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This illustrated presentation focuses on a two-month period of fieldwork undertaken alongside the Ainu communities of Nibutani and Akan in Hokkaido, Japan, between April and May 2026. The research employs immersive participation, observation, visual documentation, informal conversations and creative practice. Engagement extended to everyday community activities, including sharing meals, assisting in local businesses, attending cultural events and participating in daily life alongside community members (Kovach, 2021).

This fieldwork approach is guided by the Indigenous axiological principles of the 4Rs (respect, relevance, reciprocity and responsibility) (Pidgeon, 2019). These principles underpin the doctoral project, *Hunting the Future*, which explores how a graphic novel inspired by Ainu storytelling might communicate the significance of hunting culture within Indigenous food sovereignty. The purpose of this presentation is to examine how these values shaped the fieldwork experience itself and framed the ongoing creative and analytical development of the project. I argue that participation and relationship-building created opportunities for learning through shared experiences and sustained engagement that extended beyond formal interviews.

Living alongside Ainu community members revealed that many of the relationships and cultural meanings underpinning hunting could not be fully understood through interviews alone. Instead, these understandings emerged gradually through participation and time spent within the community (Leddy & Miller, 2020). As knowledge was experienced rather than simply described, the fieldwork demonstrated how sustained engagement could provide the context needed to interpret interview narratives more holistically and connect insights that might otherwise have remained unseen.

As the project moves into analysis and creative development, the fieldwork has reinforced the importance of trust, relational accountability and taking the time to learn from the communities whose knowledge informs the research. These experiences continue to shape the graphic novel while offering practical insights for researchers engaged in community-based and arts-based research.

Keywords

Fieldwork, Indigenous Communities, Indigenous Axiology, Arts-Based Research

References

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