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Fourth Submission for Week 7's Choice Readings

Developing African Oral Traditional Storytelling (AOTS) as a Framework

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Brief Synopsis of the Article

- Osei-Tutu (2023) describes African Oral Traditional Storytelling (AOTS) as an emergent humanistic methodology which counters the Eurocentric traditionalist approach, which have denied the validity of alternative forms of knowledge. As such, AOTS is a push against the objective positivist-colonialist stance which reflects the living realities of African peoples.
- AOTS is a form of oral knowledge which is passed intergenerationally through folktales, proverbs, sayings, songs and expressions with the intention of sharing historical, moral and cultural knowledge (Osei-Tutu, 2023). Tuwe, as cited by Osei-Tutu claim AOTS is not merely for entertainment. The interpretations of AOTS are regionally dependent because of the differing aspects of culture, language and experiences.
- Nine stylistic qualities in AOTS: Imagery, allusion, symbolism, parallelism, piling, association, tonality, ideophones and digression. These qualities are important as they “hold the language, culture, and worldviews of the African community that are partakers in the story telling” (p. 1503).
- AOTS embraces humanity through the active participation with those who are researched. Technical terminology, such as ‘data collection’ is replaced with ‘story gathering and sharing.’ Instead of ‘analysis’, ‘consent, co-telling/co-meaning’ is used. AOTS appears to highly value relational ethics. Consequently, the ‘I/We’ relationship is affirmed.
- While Osei-Tutu (2023) identifies a disagreement whether a new paradigm should be created or AOTS falling under an existing paradigm, AOTS differs because, like all “postcolonial efforts of revitalization” (p. 1499), it heightens ethical responsibility to those who are researched so that it does not inadvertently revert to Eurocentric-imperialistic standards. Therefore, AOTS provides the opportunity to critique dominant paradigms.

Analysis and Response

This journal article by Osei-Tutu (2023) brought back memories of the EDUC 9002 course taught by Dr. Susie Brigham. In this course, Dr. Brigham brought in Dr. Kesa Munroe-Anderson into our classroom to discuss different methodological perspectives in education. At the time, I was only comfortable with autoethnography, mixed-methods, interpretivism and hermeneutics. Therefore, learning from and hearing different methodological approaches helped me gain insight of other choices and approaches for conducting research. Therefore, much of my analysis response will be tied to this experience and reflection.

The summer institute provided me with moments of growth and reflection. I learned of methodologies which counters the imperialistic-colonialist perspectives. As the ‘ghost of positivism’ has been brought up several times in class and during such analysis response submissions, the refreshing nature of being exposed to Afrocentricity and Indigeneity has helped frame the world of possibilities for conducting research, which counters the perceived platinum-status of positivism. Being exposed to such methodological choices, I can see how such approaches have acted to reclaim the loss power of those who have been marginalized in the wake of the dominant Eurocentric actions and perspectives.

While ‘African Oral Traditional Storytelling’ (AOTS) is an intriguing possibility for my research around exploring the success for Black and African Nova Scotian students in high school sciences, I must confess that I need to unpack my own positionality and unconscious actions before I can go further out. Admittedly, I feel selfish by identifying this. However, the intention for looking inwards is to ensure that I can uncover my unconscious biases and perceptions before moving outwards. That way, such aspects do not seep into my interpretations and analysis.

The most thought-provoking section to Osei-Tutu’s (2023) article was the section on ‘Designing the AOTS Framework.’ As mentioned in the synopsis, AOTS embraces a heightened sense of humanity through the active participation with those who are researched. Consequently, while formal technical terminology like ‘data collection’ and ‘analysis’ is used in many qualitative and quantitative approaches, AOTS is much more sensitive using terminologies, such as, ‘story telling and sharing’ (for data collection) and ‘co-telling / co-meaning’ (for data analysis).

When conducting any form of research, individuals need to confront the issue or perception of inhumane research practices (Adams & Ellis, 2012). While Dr. Kesa Munroe-Anderson may have the shared membership and status of being a cultural insider, I do not have this privilege. As a result, there is an even more importance to ensure that, as a cultural outsider, I do not have the perception of merely writing research that is used for “personal, monetary, and professional gain” (p. 197), “recklessly leaving” (p. 197) and never being heard again. Relational ethics, therefore, must be paramount when researching historically underrepresented and/or oppressed communities.

Conclusion and Discussion Question

In all, what I liked about Osei-Tutu’s (2023) use of paradigm-shifting terminologies is the notion of valuing this relational ethics. By re-framing and humanizing research terminologies, those who are being researched are not treated as mere numbers or “impersonal subjects only to be mined for data” (Adams & Ellis, 2012, p. 206). This point was something that resonated with me deeply. For my discussion question, I’d like to hear from guest speakers and/or classmates about

where else Afrocentricity and Indigeneity research have been used and whether such research perspectives have—and to what extent—influenced policy or governance within education and political systems in Canada.

References

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- Osei-Tutu, A. A. (2023). Developing African oral traditional storytelling as a framework for studying with African peoples. *Qualitative Research*, 23(6), 1497-1514.
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