converge on a common goal, we decided to experiment with the collaboration agreement from the very beginning. This was one of the tools developed by Mamu minu-tutamutau and is the one on which we base our position to offer a more detailed presentation of the elements to consider when preparing such an agreement (Lachapelle, Puana; 2015).

This article will not directly address the findings of our research evaluation activities as identified in the evaluative assessments completed on Aboriginal territory and the activity reports we produced at the end of this process. This was done to respect the discussion circles and information sharing conditions we had agreed upon. After a brief presentation on the critical stance and the general definition of the collaboration agreement that guided our team's approach and operating method, we will situate and review our field experience. Our goal is to identify questions that reveal the state of the research relationship and evaluation process that are still largely determined by Western epistemology and the systemic and cultural inequalities of academia¹² and its colonial history.¹³

⁹ While we were planning our stays in the communities, we opted for the term "evaluative assessment" rather than just "evaluation" in our communications with the parties concerned, for reasons to be explained further on.

¹⁰ Mamu minu-tutamutau means "doing well together" in Innu-Aimun. For more information, go to: <https://mamuminututamutau.wordpress.com/>

¹¹ CURA DMC II defines its two overall objectives as follows: empowerment, namely controlling local cultural development and supporting those who transmit their culture through their creativity and the appreciation of their culture; sustainable development through cultural transmission and community co-operation.

¹² *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (2014), this policy used by the Canadian federal research agencies recognizes different types of abuse that characterized the relationship between researchers and Aboriginal people: "misappropriation of

Critical stance of Mamu minu-tutamutau

Mamu minu-tutamutau addresses the issue of *Doing well together* from the perspective of different partners when conducting research in Aboriginal contexts. The purpose of this approach in collaborative ethics is to create more favourable conditions for greater collaboration that are respectful, equitable and negotiated in Aboriginal contexts, as well as reciprocally responsible relations among the actors, be they researchers or community or organizational representatives from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. Mamu minu-tutamutau's process is anchored in an intercultural perspective on the decolonization of research and of is part of a broader movement of affirmation and empowerment that enhances and revives the ethics and customary protocols of Aboriginal peoples, notably oral tradition, collective knowledge embodied by elders and the counsel of community ethical bearers. This theoretical and critical stance recognizes "incompatibilities and historical injustices associated with research involving Aboriginal people" (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2007), as well as the need for a transformation in the area of research. Mamu minu-tutamutau is an ethical, political and scientific project.

General definition of collaboration agreement

A research collaboration agreement explicitly documents the terms of reference and working methods on which a research partnership is built as it evolves. It can buttress a research program and should ideally be drafted prior to a grant request being submitted and the program started. The drafting of the agreement can serve as a process to create spaces for dialogue aimed at establishing a co-operative approach at every stage of a research project, including the preliminary phases, as well as encouraging intercultural ethical conciliation among the partners involved in the research collaboration process. The collaboration agreement is periodically evaluated and adapted to the context, activities and transformation of the research relationship. In explicitly summarizing the nature, objectives and conditions of the collaboration as they evolve, the collaboration agreement reflects a common understanding of *Doing* and *Doing together*. Such an agreement is the basis on which collaborating in research and collaborative ethics can become the expression of a shared vision and evaluation of *Doing well together*

sacred songs, stories and artefacts; devaluing of Aboriginal peoples' knowledge as primitive or superstitious; violation of community norms regarding the use of human tissue and remains; failure to share data and resulting benefits; and dissemination of information that has misrepresented or stigmatized entire communities."

¹³ "Just as colonial policies have denied Aboriginal Peoples access to their traditional lands, so also colonial definitions of truth and value have denied Aboriginal Peoples the tools to assert and implement their knowledge. Research under the control of outsiders to the Aboriginal community has been instrumental in rationalizing colonialist perceptions of Aboriginal incapacity and the need for paternalistic control." (Brant Castellano, 2004).

that takes into consideration the different points of view of these partners conducting collaborative research in an Aboriginal context.

Background of Our Field Experience Story

In the fall of 2012, the two co-leads of Mamu minu-tutamutau, Shan dak Puana and Louise Lachapelle, hosted a participatory and creative workshop on collaborative ethics at an annual meeting of CURA Design and Material Culture¹⁴ partners. The workshop objective, jointly defined with CURA senior management and the head of Research Program Evaluation,¹⁵ was to begin a reflection on collaborative ethics with meeting attendees (CURA co-researchers, research professionals and Aboriginal organization partners and representatives). The Research Program Evaluation head was also planning to conduct a series of individual and collective interviews among partners on program activity evaluations.¹⁶ Shan dak facilitated the workshop in her capacity as researcher and co-lead of Mamu minu-tutamutau.¹⁷

During a co-ordination activity held after this annual meeting, a few of the Aboriginal community partners (including Shan dak) undertook a period of reflection that led CURA managers and some of the co-researchers to reconsider adopting a different approach for the research evaluation initially planned and implemented. The Aboriginal partners requested that the university and community collaboration become one of the objects of the evaluation. CURA managers accepted this suggestion and, the next spring, Mamu minu-tutamutau was asked to play an active role in the research work carried out under the Program Evaluation Aspect. We

¹⁴ CURA DMC II has three consultative mechanisms: annual partners' meeting, community round table and annual scientific meeting. The research group has defined its governance structure as follows: a steering committee comprising three individuals: Élisabeth Kaine (the project general manager, who self-identifies as Aboriginal), Denis Bellemare and Pierre De Coninck. In the interest of efficiency and accountability, this governance model gives the project general manager full authority with regard to decision-making, financial management and budgetary follow-up.

¹⁵ The research activities of the different CURA DMC II teams fall into one of five Aspects, each of which is led by one of the five co-researchers: 1. Consultation; 2. Education; 3. Innovative Design Product Development; 4. Transmission Product Development; 5. Participation Method Evaluation. In the program description, the Consultation and Evaluation Aspects were designated as transversal themes. Since the start of CURA DMC II, the Evaluation Aspect has been supervised by Dominic Bizot, a university co-researcher.

¹⁶ During this meeting, Dominic proposed adopting the term "Aboriginal co-researchers" to designate "Aboriginal partners" for the purpose of further underscoring their significant contribution to the research. Following this intervention, "CURA university co-researchers" will use the acronyms UCR and ACR to designate university or Aboriginal co-researchers. The Aboriginal partners do not appear to refer to themselves in this manner in their relation with CURA. It is for this reason we decided not to use the term either. Co-researcher and university co-researcher are used herein to refer to senior CURA researchers.

¹⁷ It should be noted that up until that point, CURA members had granted Shan dak the role and status of Aboriginal community partner representing the community of Uashat mak Mani-Utenam, rather than that of co-researcher, despite her research experience and training.

soon formed a team comprising Dominic Bizot, Claudia Maltais Thériault (who recently joined him as research assistant), and Shan dak Puana and Louise Lachapelle, co-researchers jointly responsible for Mamu minu-tutamutau. As our team was being formed, the general objective of the evaluation activities we had accepted to guide according to an approach adapted to and respectful of First Nations consisted of preparing and realizing two onsite evaluation work sessions on Aboriginal territory: one in the Innu community of Uashat mak Mani-Utenam, and the other, which was held in two locations (one in the Atikamekw community of Wemotaci, and the other in La Tuque).¹⁸ These two Aboriginal communities were involved in projects identified by CURA for the purposes of this process. In the Innu community of Ushat mak Mani-Utenam, the target project was *Des traces chez TRASS*, a pilot activity under the Education Aspect held in 2012 and directed by Diane Laurier.¹⁹ In the Atikamekw community, there were two target projects, both under the Innovative Product Development Aspect: the *Innovation and Design Workshops* in 2011 and the *Tapiskwan Workshops* in 2013, both directed by Anne Marchand.²⁰ The planning for and duration of the two onsite evaluation work sessions in Aboriginal territory remain to be determined with the actors involved.

Partnership and research collaboration

The start of the joint actions by Dominic, Claudia, Shan dak and Louise coincided with the start of the negotiations and ongoing evaluation of their collaboration conditions, as well as the implementation of their collaborative ethics. As soon as our team was formed, it began developing an evolving collaboration agreement. This is the process we adopted in order to act and think collectively. The first expression of our joint research work is thus the collaboration agreement.

¹⁸ Uashat mak Mani-Utenam is Aboriginal territory with a population of 3250 near the city of Sept-Îles in Quebec's Côte-Nord region (AANDC, 2012). Its political representatives are the Innu Takuaihan Uashat mak Mani-Utenam (ITUM) band council, a CURA partner. The Atikamekw nation council (Conseil de Nation Atikamekw or CNA), another CURA partner, is located in the city of La Tuque in the Mauricie region. The CNA represents over 7000 Atikamekw.

¹⁹ Developed in two schools in Uashat mak Mani-Utenam, *Des traces chez TRASS* [traces of TRASS] consists of laying the foundation of a creative intergenerational teaching program aimed at increasing the well-being of elementary and high school students through artistic expression. The project synthesis was prepared after reading the documents by Diane Laurier and her collaborators (from Laurier, 2012a; 2012b; Laurier, Robertson and Bouchard, 2013)

²⁰ The *Ateliers Innovations et design* [innovation and design workshops] were proposed to different artists and craftspeople from the three Atikamekw communities (Opitciwan, Manawan and Wemotaci). The purpose of these workshops was the creation of innovative and revitalized products reflecting Aboriginal identity for the tourist market. The *Ateliers Tapiskwan* [Tapiskwan workshops] consisted of a series of activities aimed at creating contemporary products by pairing an experienced craftsperson with young Atikamekw apprentices (from Marchand, 2013a; 2013b; 2014).

The collaborative approach favoured by our team also entails that we seek to carry out evaluation actions through close collaboration with all co-researchers, as well as the partners and representatives of the Aboriginal communities involved. From this perspective, our team began its activities thinking that the collaboration agreement under development could serve as a tool supporting collaborative dialogue for all of these actors, even if they are not necessarily involved to the same extent in its actual development. Yet rather than having an agreement binding our entire team to CURA, a research partnership contract between Mamu minututamutau and CURA managers formalized the participation of the Mamu minututamutau co-leads to CURA evaluation work.²¹ After reviewing a preliminary version of the collaboration agreement, CURA managers believed that it only applied to the internal processes of our team—and not the collaboration between our team and the group of CURA co-researchers—and that our work constituted, from their point of view, a research *mandate* that was a contractual obligation to be entered into by both parties.

The development of the collaboration agreement was conducted in parallel with our team's research actions and critical and reflexive processes throughout the period we carried out our shared activities. However, upon request by CURA managers, we had to isolate those elements of the agreement suitable to a contractual definition of our partnership with CURA, namely logistic and financial commitment information. Made several months after our activities began, this request left us stunned. Establishing this distinction (agreement/contract) was the opportunity to gain greater understanding of the interconnective limits between our process and that of CURA. It contributed to exposing the separation between what could be described schematically as the almost non-existent hierarchization of our team's internal collaborative operations and the team's external operations, comprising mainly contractual and hierarchized relations with CURA management, which itself had to cope with the occasional tension common to any team of researchers. Note that referring to the team as the CURA *mandatory* rather than as its *partner*—even though the research partnership was equally funded by both Mamu minututamutau and CURA, for instance—seems to reflect the significant differences that would characterize our respective vision of our collaboration, our expectations about the partnership and, ultimately, the manner in which we implemented balanced and mutually responsible collaborative ethics.

A partnership contract generally clarifies expectations and obligations about the logistical framework for deadlines and financial commitments, among other things. We observed that while this type of agreement may result in broadly defined orientations, it encourages neither interpersonal involvement nor more detailed collective discussions, such as those we sought to establish with the actors

²¹ For this contract, the CURA director appoints the head of the Evaluation Aspect as CURA respondent for this mandate, a role consisting mainly to conduct regular follow-ups with the CURA team director as required.

concerned, including researchers, program directors and Aboriginal community partners. In the end, the following were never presented nor discussed with all CURA co-researchers: our team's original wish to develop a collaboration agreement involving not only the co-leads of Mamu minu-tutamutau but all of the CURA actors concerned by our evaluation work, the evolving collaboration agreement developed by our team and the partnership contract finally established with the program directors.

Note that the contract itself was examined and signed near the end of our team's work, which was supposed to last six months, but required more than fifteen.

Evaluation objective and research activities

In order to provide a complete account of our field experience story, it must be stated that as soon as our team was formed and the collaborative evaluation work started, we were faced with a fundamental difficulty associated with what we perceived to be an elusive objective: the evaluation of this research program. We wrestled with the following questions: what are the evaluation process objectives for this CURA, what must be evaluated and for which goal(s)? While these questions were completely normal in this context, they proved to be a source of persistent difficulties that lasted until the final activity report was submitted. The difficulties themselves mainly arose in the communications among team members and between senior management and CURA co-researchers.

What does evaluate mean? Evaluate what, how? For whom and with whom? Why and for what purpose? These are the questions to which we would have liked to find answers, even if only preliminary answers, before undertaking our activities. Obviously, this does not take into account the reality in the field. In addition to the circumstances specific to this field research, it should be noted that the already complex research evaluation issues tend to multiply when the perspective of a university/community partnership is factored in, especially in an Aboriginal context. We were mobilized at every step by these issues in relation to the evaluation as we sought to clarify them and more clearly identify our role and situate our critical stance, be it prior to the collaborative evaluation activities carried out in Aboriginal territory, during our field experience or our critical review of these activities.

The team also felt the need to position its work in relation with the specific history of the definition of the evaluation for this CURA. This is the reason we chose to concentrate our research activities in part on what we named the "archeology of the evaluation," which is summarized below. It must be stated that the CURA had not succeeded, even by the completion of our work, to conciliate the diverse objects of the evaluation of the university and community partners involved. In the context of our field experience, it seemed that it was perhaps not the objectives and objects of the research evaluation that tended to ultimately elude

us, but rather the non-conciliated expectations of the actors participating in this research, their different and divergent needs they expressed explicitly to varying degrees regarding the evaluation, as well as a research partnership in which they have collaborated with one another for several years. From this perspective, we feel this story to be representative of the current state of the research relationship between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals, as well as of the problematic structures and systemic barriers²² that university/community research funding programs like CURA sustain by reproducing them, despite some of their stated objectives (Lachapelle and Puana, 2012; Abma and Widdershoven, 2011; and Vodden and Banister, 2008).

Summary of the Archeology of the Evaluation

Among the intentions that emerged from the initial description of this research about the program evaluation was the desire to develop an evaluation model to better meet the needs and expectations of the Aboriginal partners and university researchers and respect the "good practices" of research in Aboriginal contexts. The evaluation of participative methods is presented herein as one of the five Aspects of the program.

In his earliest work on the evaluation, the co-researcher responsible for the Evaluation Aspect, who was at his first experience conducting research in an Aboriginal context, underscored the importance of implementing an ongoing evaluation process that is participative and better integrated into achieving program action projects. He would, however, be faced with the challenge of implementing the transversality of the Evaluation Aspect to support the work of the other co-researchers and promote ongoing evaluative practices more deeply integrated into the different stages of research and the action projects of each Aspect. This challenge seemed predominantly to be a product of the structure and tendency to work in "silos" (in terms of discipline, project autonomy and limited collaboration among researchers on their individual projects or those few co-operatively designed or realized),²³ as well as the scantily defined link between the Evaluation Aspect and the other transversal theme: the Consultation Aspect.

²² Systemic barriers arise from the laws, social rules, policies and cultural practices, including research, that lead to inequality, exclusion and discrimination towards First Nation individuals. For example, under the *Indian Act* (1867), Status Indians are still considered minors under the care of the Canadian government. Being wards of the state denies thousands of people the rights and responsibilities associated with citizenship.

²³ For example, the head of the Innovative Design Product Development Aspect informed us that an evaluation had been conducted by his team throughout the eight week period of workshops in 2011 and that a visit had been carried out among participants a few months after the activities were held. Although the analysis of the data gathered has not been completed, the main findings served to improve and structure the continuity of the project with the partners. Note that we only received this information at the end of the evaluation process and that neither Dominic nor the team we formed had access to these evaluation data.

Dominic also observed the need to gain a better understanding of what constitutes an evaluation process in an Aboriginal context. By drawing on his own experience and expertise, he completed the first phase of the evaluation activities, which tended to conform to Western academic practices and models, standard methodology of qualitative research and the scientificity criteria of the humanities in an allophone environment (literature review, semi-directed individual and collective interviews with certain Aboriginal partners, co-researchers and research professionals; validation of interview transcripts; and preliminary codification, analyses and restitution). To our knowledge, the larger part of the first phase of the evaluation process was neither analyzed nor exploited by the co-researchers or CURA's community partners.

Keep in mind that the research partnership and our team's work began at the very moment the object and conditions of the evaluation activities set out in the program were once more redirected, this time upon the initiative of the Aboriginal partners and representatives. The co-researchers and partners attending this consultation meeting agreed they would avoid a general type of evaluation for the program, but rather retain two transversal themes as objects of the evaluation. They proposed that these themes be considered based on a few targeted activities.

Although this new orientation of the evaluation process maintains the objective of assessing empowerment,²⁴ the process itself now focuses more on the evaluation of the research collaboration between university and Aboriginal contexts, a change made in response to the interest expressed by Aboriginal partners. In the midst of this change, the university co-researchers agreed to realize the next evaluation activities on Aboriginal territory, in the Aboriginal communities participating in the projects designated for the evaluation objective. It must be noted that the research program is nearly over, and most of the projects have already been realized. This is the case for the activities associated with the targeted projects, some of which were completed two years earlier.

The observations we have made during the archeology of the evaluation based on the information at our disposal are indicative of changes reflecting a shift in evaluation approach, objectives and methodology, which, to us, reveals the absence of a concerted vision of program evaluation and goals. Overall, we feel that some of these changes also speak to the integration of the evaluation, consented to or actualized to a degree during the different research phases and activities, despite initial intentions and planning or the accountability obligations in academic environments regarding responsible research conduct.²⁵ In this context, the request

²⁴ Over the course of our work, the team questioned the relevance of this reference to empowerment and the fact it was not situated from a cultural perspective: is it appropriate from the perspective of Aboriginal community partners? Does it reveal a power imbalance (Cavino, 2013)? Can a link be established with the theoretical framework of healing from an Aboriginal perspective?

²⁵ For research made possible with CURA funding, senior management must submit the following, among other things, to the SSHRC: the CURA follow-up and evaluation plan (describing the

submitted during the evaluation process to CURA, mainly by the Aboriginal partners, about the collaboration between university and Aboriginal contexts strikes us as even more significant.

Collaborative Ethics and Research Evaluation in Aboriginal contexts—Our Field Experience

Within the scope of its work, our team implemented "the paradigm shift" initiated by the intervention of certain Aboriginal partners about the purpose of the evaluation, as well as the evaluation activities and methodology of research guided by an intercultural perspective on the decolonization of research and the socially responsible relational practices we are striving to achieve.²⁶ We had thus hoped to foster a performative approach of the evaluation.²⁷ Characterized by their experiential and evolutionary nature, these research and collaborative evaluation actions took the form of an experiment in the field that was linked to both the development of the collaboration agreement and the realization of collective evaluative assessments in Aboriginal territory.

Collaborative ethics—Experimentation of a collaboration agreement

The ongoing development of a collaboration agreement has sustained our team. A collaboration agreement generally implies a concerted and shared definition of the purpose of the collaboration and its objectives in the specific context of a research partnership. As a negotiation tool for collaborative ethics, a collaboration agreement constitutes a pragmatic strategy: it proposes a creative, performative and iterative process that provides a team with a common space in which to reflect and take action throughout the realization of its work. We have done more than simply produce a reference document—we have appropriated the collaboration agreement as a governance tool for our team. Moreover, we modified this description of the terms of our collaboration to adapt it to the reality in the field so that the terms could also support the planning and realization of our approach by reflecting on our actions and processes. As the core tool for the

changes made to performance indicators; the manner in which performance data are measured, controlled and reported; the evaluation activities that were conducted; CURA performance and progress using the follow-up and evaluation plan included in the progress report; how performance and evaluation data were used by the CURA management structure (decision-making, improvements and modifications made to CURA, etc.). For more on accountability, see also the *Tri-Agency Framework: Responsible Conduct of Research* (2016).

²⁶ "Interactive evaluation is relational and socially responsible...in that the evaluator engages in the practice and stimulates the participants to be active and responsible themselves for the quality of their interactions, communication, and relations." (Abma and Widdershoven, 2011).

²⁷ In reference to the linguistic concept of performativity developed by Austin in his book *How to Do Things With Words* (1962), a performative process implies that "the collaborators jointly define, and individually and collectively implement, in words and actions" the collaborative ethics and collaboration conditions they have agreed upon for the purposes of the evaluation (Lachapelle and Puana, 2015).

implementation of our collaborative ethics, the agreement allowed each team member to pursue more in-depth reflection of the many themes associated with the evaluation process in general or research with Aboriginal peoples. It enabled us to discuss and define our shared critical and political stance, as well as the values that determined and guided our actions.

Using the collaboration agreement first led us to develop our own terms of reference for our actions by clarifying terminology or by explicitly defining the goals sought and strategies preferred. Discussions about the collaboration agreement enabled us to ask the fundamental questions pertaining to our roles and objectives, the formation of the team and the reason for its existence, as well as determine the conditions favourable to our collaboration. These include conditions for facilitating communications, establishing timetables or identifying the concerns about mentorship and the support provided, for example, by the members more familiar with research in Aboriginal contexts or with evaluations. We also hoped to create situations conducive to mutual training, be it for knowledge or skill sharing, workplace rotation²⁸ or forms of creativity and transdisciplinarity indispensable to collaborative research in Aboriginal contexts.

These ongoing negotiations, as well as every decision having an impact on our work, were guided by a desire to seek consensus. All decisions reached by consensus were made in the spirit of reciprocal responsibility and accountability among team members and their collaborators. This contributed to "slowing" certain processes down, considering the frequency and duration of the communications needed in decision-making. However, it facilitated the sharing of information among ourselves, encouraged mutual learning and participation in each stage of the project, and allowed our work to progress more effectively. Creating a common language about the evaluation and our collaboration conditions and adopting a shared stance about our role in the research process facilitated communication among team members during partner and co-researcher meetings to plan the sessions in Aboriginal territory. We feel that our reflections on operating by consensus proved invaluable for onsite session planning in that they enabled the team to be more mindful of its role and stance, not to mention respond more rapidly and cohesively to unexpected challenges and new proposals being raised on the field.

Even before an elaborate vision of this collaboration agreement is established, the collaborative ethics favoured by the team led us to adopt a collective governance model. In addition to accepting the responsibilities of researchers initially associated with the CURA evaluation, the team members collectively assumed most of the responsibilities directly related to their evaluation

²⁸As the team members live in three different regions in Quebec, located from 500 km to over 1000 km from one another, we have had to use means to work collectively at a distance. We also sought to hold our work meetings in person, alternating among the regions, as much as was feasible.

activities. This occasionally caused confusion among—and perhaps a little frustration for—some of the co-researchers. In an academic environment, it is generally recognized that a "lead researcher" directs the activities of *his or her* team. Instead, we chose to share all roles and responsibilities among ourselves. The experience, skills or standing of our team members within CURA or in the partner Aboriginal communities could have served to determine, or at least help define, the formal roles and responsibilities each played in the project. With respect to the diversity within the team and in the interest of maintaining equality and equity, we instead attempted to give a more fluid definition to our roles and responsibilities, a rotation of stances more favourable to the exercising of circumstantial leadership and the circularity of knowledge.

Communication between our team and the group of CURA co-researchers was primarily ensured by Dominic acting as team spokesman. We thus hoped to integrate into the operating structure that seemed to have already been established within the CURA group, as we believed that researchers were already involved in regular meetings and exchanges, so favourable to ongoing feedback. In practice, however, this was not the case. Moreover, by agreeing to thus share *his* powers and responsibilities with the other team members, Dominic was led to question certain aspects of his role and the functions that existed up until that point among the co-researchers of this CURA. His stance toward his peers, in particular the co-researchers responsible for other aspects of the program, was being transformed. He went from being the only Evaluation Aspect co-researcher, as such responsible for and holding decision-making authority inherent to his work, to "suddenly" becoming the spokesman for an "external" team whose consensus-based decisions were made through the regular sharing of information and constant feedback from all team members. Some of the communication conditions we preferred using with the CURA co-researcher group thereby became insufficient to establish the links necessary between our evaluation activities and the rest of the program. Over the following months, we observed that in spite of certain consultative mechanisms between partners and co-researcher meetings, neither the definition nor the implementation of this program truly succeeded in laying the relational foundation for collaborative operations with the capacity to transform a group of individuals working in silos to a community of practice. Our chosen method of communication was perhaps not ideal, as it seemed to have contributed to crystalizing certain tensions associated, in an academic context, to an internal evaluation process and peer review.

In the context of collaborative ethics and the evaluation process that was the subject of our team's experiment, the iterative development of this agreement in a diversity of forms (written, discursive or performative) has become as much a tool and a research object, as a process and research findings. As the material and conceptual development of the collaboration agreement progressed, it served to document the key stages in our collaborative process, as well as the crises and conflicts that arose and consolidated the process itself. In addition, this development

served to establish circumstantial definitions for collaborative ethics incarnated and active in academic and Aboriginal contexts. Note that developing a collaboration agreement in this context permitted us to acquire our own process for (self-) evaluating the conditions of our collaborative ethics.

Collaborative evaluation—Trial of an evaluative assessment

It seemed the term "evaluative assessment" could be more appropriate to designate an evaluation approach striving to be modest, open, and as relevant and connected to the reality of field experience in an Aboriginal context as possible. We preferred to say evaluative assessment rather than evaluation to underscore the importance of a reflexive and critical review of the process and collaborative actions from the perspective of the concerns of our partners, their motivation for becoming involved in the research, and the specific contexts in which the continuity and perennality of their involvement. This term would also allow us to position our approach by keeping a certain distance from the more academic conceptions of the evaluation, as well as the strategies and methods more closely associated with institutional research evaluation objectives. By adopting such a stance, we wished to overtly favour the point of view, initiatives and needs of our Aboriginal community partners in the scope of this process, confident that this approach could serve CURA objectives equally well since, at least in principle, partners in a university/community alliance share a common vision of the research in which they are both involved.

The team asked that the community partners and researchers involved in the targeted projects continue to use the evaluation by picturing the evaluative assessment as being directly linked to their common and respective analyses, objectives and actions, as well as by participating in the planning and hosting of these work sessions on Aboriginal territory. Although the proposal was addressed to both researchers and Aboriginal community partners, we attempted, as much as possible, to step away from the "social system of reference and control" of Western research environments, institutions and culture (Wiesmann *et al.*, 2008). In the interest of disclosure, we wanted to create conditions wherein the research objectives of Aboriginal partners and community representatives are acknowledged; these objectives are often related to the self-determination and development of Aboriginal communities. We therefore expressly asked our Aboriginal partners to lead the onsite evaluation work sessions on Aboriginal territory in order to produce an evaluative assessment relevant to them. We also suggested they play a leadership role in these research activities to the extent of their availability and desired degree of involvement. We felt this approach was coherent from an ethical and collaborative evaluation perspective and, as such, would be more likely to allow different voices to be heard, generate new knowledge and enhance the value of existing knowledge.

During the first exchanges among the team, researchers and Aboriginal partners, evaluation activity planning was guided by a few general questions: What

are your accountability needs? What are your evaluation needs? What are your restitution and diffusion needs, both in your communities or elsewhere? What is your vision for the continuity of your actions? It was agreed during these exchanges that the onsite sessions would last for five consecutive days at each site.²⁹ Logistic and financial considerations were some of the factors influencing this decision. Beyond this discussion and the planning activities, a part of which was assumed by the host partner communities, most evaluation activities and meetings were defined and held in person on Aboriginal territory at the initiative of the main Aboriginal community organizations. The researchers involved in the targeted projects occasionally attended these meetings.

The onsite evaluation work session in the community of Uashat mak Mani-utenam was the first phase of more collaborative work for our team. It is important to note that this onsite session was also the first field experience in an Aboriginal context for both Dominic and Claudia, respectively the researcher serving as head of the CURA Evaluation Aspect and a research assistant and researcher-in-training. In addition to the other team members, Louise and Shan dak, who were co-leads of Mamu minu-tutamutau, we were assisted by Mendy Bossum-Launière, who was responsible for the audiovisual documentation. This onsite session led to the creation of an evaluative assessment associated with the targeted project *Des Traces chez TRASS* (DTCT). We met numerous actors, including those most heavily involved in the planning and realization of the DTCT workshops. The researcher responsible for this project under the Education Aspect of the program attended the meeting by telephone. We also met Manikanetish High School students who had agreed to speak to us.

Once on site, the Aboriginal community partners requested that the evaluative assessment on the CURA collaboration be an opportunity to review the *Papami-mitimeu Papami-mitimetau*³⁰ public consultation, a process linked to a cultural project led by Shan dak, then cultural agent mandated by ITUM. At the time, she had sought the support of a CURA director to validate her approach. Several councillors of the new ITUM government, some of whom were cultural bearers in the community, as well as those involved with the Shaputuan Museum, wanted to take part in the evaluative assessment discussion, which proved to be fruitful. The review was the first step for the community to renew its efforts to develop its own cultural policy.

The onsite evaluation work session in La Tuque and Wemotaci led to the creation of an evaluative assessment of the collaboration with CURA that, at the

²⁹ Joint planning for these sessions was mainly done by conference calls and e-mails to determine how to carry out the evaluation process.

³⁰ *Papami-mitimeu Papami-mitimetau* means "he follows a path, a trail" in Innu-Aimun (Puana, 2012).

request of the Aboriginal community partners, would serve towards relaunching the Coopérative des arts Nehirowisiw (Nehirowisiw Arts Co-operative, or Co-op) by the Atikamekw Nation Council (CNA). The Atikamekw partners seized the opportunity presented by the evaluation process to pursue the reflections they had planned, mainly with artisans, about the consolidation of the Co-op project. The many meetings and exchanges held during this onsite session converged on a day of work in which a number of key community actors took part, including those involved since the founding of the Co-op. The development of this evaluative assessment contributed to stimulating critical reflection of the benefits and drawbacks this research would have on the initial community objectives, as well as supporting a process aimed at striking a Co-op relaunch committee and preparing a short- and middle-term action plan for consolidating this community project.

As with any field experience, the onsite evaluation work session in La Tuque and Wemotaci had its share of surprises for both the team and our host partners. The CNA had to cope with the very low participation of artisans with experience in design workshops, the projects targeted by CURA for this evaluation process. These actors would also be, potentially, the ones most directly affected by the viability of the Co-operative project. The team had to readjust its dynamic, given that it was in the territory of an Aboriginal nation whose culture was less familiar to us. We also had to deal with the unexpected absence of Dominic, who had to remain in Chicoutimi for health reasons, as well as changes that occurred during the week about the availability of Anne Marchand,³¹ who, ultimately, was only able to attend the meetings on the last day.³² Moreover, the person responsible for documenting the onsite session in Uashat mak Mani-utenam was unable to rejoin the team at that location.

Overall, the community partners used the evaluative assessment process to review and initiate a dialogue on the nature and relevance of the benefits of their involvement and investment in this research partnership. In addition to the project participants, namely those who are usually the first or only individuals solicited to evaluate research actions, the partners also convinced a number of representatives from their communities to become involved in this process, including several members recognized for their commitment, expertise and role as cultural bearers, as well as members of the band council or other local Aboriginal organizations. They discussed their own objectives about community development, research participation and the collective desire to pursue and ensure the perennality of their actions. The possibility of undertaking other research actions was occasionally raised.

As was to be expected, the manner in which each of the CURA actors concerned was involved in the collaborative evaluation process we proposed revealed

³¹ Anne Marchand is the the head of the Innovative Design Product Development Aspect, which is the aspect to which this project was associated.

³² However, a research assistant had been delegated to attend the entire session.

that the researchers and partners representing the Aboriginal communities had different needs and objectives with regard to not only their research partnership and everything defining it, but also the evaluation of their respective and shared actions carried out in the scope of this research. However, we did not anticipate some of the manners in which they expressed their culturally different relations in the evaluation. It is these differences in their relation with the evaluation that we will now address to complete this recounting of our field experience. We identified some elements that seemed to distinguish academic and Aboriginal cultures in this area.

Evaluation in Research

Western scientific tradition, influenced by models specific to quantitative and hard science research, focuses on the objectivity of the evaluation; the critical distance required to be maintained by the evaluator; the subject/object relationship; and the concordance between the objectives and findings measured—*a posteriori* and at a certain distance from the processes—by the researchers themselves or by peers considered external experts (a point of view hard to reconcile with perceptions maintained outside research environments, where these "external experts" appear nonetheless to belong to the same environment or culture, in other words, to the system that shares the same values and interests). Yet objectivity, critical distance and non-involvement may clash with relational ethics that fosters engagement, generosity and reciprocity, as well as disrespect customary protocols based on different rhythm, expertise, authority and knowledge systems. We observed different stances during our field experience, which sometimes seemed to differentiate culturally marked evaluation relations between the researchers and Aboriginal partners. The criteria and indicators retained by academic environments and funding agencies with regard to a pertinence or scientificity coefficient conforming to their own values leads to the types of evaluations and academic sanctions commonly practised in research that, in turn, reinforces a hierarchy and socioeconomic system that controls and reproduces knowledge production modes from which they benefit.

For more than forty years, the field of qualitative research has tended to modify this dominant research paradigm (Abma and Widdershoven, 2011; Creswell, 2011) in an attempt to establish academic value of its own research methodology and disciplines, but also validate knowledge produced by emerging practices that are pushing back disciplinary boundaries, even those of scientificity. By favouring interactive, holistic and dialogic approaches, some qualitative research practices have succeeded in creating more inclusive and safer conditions for the purpose of permitting marginalized voices to be heard. Such changes, which are transforming epistemological stances and diversifying evaluation stances, also contribute to the propagation of a plurality (rather than a rivalry) of truths and an equal number of interpretive communities.

In spite of some significant transformation in this area, research evaluation still tends to first respond to the strategic needs, interests and demands of research

environments: these could be accountability requirements for scientific or institutional objectives associated with research or program objectives or other policies governing the conduct of research for granting agencies, or aimed at securing new funding for future research; the desire to acquire scientific legitimization tools, confirm the effectiveness of strategies, increase one's influence over decision-makers or one's authority over one's peers; or the desire to perpetuate one's actions, methodology or heritage. Under systemically imbalanced conditions, it is not true that every collaborative research partner will benefit from the research evaluation to the same degree (Cavino, 2013).

In research ethics, researchers are increasingly recognizing the importance of ongoing and participatory evaluation and, for research conducted in Aboriginal contexts in Canada, they are now required to have the community concerned agree to participate prior to starting any such research (Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador, 2014; CRSH, CRSNG and IRSC, 2014). Our own observations, based on our involvement in a variety of research contexts,³³ including the experience described herein, leads us to think that the implementation of these more interactive approaches, such as ongoing evaluation, is currently limited and restricted to certain aspects or stages, rather than being applied to the entire research process.

Academic culture, with its strong emphasis on critical thinking, is also characterized, like all cultures, by its own "blind spots." We cannot underestimate the number of researchers and scientific institutions frustrated by self-regulation and peer-reviewed rules or processes imposed "on individuals and groups whose goal is to advance knowledge, thus the good of humanity." (Lachapelle and Puana, 2012; Doucet, 2010). Scientific tradition rarely leads researchers to examine or disclose the personal motivations or problematics that influence their relation with research and steer them toward their choice of study objects. It may seem "sufficient" to legitimately invoke either personal or professional "good intentions" and assimilate these to scientific or humanitarian ideology (Smith, 1999) to avoid certain form of reflexivity and (self-) evaluation, to seek and find shelter in *the* (Aboriginal) cause.

Collaborative ethics and evaluation: Negotiating the passage from intent to practice

The situations, experiences, values and practices of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal partners undertaking a collaborative effort may be extremely diversified. Should they decide to start working on a collaborative research project together, in other words, even if they choose to start *Doing* research *together*, the

³³ We are referring here to our experience in action research, partnership research, research ethic committees, institutional development research, academic and community research training, in Aboriginal contexts, etc.

motivations and intentions of the research partners—whether from a university or community, Aboriginal or not—are often much different (see Figure I: *Doing what?*).³⁴ This is even truer for cultural diversity research (in the general sense) in Aboriginal contexts. As such, these differences mean the definition of *Doing*, which is the definition of the purpose of the research collaboration—and this includes, though is not limited to, the specific object of the research or the scientific goals—may vary widely, depending on the point of view of the Aboriginal organizations, communities or representatives, or of the researchers or academic institutions. Different collaborators will not answer the question of *Doing what?* in research in the same manner, nor will their capacity (with the double meaning of ability and effective possibility) to answer this question be identical. Therefore, their commitment in a context of collaborative research will not be based on the same intentions, will not meet the same needs and will not be defined exactly in terms of the same goals (university and community).

We could consider that these statements underscore a fact obvious today to all actors involved in collaborative research in an Aboriginal context. In practice, collaborators rarely measure these fundamental differences when it comes to establishing the conditions of their research partnership, thus neglecting to identify the manner in which these conditions will affect their specific situational and relational context. Throughout the collaboration, the collaborators have to positively manage this diversity and the impacts arising therefrom, namely the risks associated with communication problems (the partners do not necessarily share the same values or language, or do not have a jointly defined theoretical framework), power struggles, conflicts and disengagements.

The definition of *Doing* that generally prevails—the one that determines, even today, research actions—usually reflects the point of view and concerns of the researchers or research environments. That being said, research in Aboriginal contexts must not allow the imbalance of power that has existed for far too long in research relationships to recur. If, in a collaborative context, the different collaborators are indeed responsible for rebalancing this relationship, we feel that the onus is on the researchers to ensure the priorities and questions of all the collaborators are clearly communicated and taken into consideration so that a mutually satisfactory and inclusive definition of *Doing* and *Doing together* is negotiated, collectively developed and shared (see Figure II: What is *Doing together?*). It is under these conditions that this collaboration is revealed, through an ongoing evaluation, as the expression of *Doing well together* that extends to the entire collaborative process, as well as to the relations, processes and findings (Figure III: What is *Doing well together?*).

³⁴ The next three figures are the synthetic diagrams taken from an online tool called Kapatakana/Portage Trails (Lachapelle and Puana, 2015).

A collaborative research vision implies inclusivity that emerges through the recognition and consideration of existing elements of convergence and divergence between partners, that is, without limiting oneself to invoking scientific objectives or the "greater interests of science." In its performative aspect, collaborative ethics often reconfigure the "traditional sequence leading from scientific findings to action" in order to "enable the refining of [a] problem definition, as well as the joint commitment in solving or mitigating problems" [translation] (Wiesmann et al., 2008).

Creating conditions favourable to the emergence of this common definition of the object and objectives of collaborative research entails the challenge of double conciliation. First, the conciliation of the multiple interpretations of *Doing* and *Doing together* to increase the relevance of the research actions and collaborative approaches from the perspective of each research partnership actor, and second, the conciliation of the values and ethical spaces to attain a positive evaluation—*Doing well together*—of these collaborative actions from the perspective of the actors concerned. This process takes into consideration the manner in which the research addresses the respective mandates of the organizations and partners, as well as the responsibilities linked to the status and functions of the collaborators who accepted to take part in the research. It also makes it possible to consider the factors influencing this collaborative relationship, though less explicitly on occasion, such as the professional and personal motivations of those involved in the research project; or the intentions, needs and expectations of the individuals or groups concerned, as well as their visions and dreams. This constitutes an understanding of collaborative ethics that leads to harmonious and complementary co-existence between people, communities, knowledge and ecosystems.

The collaboration agreement, an evaluation tool

The continuation of the story of our field experience will now be based upon three figures drawn from *Kapatakana/Portage Trails*, a tool aimed at explicitly describing the elements to be considered in all collaborative ethic negotiations and communications, as well as in the development and implementation of a collaboration research agreement.

The evaluation means doing what? As each research action was being completed, we observed that the different understanding of the evaluation seemed to result in the actors involved to hold a range of expectations and attitudes, in addition to influencing the manner in which they participated in the evaluation activities. Moreover, it seemed uncertainty was growing among the researchers, who already doubted the CURA evaluation process even prior to our team being struck (for more information, see "archeology of the evaluation" below), a situation we undoubtedly fuelled on occasion, despite our best efforts, through lapses in our communications and follow-ups. That being said, this climate of uncertainty was a sharp contrast with how the Aboriginal partners responded to the evaluation. They proved active participants willing to accept an open proposal (e.g. a precisely

oriented proposal whose definition was left open) and co-operate in a critical reflection of this research partnership from a perspective that takes their own research and community development objectives into consideration.

We feel that these differences, viewed here from the perspective of their relation to the evaluation (we are cognizant that they are not limited to this aspect), cannot be entirely attributed to each partner's role, interests and responsibilities within the scope of this research. We have considered that they are certainly tributary to the specific evaluation history of this CURA and, more broadly, to the challenge posed by the development of ongoing evaluative practices that are actually assumed and integrated into every research phase. They also seemed to indicate that marked cultural representations of the evaluation were still firmly anchored in each partner's respective traditions, as throughout the history of research relations between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals.

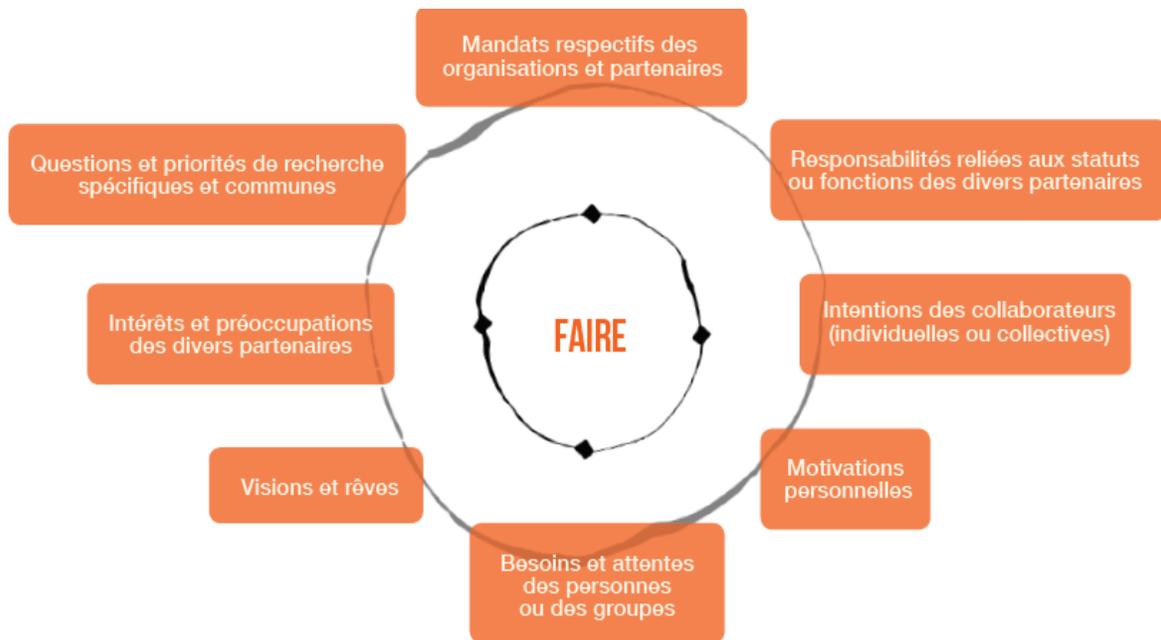


Figure 1. *Doing what?*

Conciliate the diversity of the objectives of different partners and agree on the object and goals of the collaboration.

When a common agreement pertaining to the objectives of the evaluation is missing, an evaluation process may be experienced as potential personal criticism or perceived as discourse that is or ought to be authoritative. As mentioned at the beginning of this article, neither the other CURA co-researchers nor the Aboriginal community partners were directly involved when the collaboration agreement was developed by our team, though it did guide the actions of our team in our relationships with these actors during this collaborative evaluation process. We believe sustaining more meaningful dialogue with all the CURA co-researchers would have been

facilitated from the beginning had they participated in the development of the agreement or, at the very least, had had it explained to them more clearly. This would undoubtedly have contributed to creating more meaningful and secure conditions to address the issues and challenges of a research evaluation.

The evaluation means doing what together and how is it being done?

The changes made after our team was formed impacted not only on the evaluation process itself, but even the relational and operational dynamics that existed until then within CURA. It took us time to grasp how little was known about our team's objectives and role by CURA co-researchers since the beginning of our partnership; this included the researchers whose projects had been targeted by CURA for the evaluation. However, we are well aware of the necessity for things to be otherwise. The limits of such an agreement need be underscored when realized almost exclusively by a sub-group (our group, in fact) in relation to another sub-group (CURA co-researchers). Due to the poor sharing of information, the researchers felt we had no specific role other than the poorly defined one they considered potentially threatening, given the group dynamics and other power games, that the co-researcher responsible for the Evaluation Aspect had initially assumed. The partnership contract between CURA managers and Mamu minututamutau was also of limited use when it came to facilitating communications and sharing information, because it proved insufficient to explicitly state the proposed objectives and actions to CURA co-researchers, as well as the ethical principles guiding the planning and execution of our work.

We gradually became aware of some of these initial oversights throughout the course of our work. Once again, this confirmed the importance of establishing spaces and moments for discussing the object, conditions and forms of the collaboration from the outset. It is also during these discussions that communication, power management, decision-making processes, objectives, methodology, and the theoretical and political foundation of the collaborative ethics favoured are determined and renegotiated as needed. Discussions of this nature, addressing fundamental and concrete issues, were held with the Aboriginal community partners during the planning and activities done on Aboriginal territory. The researchers concerned by the project targeted by the evaluation were also involved in these discussions insofar as they participated in the planning or activities.

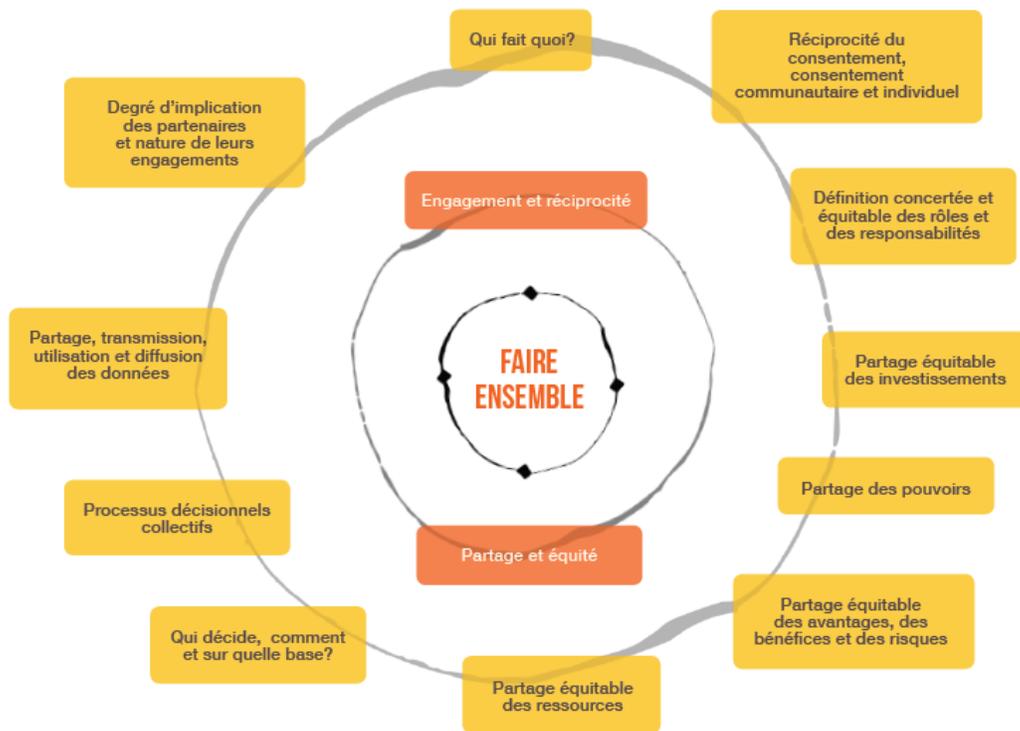


Figure 2. *What is doing together?*

Conciliate the many ways of doing (methodology, protocols and other cultural practices), as well as agree on a shared vision of the collaboration and the concrete ways of working together.

The field experience presented herein was undertaken with the framework of an action research program fostering participatory approaches. In a context such as this, the evaluation is sometimes associated or even confused for participatory validation practices or consultative mechanisms. These practices and mechanisms may in fact comprise some form of evaluation and testify to real (albeit limited) communication efforts during research. They are most often aimed at gathering participant feedback and validating the attainment of objectives according to considerations predetermined by the researchers in an exchange taking the form of the traditional (and rather univocal) question/answer academic dynamic, though with different variants.³⁵ However, when these validation or consensus-building

³⁵ For example, some practices place the evaluation at the end of a linear process to conclude the project or launch a new one. Alternately, it may be held during the project to afford the possibility of making changes or adjustments to the target objectives; suggest using a questionnaire or "specific evaluation grid whose criteria are drawn from the project" itself to serve as a framework for the evaluation; or recommend that the evaluator strive to "raise awareness, take a position and take action" and attempt "to make the person addressed reflect on his or her experience" (Kaine et al., 2016).

processes are carried out either prior to or following effective planning stages or apart from determining decision-making processes, they propose a participatory and evaluative method that remains to an extent strategic, or even strictly symbolic. This "only serves to consolidate existing roles and positions, while significantly reducing the potential for innovation" (White, 2011; Wiesmann et al., 2008 ;), as well as missing opportunities to rebalance the power that lies within, say, stimulating and involved collaborative and evaluative practices. Some forms of evaluation may certainly contribute to the strategic and consultative planning of research in collaborative contexts and Aboriginal contexts. However, a research evaluation process cannot be mistaken for, nor be reduced to, participatory or consultative methodological practices. Should this occur, there is a risk that the data gathered from participants serve for purposes other than that for which they were originally gathered or that the evaluation is postponed until the end of the research and limited to considerations predominantly associated with the *findings*. It is also possible that the findings, once obtained, are not actually assessed or that the evaluation itself does not take into consideration research relationships, processes and collaboration. It is also possible certain mechanisms said to be participatory are considered *the good practices of the day* or are assimilated to other forms of expertise, when in fact they may have the self-designated weight of authority or value that no other form of evaluation has attributed to them yet: "without investigating and questioning one's practices, theoretical framework, or choice of methodology, one risks creating work that relies solely on its own 'integrity' to justify its contributions to knowledge/culture/history/et cetera" (Chapman and Sawchuk, 2008). This methodological or ideological imprecision is insufficient for the purposes of a collaborative research evaluation or collaborative ethics. We feel there is a subversive critical charge with strong potential for innovation in implementing collaborative ethics and different forms of research evaluation, which, in many ways, constitute an "intervention into the 'regime of truth' of university-based research" (Chapman and Sawchuk, 2008).

The evaluation means doing what well together? According to whom? And according to which criteria? Over the course of our work, our team produced a report comprising four sections: one activity report for each of the two onsite evaluation work sessions in the two Aboriginal communities concerned, a third report on certain activities conducted with the CURA co-researchers, and a fourth report on the entire evaluation process with this CURA, including that carried out by our team. Each section of this report contains a description of the activities realized, as well as analytical elements presented in the form of working questions that have been grouped according to the issues and challenges raised by the evaluative assessment for the purpose of encouraging reflection and discussion among the partners. After the report was drafted, we undertook a process to validate the document prior to finalizing it and distributing it to the parties concerned, in keeping with our initial commitment. The description of the validation process allows us to provide a concrete example of the implementation of the major principles we included in our collaboration agreement about our collaborative

evaluation approach. Just like we wish to expressly listen, recognize, respect and validate the voices of the actors involved, we would like to ensure the evaluative assessments lead to the sharing of ideas, opinions and information in a culturally safe and respectful context. This, we believe, corresponds to a manner in which a diversity of voices, truths and interpretations may be celebrated. In other words, an approach that gives space to criticism, divergence of opinion and dissidence.

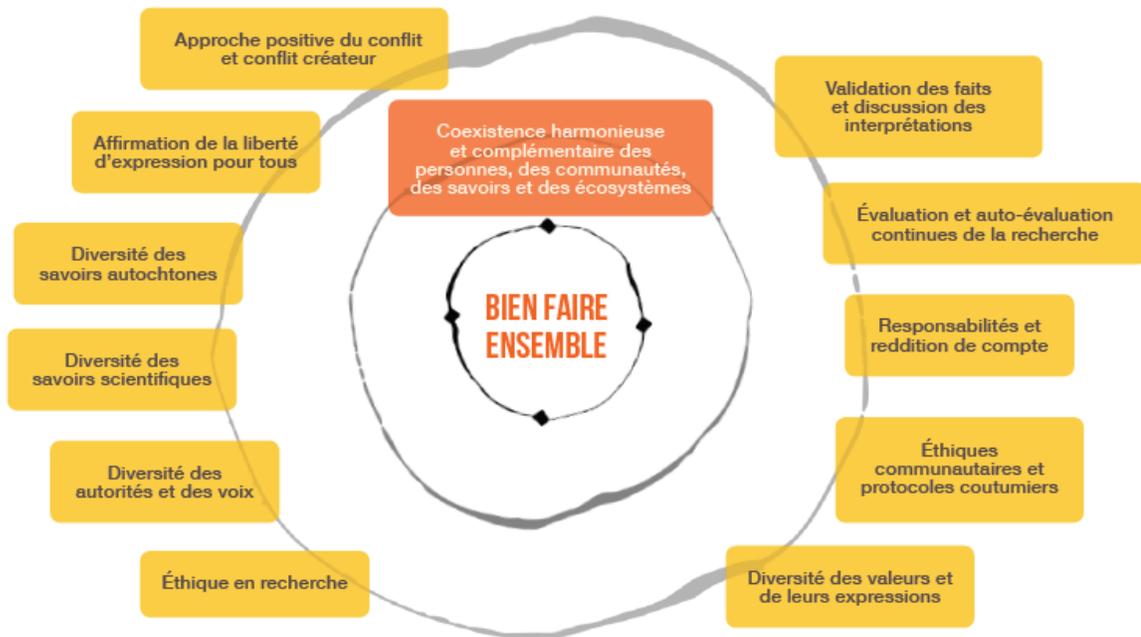


Figure 3. What is *Doing well together*? Conciliate ethical spaces; agree on collaborative conditions and goals, self-regulatory processes; and a manner in which to evaluate collaborative work that is acceptable to each actor.

We proposed a validation procedure to all university researchers and Aboriginal community partners involved in the planning and realization of the onsite evaluation work sessions.³⁶ It consisted of each reading the preliminary version of the sections of the report pertaining to them and submitting their comments to prepare a final document that would then be shared with all those concerned. We guided this reading process by suggesting each reader be mindful of the consistency of the names and status of meeting participants; correct factual errors and identify omissions; share his or her point of view of the interpretations, as well as any questions or comments he or she may have; and request clarifications and suggest modifications as required.

³⁶ In the interest of intellectual integrity, Dominic and Shan dak abstained from this validation process owing to their status as team members. They were, respectively, the co-researcher responsible for the Evaluation Aspect and the CURA community partner.

All the actors responded to the validation procedure in one manner or another, and the majority sent us their comments, which the team analyzed. Grammatical and factual corrections were made. We also added certain comments and modified the wording in places to make things clearer or add information. We synthesized the topics for which we had received comments, including several used as citations, in order to provide more space to the voices, questions or personal interpretations of the actors involved. Personal criticism was deliberately omitted when it proved impossible to identify a question or topic of general interest. We included this description of our comment analysis process to the report. The team sent the finalized document to each actor concerned. A formal recognition letter was sent to the Aboriginal partners to acknowledge their participation in the research activities.

One of the interesting points in this process—and not the least so—is that we were able to integrate herein an overview of the reaction of the different research partners to the final version of the activity report. The comments received from the Aboriginal community partners were brief, often shared orally and mainly consisted of a few language or factual corrections. They also confirmed that the reports reflected the remarks made while the evaluative assessments were conducted in Aboriginal territory. All but one of the university partners, including CURA senior managers, provided us with several pages of written comments. In addition to requests for corrections, clarifications or additional information, the comments from these partners occasionally expressed differing interpretations of some factual information and divergences of opinion or interpretation about the comments the report attributes to the Aboriginal partners or the team. Some of the researchers' comments seemed to be acts of self-justification, while others were critical of the process, distancing themselves from the *team's* actions and findings.

Overall, the actors responded to this validation process in a manner that seemed coherent with their regular communication methods. While some of the researchers questioned the utility of this report to them—it should be noted that none of those making such a remark had attended the onsite work sessions in person—the Aboriginal partners made no comment about this issue. The team does not have enough information to presume as to the utility of this report to these partners. However, it seems that, from the perspective of the Aboriginal partners, the realization of the community evaluative assessment was more immediately relevant than the restitution of the assessment in the form of a written document.³⁷ Their satisfaction was described in the activity report. Moreover, the interrogative format of certain parts of the report was influenced by one of the partners' request

³⁷ This was also revealed at one of our meetings during the Annual Partner Days in June 2014, which was an opportunity for the team and certain community partners to update one another about the progress of our respective and shared activities pertaining to the evaluation process and the implementation of the action plan developed during the November 2013 evaluation session.

to be provided with working questions, an idea inspired by their vision of being able to use these questions for their own actions in the community.

During this validation process, we were surprised that the researchers did not pat themselves on the back about the appropriation of the evaluation process by the Aboriginal community partners, given CURA's stated objectives, particularly those pertaining to Aboriginal community and individual empowerment. It seemed to us that the researchers were faced with an activity report that, as a document (in both the material and conceptual sense), left them in a situation so often characteristic of the research experience of Aboriginal representatives.³⁸ As this report also describes a collaborative research evaluation process with the intention of favouring the perspective of Aboriginal communities, we could say that the researchers recognized neither the mirror nor the reflection of themselves that they, consciously or not, sought to find in the eyes and in the voice of the other; it was as if the evaluation was necessarily or exclusively about *their* actions and *their* accomplishments. After reading this document, the university partners then interpreted the validation process proposed by the team as a process requiring their approval of the report and its content, as if these both needed to have their *imprimatur*. We felt this interpretation reintroduced authority and power through the act of approving/rejecting this "deliverable,"³⁹ a move away from the legitimacy of this collaborative evaluation process. Their dissidence was consigned to the final report, along with the other comments about the proposed validation process.

Academic culture tends to favour detachment where evaluation processes are concerned. The evaluation is sometimes even considered as an external requirement that falls outside *real* research activities, when it is not reduced to a simple formality strictly associated with the accountability requested by a funding agency or other institutional body. Relegated to the end of the research program, the evaluation is too often compromised by a lack of time, depleted budget or the unavailability of key actors; it may also be reduced to quantitative accountability or lumped in with the media success of a project, when it is not simply shoved aside in the flurry to start another project or obtain a new grant. In several of these cases, the evaluation risks remain implicit or reflect a self-serving bias and a less than rigorous approach. The relationship with the evaluation is, we repeat, strongly anchored in culture and personal and collective history.

In our field experience, we noted that the Aboriginal community partners had a vision more holistic than hierarchical of the evaluation they considered to be, overall, as a positive source of learnings and teachings rather than a negative, potentially

³⁸ Take the frustration felt by Aboriginal community representatives, for whom the only access to the findings of the research they contributed to and invested in are research reports or scientific articles.

³⁹ Here, this expression refers to the partnership contract that did not, however, make provision for an approval process or even set out the form of the deliverable that the team agreed to produce.

punitive, practice. Certain daily introspective and self-reflective practices—if present in the pedagogy and some forms of Aboriginal spirituality, among those who embarked on a journey of healing or, as indicated by Hugo Asselin, in some forms of intergenerational transmission—offer wonderfully well-adapted tools that would be described in a different cultural context as *ongoing evaluation*. Many Aboriginal organization representatives seemed mindful of their responsibility to be accountable directly to their community. This practice is familiar to them, given the role they play in the research partnership, and is simply another responsibility added to their other tasks. This significant personal investment is one that is often underestimated (especially when the urgency of the need and dearth of resources in communities are taken into account) and for which it is legitimate to expect the community partners to want a reasonable return on their investment.

We have observed that the challenge of conciliating the diversity of objectives, needs and expectations of the different actors in the evaluation process remains to be met, notably to attain a culturally adapted individual and collective evaluation process that is mutually relevant for research partnerships between universities and Aboriginal communities.

Collaborative Evaluation in Research, Moving Towards a Paradigm Shift

The ethical and scientific evaluation of research programs and processes is intended to meet the need to situate standards, practices and values within the critical reflection on science. This reflection must also encourage "dialogue between the general public and scientists" [translation] (Doucet, 2010) from the perspective of social justice. The evaluation of research in Aboriginal contexts obviously entails the same requirements. However, it seems that these are reflected with greater acuity.

If evaluation in research, as for research in general, needs to be at the service of pertinent relations and research actions, this pertinence must also be established in and acknowledged by Aboriginal communities. The pertinence coefficient seems strongly influenced by the intercultural collaborative ethics implemented by the research partners, the degree to which the Aboriginal partners are involved in the management of power and decision-making processes, and the rigorous self-reflexive creativity supporting the collaborators' individual and shared actions.

Through its self-critical forms and aims, the evaluation of research in Aboriginal contexts seems to be located in a space of creative tension where it is necessary to respect traditional evaluation systems—be they academic or Aboriginal—while challenging the boundaries and pushing past the limits of these systems.

During the field experience we have just described, we do not believe we developed evaluation methodology or criteria for research in Aboriginal contexts. At most, we experimented with a retrospective evaluation process in the form of a

collaborative evaluative assessment that was intended to focus more on the perspective of the Aboriginal partners and communities involved. Our team also implemented a collaboration agreement as a creative, performative and iterative process in the scope of our evaluation and research activities.

This experience enabled us to become even more aware of the extent of the role evaluation plays in collaborative ethics and the potential of the collaboration agreement as an evaluation research tool. Collaborative ethics necessary calls upon integrated and ongoing forms of evaluation, even if some of them may be implicit on occasion. Developing a collaboration agreement is a demanding and engaging process that is always evolving and one that requires both time and a desire for reflection. It is based on dialogue, openness and a capacity to listen. Despite its limits, some of which arose from the context where we carried out our work, we have observed that, when it comes to meeting the challenge of *Doing well together*, a collaboration agreement may be a relevant and pragmatic strategy for achieving a shared collaborative vision. Such a recursive process involves creating spaces and moments favourable to periodical (self-) examination, in addition to encouraging partners to iteratively evaluate the conditions of their collaboration among themselves. Doing so would emphasize the essentially relational character of research. In the extent to which the collaboration agreement fosters greater equity and reciprocity by examining all research relationships, conditions, processes and findings, it seems to us that it is also a tool for a research evaluation process.

We wanted to heed the voice of Mishtamek, use our own power to attempt to amplify the voices we hear less often and share what we have heard. Is it possible that, together, we could hear a diversity of voices without creating new silences? We continue to reflect on the teachings of the whale.

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge all our relations. We thank those involved in this collaboration experience. We appreciate being invited to take part in the *3rd Seminar on the Ethics of Research With Aboriginal Peoples* at the Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue. A special thanks to the organizers, Suzy Basile and Hugo Asselin, as well as the attendees for their questions. We also thank the evaluators solicited by ACME for their enthusiastic and attentive reading of this article; their comments and suggestions have proved invaluable. We thank the translator, Greg Kelm, for his professional dedication. The authors acknowledge support from Fonds de recherche du Québec Société et culture and Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur Québec.

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