Bridging Inuit and Scientific knowledge about socio-environmental change via collaborative mural making

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Abstract

Linking Inuit and scientific knowledge systems to understand and address rapid change in the Arctic is a crucial challenge. The objective of this presentation is to demonstrate the capacity of collaborative mural making, and artistic process more generally, as a promising approach to connect ways of knowing with regard to socio-environmental change. I draw on my empirical research in Nunavut, Canada, and my experience collaborating with Inuit artists, youth and elders on a mural about socio-environmental change in the Arctic. We engaged in games, story telling and local techniques in print-making and traditional sewing to collaboratively create the mural. Both the mural itself, and more importantly the processes surrounding mural creation, demonstrates a bridging of knowledge systems. The mural expresses a youth perspective on socio-environmental change. It shares a vision of the past as connected to the future via hunting, seals and ice/water travel, and demonstrates the resilience of Inuit culture in the context of rapid socio-environmental change. The process of collaborative mural making offers methodological lessons for scholars and practitioners engaging in bridging ways of knowing. Collaborative art making allows an open, creative space for Inuit and western scientific participants to share understandings of environmental change and socio-environmental relationships (e.g. hunting stories, sketches), and to engage in experiential learning (e.g. seal-skin stretching, stencil techniques). Artistic processes therefore can offer a robust platform for bridging Inuit and scientific knowledge systems about socio-environmental change and result in a tangible artistic output.

Keywords: Approaches, community engagement, epistemology, global change, local knowledge, multiple perspectives, narratives, participation, shared learning, stakeholder engagement, ways of knowing

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