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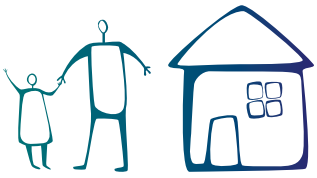

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Foreword

Brittany Mathews and Emily Williams

Coordinating Editors of the *First Peoples Child & Family Review*

Corresponding author: Brittany Mathews, bmathews@fncaringsociety.com

It is with great pleasure that we bring you Volume 15, Issue 2 of the *First Peoples Child & Family Review* (FPCFR), which includes six published submissions from academics and community experts. Although this issue was not guided by a particular theme, the articles take on new light given the current COVID-19 pandemic. Authors shared their manuscripts and peer referees conducted reviews at the height of the pandemic's first wave in Canada. We are now publishing this issue in the midst of the pandemic's second wave.

The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the serious inequities and harms that First Nations, Métis and Inuit children and families experience in Canada. Historic and ongoing colonialism and structural racism means that Indigenous peoples are more likely to experience harm due to communicable diseases like COVID-19. While Indigenous communities have always adapted to keep children, Elders and families safe and well, this capacity is continually undermined by long-standing inequities in publicly funded services and colonial hostility to Indigenous understandings of health and wellbeing.

Canada continues to violate its distinct obligations to First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities and fail to work towards reconciliation. The COVID-19 pandemic reveals the toll of these ongoing violations. Amidst this stark reality, this issue's authors take up this work and remind us that other ways are possible. The community-based research, stories, and experiences articulated in the articles demonstrate the collective resilience of Indigenous communities, the resurgent vitality of Indigenous worldviews and lifeways, and the capacity of Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities to collaborate in pursuit of justice, equity, and the holistic wellbeing of Indigenous children, families, and communities.

In good spirit,
Brittany Mathews & Emily Williams

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Becoming Self-in-Relation: Coming of Age as a Pathway towards Wellness for Urban Indigenous Youth in Care

Andrea Mellor,[a] Surrounded by Cedar Child and Family Services, and Denise Cloutier[b]

a University of Victoria
b PhD, Professor, Department of Geography, University of Victoria PhD, Professor, Department of Geography, University of Victoria

Corresponding author: Andrea Mellor, amellor@uvic.ca

Author Note

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Abstract

Two workshops were held with urban Indigenous youth who live in foster care on Lekwungen Territory on southern Vancouver Island. The workshops were informed by guidance from community knowledge holders and Elders and explored the meaning of Indigenous coming of age and adolescence with 15 youth through oral, visual, and text-based activities. Following a thematic analysis of the workshop transcripts, five themes emerged: self-continuity; self-awareness; empowerment; being part of something bigger; and support networks. These themes provide evidence that engaging with coming of age teachings and activities are protective to youth wellness and help youth to build strong foundations from which they can learn about their Indigenous ancestry and history in their own time. (Re)connecting to coming of age teachings is part of a broader discourse of (re)writing narratives that celebrate the strength, leadership, and independence of the urban Indigenous youth community. Although the voices shared reflect young community members living in and around southern Vancouver Island, the essence of our key messages are relevant to the broader Indigenous community and those practicing allyship through education, health care, social work, and other areas of influence.

Keywords: urban Indigenous, foster care, coming of age, community-based participatory research

Territory Acknowledgement

Hay'sxw'qa si'em Lekwungen elth'tel'nexw, Hay'sxw'qa si'em Lekwungen tung'exw, hay'sxw'qa si'em Lekwungen xa'sa

Thank you Respected Place to Smoke Herring people, thank you Place to Smoke Herring people's lands, thank you Place to Smoke Herring people's sacred waters,

Thlaninulth hay'sxw'qa si'em a'nelth hali, chay, ye'yah'sung stay'tha en'sne i'ey'mut tung'exw, i'ey'mut xa'sa

We thank you Respected for allowing us to live, work, play on your beautiful lands, beautiful sacred waters.

Project Acknowledgement

We wish to express our gratitude to the Youth whose voices guided this project. We raise our hands to the knowledge keepers, community members, and staff of Surrounded by Cedar Child and Family Services who took the time to be with us. The sharing at the dinner and the workshops helped to guide us in doing this project in a good way.

Surrounded by Cedar raises its hands in gratitude to those who have supported the agency over the years, to those who envisioned this organization and were instrumental in its development, and to the children, youth, and families with whom we walk each day.

We extend a special thanks to one of our project's Lekwungen knowledge holders who shared the Lekwung'athun territory acknowledgement with us and gave us permission to share it here.

Introduction

Indigenous traditions surrounding the coming of age transition from childhood to adulthood are celebrated through teachings and ceremonies that promote strength, resilience, and discipline in the face of obstacles that may be encountered in one's life. The rites of passage enacted during one's coming of age promote a sense of connection, belonging, and community (Richardson, 2012) and create a foundation that strengthens personal autonomy in a way that is socially supported and encouraged (Risling Baldy, 2018). Passing on coming of age teachings transcends "this life" by creating what Nishnaabe Elder Edna Manitowabi refers to as *kobade,* meaning "a link in a chain – a link between generations, between nations, between states of being, between individuals" (Simpson, 2016, para. 22).

This *kobade* was damaged through the intentional dismantling of community and family units, and by disconnecting Indigenous people from their territories, teachings, and ceremonies. The impacts of settler-colonialism have resulted in an intergenerational living history that is carried by Indigenous youth in foster care. These impacts are reflected in data from the province of British Columbia which

reports that nearly half of all youth in care have Indigenous ancestry despite Indigenous populations representing only four percent of the overall population (Hughes, 2006). And, with more than half of Indigenous people living in urban centres of greater than 30,000 people (McIvor, 2018), (re)connecting[1] urban Indigenous youth to traditional coming of age teachings and ceremonies cannot be decontextualized from the social and political environment within which they reside.

Receiving traditional coming of age teachings is an active part of cultural preservation and revitalization for Indigenous youth. Revitalization is a larger movement that works to heal the wounds of colonialism by recovering traditional cultural practices and undoing systems that cause harm to Indigenous peoples, land, and culture (Jacob, 2013, p. 12). The preservation of culture or cultural continuity is one of several factors that nurtures the mind, body, and spirit, and is protective to health and wellness (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; Chandler et al., 2003; McIvor et al., 2009; Petrasek Macdonald et al., 2013). (Re)connecting to coming of age teachings aligns with what Risling Baldy (2018) calls "embodied decolonization" because it actively seeks to counter ways that settler-colonialism has and continues to disrupt the passing of cultural knowledge to current and future generations of Indigenous youth. This decolonization reflects participating in a future rooted in Indigenous epistemologies that resist narratives suggesting Indigenous teachings are relics of the past (Goeman, 2013; Jacob, 2013; Risling Baldy, 2018).

The project "Supporting Culturally Appropriate Coming of Age Resources for Urban Indigenous Youth in Care on Vancouver Island: (Re)Connecting with Self-Determined Health and Wellness" advocates for the importance of culturally appropriate coming of age ceremonies and teachings for urban Indigenous youth in care. This community-based participatory research project comprises a collaborative team of Indigenous child and family youth workers (Surrounded by Cedar Child and Family Services [SCCFS]), university-based researchers (University of Victoria), and health practitioners (Island Health). Together, we worked with knowledge holders, Elders, and urban Indigenous youth to foreground the voices that are a part of the diverse urban Indigenous community in Victoria, British Columbia on the topic of youth coming of age.

All the authors, collaborators, and team members have unique histories and stories to tell. Our paths began converging when Andrea, an interdisciplinary doctoral student, and her supervisor, Denise, a health geographer at the University of Victoria, were introduced to SCCFS through a mutual connection at Island Health. Together, we collaborated to understand how we could support SCCFS as an organization to determine what is possible for Indigenous youth and Indigenous coming of age ceremonies while growing up in care and in an urban location. (Re)connecting to coming of age teachings, and Indigenous knowledge more broadly, is part of SCCFS' mission to connect youth to spirit and identity through familial, hereditary, and cultural linkages because these are protective factors that promote safety and wellbeing amongst Indigenous people.

1 The prefix "(re)" is an acknowledgement that the connection to ancestral teachings may have been broken, but it was never lost despite the efforts of colonial governments to disconnect Indigenous children and youth from their culture.

This paper shares the voices and wisdoms of youth and knowledge holders that were gathered during two youth workshops designed to explore questions about what coming of age means and how it is celebrated. The findings that emerged from the workshops reflect five key themes that illuminate the importance of celebrating coming of age as a passage in one's life, and recognizing its potential in supporting holistic wellness and its part in preserving cultural knowledge. This work contributes to the growing body of research focused on promoting the positive development of urban Indigenous youth.

Ensuring that this project was done in a "good way" meant that we conducted the research respectfully by honouring Indigenous traditions and spirit, cultivated authentic and lasting relationships, and engaged in meaningful dialogue so that the research could benefit the Indigenous community as a whole (Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Community-Based Research Collaborative Centre [AHA Centre], 2018). During our first full team meeting, we began the project with the Anishnaabe song Wildflower, a call and response drum song about a mother calling her child, appropriate for this project as we are "calling the children in." We then began planning a knowledge holder's dinner which would provide the guidance to lead this project in a way that aligned with the community's wisdom and wishes. This paper begins with sharing what we learned at the dinner as the project background. Although it is not a conventional "background" in the sense that we are not integrating findings from previous published works (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2003), it aligns with our research framework that honours the wisdom and expertise of Indigenous knowledge keepers and Indigenous ways of knowing and doing, setting the foundation for our community-based work. This paper uses the language and terminology held up by all our research partners and has cited direct quotes as accurately as possible.

Guidance from Knowledge Holders

The knowledge holder's dinner explored the ways that SCCFS, the LGBTQ2S+, urban, and home/ancestral communities are involved in the coming of age of Indigenous youth in care. Four sharing circles discussed the unique roles of each community, but also the interconnected roles that support youth coming of age. This includes a shared responsibility in cultivating safe spaces where youth can self-determine their identities and have access to role models, mentors, and teachers who help provide context and understanding on their place as Indigenous people. These spaces support physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing and foster opportunities to experience healing, love, acceptance, empowerment, and curiosity.

As an organization, the community views SCCFS as having a role as a cultural hub that, in addition to having legal guardianship responsibilities, also facilitates access to culturally centered care to support holistic wellness. Wherever possible, birth families are involved in hosting coming of age ceremonies/processes, though in some cases, SCCFS may be able to assume the responsibility of safely delivering coming of age ceremonies for youth who may not be connected to their home communities or who are learning about their Indigenous identities. The urban community can

help SCCFS identify cultural assets, teachers, and knowledge holders during these times. A youth's ancestral or home community can be supportive by sharing teachings, offering ceremony, or hosting youth in their territory. They may also be able to inform SCCFS in preparing youth "coming of age" plans. However, individual circumstances must first be considered because not all youth have this connection to their home community.

The knowledge holders emphasized the ways that traditional coming of age teachings are intentionally healing and empowering, and teach life skills to prepare for future life stages. Adolescence is seen as part of a cultural continuum and receiving teachings is an important step in learning how to pass teachings on and keep culture alive. Knowledge holders shared that teachings may be grounded in tradition and protocol, but they can be adapted to urban environments and contemporary living situations.

Although there may be shared meanings in coming of age teachings between Nations, the protocols and ceremonies through which they are taught will differ. It is important not to pan-Indigenize coming of age teachings and respect both the nation from which the youth is a member and the territory upon which ceremonies are happening. This requires consultation with knowledge holders and Elders. There will be differing opinions and points of view on how this should be undertaken and some of these politics might create tension between different groups. It is important that the welfare of the youth is the focus in all discussions and that the safe spaces created for them are not disrupted by lateral violence or tensions that may obscure the goal of connecting youth to culture, community, and their Indigenous strengths. Additional detail on the dinner can be found in Mellor et al. (in press).

Methodology

This project seeks to understand the meaning of coming of age from the perspective of the youth participating in two workshops. More broadly, the project aims to create a cohesive web of meanings woven from pieces of their unique living experiences and stories that they chose to share. This project aligns with the metaphor of hoop dancing detailed in Garrett et al. (2014), which suggests that youth must balance multiple identities, pressures, and expectations while constantly remaining in motion, much like they do when they are hoop dancing. These authors say that to better understand this dance we must "… hear and understand their voices, their stories, and their experiences" (p. 471).

To activate this metaphor, we engaged with complementary methodologies that honour relational meaning making or inquiry that engages with shared physical, experiential, and sacred ways of coming to know (Hendry, 2010; Meyer, 2014). We recognize the diversity in Indigenous ways of knowing and doing across nations but also acknowledge that shared epistemological principles such as deriving meaning through relationships to place can bring communities together and shape the cultural, spiritual, emotional, physical, and social lives of individuals and communities (Wilson, 2003). This shared worldview grounds us in an Indigenous methodological framework, "… the theory and method of conducting research that flows from an Indigenous epistemology" (Kovach, 2009, p. 20).

We worked with an Indigenous research paradigm and a community-based participatory research (CBPR) framework because these work to prioritize Indigenous community needs and the issues that are of interest to them (Brant Castellano, 2004; Schnarch, 2004), and have an "… underlying goal of collaboration, research equality, and community control" (Drawson et al., 2017, p. 6). We also recognized that Indigenous CBPR frameworks require additional considerations, some of which include but are not limited to: recognizing the legacy of research harms that have been experienced by Indigenous communities; ensuring that research materials are interpreted using an appropriate cultural context; and using Indigenous ways of knowing and doing to conduct research activities (De Leeuw et al., 2012; LaVeaux & Christopher, 2009). Honouring these considerations and CBPR principles more broadly ensured that our engagement activities were designed in ways that explored the cultural dimension of our work and created space for youth to "… take part in and influence processes, decisions, and activities that will affect their health and the community within which they live" (Blanchet-Cohen et al., 2011, p. 89) if they wished to do so.

We also used narrative inquiry to understand how coming of age was understood by the youth participants and knowledge keepers. Narrative inquiry allowed us to engage with the stories shared by our participants, listening and trusting that a unique, co-created meaning about urban Indigenous coming of age would emerge from our time spent together (Hendry, 2007). This meant listening to each story and acknowledging that each participant had a unique lived experience and relationship with adolescence. By approaching our data in this way, we hoped to counter methods of meaning-making that have historically disassembled and reassembled stories to "fit" a narrative of Indigenous youth that is deficit-based, and sometimes deviant and sadly fatalistic (Cameron, 2012; Goeman, 2013; Leeuw et al., 2010).

To understand the way this meaning has evolved in a broader social and historical context and how we might help to rewrite these stories, we drew on Judith Butler's theory of performativity (2000). Using performativity helped us to convey how a culturally centered coming of age grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing and doing can be part of a larger space of strength and healing.

Our team worked collectively and individually to practice critical allyship, in part by doing our best to put the youths' voices forward in this project. We worked to center this project in the four "R's" of research involving Indigenous people: *respecting* the plural worldviews and experiences of project participants; ensuring we engage with issues *relevant* to the participants; honouring the *reciprocity* in knowledge sharing, ensuring those who share knowledge are compensated appropriately for their time and effort; and, upholding our *responsibility* to truthfully represent participant voices (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). This project engages the OCAP® principles of ownership, control, access, and possession (First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2017) and the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Chapter 9 (also known as TCPS 2) (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2018). Ethics approval was granted by the University of Victoria and the Island Health research ethics boards.

Wisdom Catching

Youth Workshops

The workshops took place in September and November 2019 and were held at SCCFS's office. The workshops explored the meaning of coming of age, cultural traditions related to coming of age, and perspectives on living as urban Indigenous youth in Victoria, BC. The first workshop was an opportunity for youth to learn about the project, and for the team to understand how best to engage with the youth and ask general questions about coming of age. The second workshop focused on specific questions, involved community knowledge holders to guide conversations, and included time for more hands-on activities and one-on-one interviews. We primarily used oral methods to collect data including group sharing circles (Workshop 1), young women's and young men's sharing circles (Workshop 2), and one-on-one semi-structured interviews (Workshops 1 and 2).

The first workshop was attended by nine youth aged 11 to 17 (seven girls and two boys), and six research team members including three youth support staff with SCCFS, two University of Victoria researchers, and one Island Health dietitian. All attendees participated in the sharing circle, and two girls and one boy were interviewed separately. The second workshop was attended by thirteen youth, aged nine to 17 (ten girls and three boys), a female Elder, a male knowledge holder, the granddaughter of an SCCFS team member (age six), and seven research team members including two SCCFS leaders (also occupying roles as female knowledge holders), a graphic designer, and the University of Victoria and Island Health research team. The young men's sharing circle was led by a knowledge holder and attended by three male youth participants. The young women's sharing circle was led by an Elder and the SCCFS team members and intermittently attended by all the female participants. Six young women were interviewed.

Workshop 1 began with an acknowledgement of Lekwungen Territory and workshop 2 began with a territorial welcome from a Lekwungen knowledge holder. The latter included a teaching about coming of age and a welcome song in Lekwungen'athun. The invitation was made to introduce oneself and provide a word on how we were feeling at the beginning of the day. This was followed by a discussion of the project, what it means to consent in the context of a research project, and a review of the consent forms. Prior to beginning our sharing circles and interviews, guidelines were established for the day to ensure that we engaged in respectful conversations with one another. Both workshops included a lunch; Workshop 1 was catered by the Island Health dietician who spoke about "food as medicine" and Workshop 2 was catered by SCCFS's Elder in residence. The day was closed by gathering in a circle and sharing a word of reflection on the day.

Oral Methods

Sharing circles and semi-structured interviews during Workshop 1 were guided by the following broad questions: what do you know about coming of age? And, is coming of age important? If so, why? In addition, a whiteboard was used for youth to write their thoughts about the question, who is part of coming of age? And, how is it part of your life?

The first workshop helped the research team understand what themes resonated with the youth, the best language to use to approach questions around coming of age, and how to organize group and individual activities that encourage sharing in safe ways. This led to the refinement of our guiding questions for Workshop 2:

1) What does coming of age mean to you?
   - What rites of passage can you think of that happen during this time?
2) Do you know about rites of passage ceremonies?
   - Have you had any? Attended any?
3) What does "culture" mean to you? What parts are important?
   - Who has been a teacher for you?
4) What does it mean to have an identity?
   - Do you identify in certain ways and are there ways you want to identify?

Although the workshop questions initiated the conversations, the youth guided the conversations to honour our overarching objective to understand what is meaningful for them. Discussion during the young women's and men's sharing circles were recorded by a circle participant on oversized post-it notes for the group to see. Research team members who were not participating in the discussions were recording the wisdoms shared. Interviews were recorded by the interviewer in handwritten notes and no digital audio recordings were taken. When photographs were taken, efforts were made to not show the faces of the youth as per SCCFS and ethics review protocol. Notes were transcribed into a word processor and transcript cleaning included replacing real names with initials or avatars which had been selected by each participant on their consent form.

Meaning Making

A thematic analysis of the transcripts was completed to understand the meaning of the responses to our research questions from the perspective of the youth participants and knowledge holders. There were four main steps in the data analysis: summarizing each transcript; generating narrative phrases; developing main themes; and detailing and verification. The thematic analysis was led by the first author and validation of meanings and interpretations was accomplished through several collaborative team meetings and e-communications.

In the first step, 12 transcripts were reviewed. Each transcript was read at least three times by the first author prior to cleaning the text in a first pass and generating point form summaries that paraphrased comments related to coming of age, culture, family, and self-reflection. Step two generated narrative phrases that captured the essence of each summary point and was used to categorize statements for later analysis (Saldana, 2015). Phrases were not intended to decontextualize the voice of the interviewee or the circle, rather they were used to reflect a shared quality like "not a child anymore" or "everyone is different." The repetition of phrases or phrase topics reflected common experiences and those that were repeated were connected or combined where appropriate. Step three organized narrative phrases with shared qualities into categories that became one of five overarching themes. The final step provided context and validation for our interpretation by generating a table that connected the overarching themes and narrative phrases (Table 1). Teachings and supporting quotes from the participants were included to complete an iterative loop of analysis bringing us back to what was shared at the workshops.

Table 1
Excerpt from the Table of Project Themes

Overarching Theme	Narrative Phrases	Teaching	Supporting Quotes
Self-awareness	(Selected) • Recognition • Body awareness • You feel different	Coming of age ceremonies and teachings help to teach and guide you through the changes that happen to your body, mind, and spirit as you transition to adulthood.	"[after my ceremony I felt] weird, I had this feeling, I don't know what it was. It felt like I wasn't a child anymore" (TS, interview)

Findings

Five themes emerged from the thematic analysis: self-continuity; self-awareness; empowerment; being a part of something bigger; and support networks. These are described in the following sections.

Self-Continuity

The first theme aligns with Chandler and Lalonde's (1998) definition of self-continuity, which relates to "a young [person's] belief about personal persistence" (p. 193). During our workshops, youth talked about ways that Indigenous coming of age teachings helped connect them to the past, present, and future and talked about how relationships with themselves, their families, and their communities were changing over time.

Youth saw themselves as playing an active role in carrying ancestral teachings into the future and reflected on how this was beneficial. For instance, one workshop participant said, "… it's always good to keep it with you so your culture doesn't die. If you say your language every single day, your ancestors will hear you and give you good things" (*RT, interview)*. Learning and speaking one's language was

raised on several occasions as a proactive way to connect to the past, present, and future. It connected youth to their own Indigenous identities, and to their families and communities: "… history, ancestors and keeping it alive, a naming ceremony, language … [I'm] going to be learning [my] language (Carrier and Dakelh) from a cousin who speaks it fluently. [I'm] looking forward to it a lot" (*RT, interview).* Youth also expressed personal accountability in carrying these language teachings to the future: "language is important … so I can teach my kids or grandkids" (*young men's sharing circle)*. This also reflects seeing oneself *in* the future, as parents, knowledge holders, and teachers.

Many cultural values are embedded in Indigenous coming of age teachings and ceremonies, and reinforce the important role of an individual in their community (Markstrom & Iborra, 2003). In addition to helping develop one's identity as young Indigenous people, we also learned how coming of age ceremonies can help with, as one workshop participant put it, "… looking forward and being ready for obstacles," in other words, occupying spaces of resilience and building strength and coping skills.

Self-Awareness

Ways that youth expressed how they feel, how they see themselves, and how they want to be seen, was part of recognizing themselves in relation to their surroundings (i.e., self-in-relation). Coming of age ceremonies and teachings help youth to be reflexive about the changes taking place in one's body, mind, and spirit, for example, "[It was] different … you just feel different after … . Feel older, more mature. You just let the younger self in you out -the child" (*LC, interview).*

Youth need safe spaces to navigate the coming of age life stage, because experiences may occur that can be triggering for some. Knowledge holders in the young women's sharing circle acknowledged this as an area in need of further understanding, "… how [do we] recognize the old traumas that can resurface and draw strength from this, rather than being crushed by past memories and recollections." Cultural teachings can help youth to cope and manage their emotions during these challenging times. Activities like drumming, singing, and connecting to nature were discussed as ways to connect to culture and stay personally grounded. For example, "[Beading] calms me down. It's like a healing thing. There's no point if you have bad energy or are in a bad mood … (*LC interview).*

On several occasions, youth shared ideas about ways that they wished to be recognized and seen as their own person, "… sometimes [I] tell people my story, and that's part of who I am. Personality makes up identity. Introducing ourselves … Nation, territory … [this is] also part of identity, and [I] enjoy doing introductions like that." The ways that youth discussed "who you are" was different from the views of the knowledge holders, particularly when it came to dualities. Youth talked about competing identities within themselves. When reflecting on an illustration of a bear with a flower crown on its head during a vision boarding exercise, one youth said,

[The bear is] seen as a tough and strong, and sometimes a scary animal, but the flower crown made it less scary and showed how we have different sides to us, and how we can be strong and tough but also soft and pretty *(RT, interview)*.

On the other hand, knowledge holders shared more about self-in-relation to different societal communities. During the young men's sharing circle, a knowledge holder shared the teaching "… sometimes we have to walk in both worlds, colonization has impacted our language and culture." Female knowledge holders reflected during the young women's circle, on how it is a confusing time to be Indigenous, where an Indigenous person may know they are Indigenous, but there is identity confusion about this because there is a sprinkling of many different cultural practices arising from the reality of blended families with different origins.

Empowerment

Empowerment reflects youth finding the strength and power that resides within them. Empowerment also suggests that youth are active agents of change and that they can (re)write their own stories. Empowerment is cultivated through increased access to independence, recognition of Indigeneity, and confidence gained through self or culturally defined activities. Youth and knowledge holders expressed ways that these are activated through various Indigenous rites of passage and ceremonies (e.g., naming ceremonies, coming of age ceremonies, vision quests), but also shared ways that empowerment is accessed in their daily lives. For example, the young men in the sharing circle said,

> There is a component of trust with guardians … [like] being able to walk home, be home by myself, being trusted … Not doing what I'm not supposed to do … [have the] knowledge that I can manage myself – makes me think of discipline (love and respect). (*composite of ideas from the young men's sharing circle*).

Becoming independent was understood as a reciprocal process of earning trust and cultivating self-discipline. Developing confidence in the independence one gains from trust is also a teaching on self-protection/preservation. Reflecting on teachings from his uncles' during his coming of age, a knowledge holder shared, "… in your life you're going to be the only person around; [it's] up to you to hear, see and feel about that around you …" (*BD, young men's sharing circle)*.

Having a name (both family names and receiving an Indigenous name) and speaking one's language was a source of empowerment shared by several youth. In one situation, a young woman talked about how she gets frustrated that she must explain why she has two last names, and that after her adoption, "… my last name will change to … After it won't be confusing – at school, I'm under two names." This same young woman also shared how she is learning her language with her family and noted: "… when I introduce myself, I want to say it in Gitxsan. Then they'll know you speak your language." This reflects Lertzman's (2002) argument that "having a sense of place in the world and a community in which to experience it is an important foundation in one's life, especially for young people transitioning to adulthood" (p. 35).

Being Part of Something Bigger

Cultural activities were discussed as events that cultivate a sense of connection between individuals and their home, urban, and SCCFS communities. As one workshop participant explained, "Cultural activities like dancing, singing, and drumming help to connect me to my teachers. Speaking my language is a way to also get teachings, and for me (and others) to know who I am." A knowledge holder reinforced the important connection of these activities to lands, ancestors, and identities, and how they "… offer our worldview."

The youth recognized the important role that SCCFS plays in facilitating cultural activities. However, some youth expressed a view that the connection to their family of origin is important and that coming of age ceremonies are the "home family's job" (*RT interview)* and that they should involve "… either going home or having someone from the home community support the coming of age" (*young men's sharing circle)*. The relationships that these urban youth have with their home communities speaks to the connection to place, identity, and land, even if they are not physically present. The efforts SCCFS and foster families place in helping to maintain connections where possible to home communities clearly resonates with youth, regardless of whether they are aware of these efforts. The "blood memory" of a place that one may possess without being there is something carried by youth, and was articulated by a knowledge holder in the young women's circle "… just going there [*to her home place*] was about a connection to [my] ancestors … [I] started to cry just when being there."

Support Networks

Coming of age teachings come from knowledge holders, family members, and Elders. These are the people that youth identified as individuals they could go to for support. When asked what advice a participant would share with the granddaughter of one of our team members, she replied, "[I would tell her to] just be proud of herself. Let her know she has a bunch of support in difficult times … like to talk to, just be there" (*LC, interview)*. Support for youth can come in different ways. Some ways they identified included being listened to, acknowledged, trusted, and recognized for the many sides of themselves. For instance, one participant said, "I need people to know there is more to me than just test scores and bubbly personalities. Sometimes I need space to do what I have to in order to keep myself calm" (*CT*, *interview)*.

Support networks are important to connect the five themes in healthy and positive ways. Having guidance in these networks helps to gently teach about the confusion that might arise when youth are learning about the changes in their bodies. "[Coming of age is] a time of teaching about our roles and responsibilities as a woman or as young ladies," explained one of the knowledge holders during the young women's sharing circle. Cultivating a healthy sense of self and how one becomes self-in-relation with the world is supported by teachings that flow through support networks. Self-continuity, seeing oneself in the future, and surviving are all learned from these supports. One

participant shared, "I learned how to bead a feather, make jam, make drums and cedar head bands … cook salmon heads, fire bread, seafood chowder, butter … So when we're older, we know how to prepare meals" (*RT, interview)*.

Discussion

Connecting to Holistic Wellness

This paper began with the question, *what does coming of age mean for urban Indigenous youth in care?* to help us learn how to support (re)connecting to traditional teachings in ways that are meaningful, relevant, and culturally appropriate for the youth and the communities that support them. One of the most significant findings of this project is that coming of age for Indigenous youth in care reflects a site of convergence of overarching individual, family, and community relationships, each of which supports youth in different and connected ways. These interrelated relationships converge and weave like a three stranded braid. Like a braid, if one strand has too much tension, or another has too little, the balance in the braid becomes skewed or even lost. The interaction between these communities reflects the wholistic model of health and wellness that is shared across Indigenous cultures, which operates with a fluidity between wellbeing of the body, mind, heart, and spirit (First Nations Health Authority, 2020).

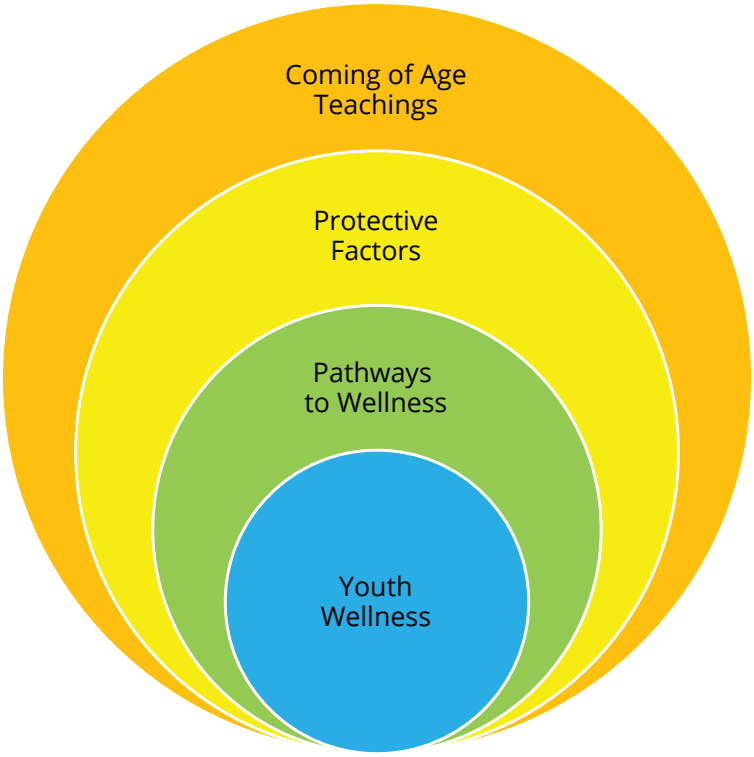
In reflecting upon historical events that have compromised the ability for cultural teachings to be transmitted from knowledge holders (community) through kinship networks (family), and in turn, embodied at individual levels, we can understand how the entire structure of this "braid" has at times been compromised. And yet, the persistent plaiting of these tresses helps to see the temporal nature of teachings and that they are continuous and can regain balance over time.

Knowing our relations connects us to the past, helps us understand the present, and lays out our responsibility to the future (Wilson & Wilson, 2013, p. 33). The findings from the coming of age workshops suggest how Indigenous coming of age teachings transcend space and time to support youth in becoming part of an interconnected network of self, family, and community, each of which have special roles as protective factors for health and wellness. Protective factors as a determinant of health are defined as "… characteristics at the individual, family, or community level that are associated with a lower likelihood of a problem outcome" (O'Connell et al., 2009, p. 82). The risk of negative outcomes for Indigenous youth are heightened as a result of the social, economic, and political precariousness that is associated with colonialism and might include risks related to feelings of anxiety and depression, substance use, and suicide (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; Garrett et al., 2014; Reading & Wien, 2009; Nelson & Wilson, 2017). Because of this, supporting and engaging with protective factors, such as those related to Indigenous child rearing, are crucial to counter risks rooted in colonialism (Anderson, 2011).

The five themes identified through our collective efforts connect in ways that indicate coming of age teachings facilitate protective pathways supporting healing, wellness, and resilience (Petrasek Macdonald et al., 2013). The themes "being part of something bigger" and "support networks" align with protective factors identified at multiple levels: individual; family; and community (O'Connell et al., 2009; Petrasek Macdonald et al., 2013). "Self-continuity," "self-awareness," and "empowerment" reflect pathways to wellness that are strengthened by having support networks and by belonging to a community, nation, and family. Figure 1 is a schematic diagram that illustrates these nested relationships in the context of this research:

Figure 1

A Conceptual Model of interconnected protective mechanisms specific to Indigenous Coming of Age That Support Youth Wellness.



Note. Pathways to youth wellness such as the embodiment of self-continuity, self-awareness, and empowerment, are nested within and facilitated by protective factors including support networks and being part of something bigger. These in turn, are nested and embedded more broadly within coming of age teachings.

In their systematic review of literature specific to Indigenous youth in the circumpolar north, Petrasek Macdonald et al. (2013) identified more than 40 protective factors related to enhanced mental health and linked them with causal pathways that directly protect and increase resiliency. Our findings support our position that Indigenous coming of age teachings for youth in urban environments present opportunities to enact culturally specific protective factors and in turn,

cultivate pathways to wellness. This aligns with the literature on culturally centered protective factors in that they contribute to supportive social environments, they enhance self-esteem and self-confidence, they foster self-reliance, and they enable individuals to participate in their culture (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; McIvor et al., 2009; Petrasek Macdonald et al., 2013).

Indigenous Coming of Age as Performative

To say that Indigenous coming of age is performative is to say that a cultural Indigenous adolescent identity is not fixed but constructed, dynamic, and evolves over time. Judith Butler describes performative as being the way that actions (re)produce a series of effects (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). This differs from performing, which more simply, is the enactment of these actions (Big Think, 2011). Indigenous coming of age can be considered performative in that it consolidates an impression of *becoming,* and in turn *being* an Indigenous adult. (Re)connecting to coming of age teachings in this way suggests that "being Indigenous" is different from merely having Indigenous ancestry, much like the gender assignment of *being a* man or *being* a woman can be vastly different from one's assigned sex at birth. It is in the "doing" of coming of age that one aligns with Indigenous as a way of being.

Guidance through the "being" or "becoming" is a crucial function of coming of age rites of passages and ceremonies (Markstrom & Iborra, 2003). An Indigenous coming of age is unique not only regarding the traditions specific to each Nation but is also a reminder that becoming an Indigenous adult reinforces *Indigenous* as it has been shaped over time. Celebrating the ways that traditional teachings adapt and evolve over time is a decolonial act that resists fatalistic narratives suggesting that "traditional" is synonymous with the past, and should therefore be relegated there (Goeman, 2008; Risling Baldy, 2018). To illustrate this, knowledge holders spoke of this specifically with the young people in mind, noting that it is the essence of the teachings that is crucial, not necessarily the mode of transmission. One knowledge keeper shared during the knowledge holder's dinner the following reflection:

> Father would wake us at night to get berries from the juniper bush, in the dark … Can you duplicate that in an urban environment? It's how you learn to navigate in the dark, [how you] trust your response in this.

The knowledge holders who carry the responsibility for passing teachings on this hold a huge amount of power, because in asking young people to accept *these* teachings and *this* way of being, they are shaping the lineage of this knowledge. The importance of the right teacher or mentor was emphasized by one knowledge holder who shared:

> [There is the] "crabs in a bucket" syndrome … . Some people are righteous about this … [the right way and the wrong way to do things]. "You aren't doing it right" … [they criticize] rather than [give] gentle teachings about how to be Indigenous …" (*knowledge holder, young women's sharing circle).*

Criticizing one's path risks policing a young person's coming of age journey through potentially harmful interventions like lateral violence, racism, or other oppressions that work against (re) connecting youth to their teachings. Offering teachings in gentle and culturally safe ways, take for example, the drumming, beading, and singing that youth identified as being important or meaningful, can help youth to build strong foundations from which they can learn about their Indigenous ancestry and history in empowering and gentle ways in their own time.

Returning to Risling Baldy's (2018) "embodied decolonization," we can understand how coming of age ceremonies and teachings resist colonial structures that seek to reinforce a deficit-based perspective on the "performance" of being an Indigenous youth. Instead, they work to (re)connect to celebrations that strengthen relationships within themselves, their families, and their communities. Indigenous coming of age teachings, as defined by knowledge holders, Elders, and the youth who receive them, thus become spaces to disrupt the harmful narratives that are situated in discourses of inequity, subjugation, oppression, racism, and marginalization. The resistance thus is to be strong, to be healthy, to have a voice, and to be alive. This is why we must advocate for a culturally centred, safe, and appropriate coming of age for Indigenous youth. It is precisely because the enactment of these rites of passage holds within it the power to (re)write and (re)right the narrative of adolescence for urban Indigenous youth in care.

Limitations

Throughout this project, we have worked to honour narratives from all the participants who speak from their own Indigenous identities, places of residence, and families of origin. However, we recognize that the stories and conversations shared are specific to urban Indigenous youth in foster care in Victoria, BC, and are shaped by the landscape of Vancouver Island. Because coming of age teachings flow from relationships to the land, youth workshops in different territories and their subsequent findings, will be shaped by teachings informed by those landscapes and their unique histories.

In doing this work, we were made aware that the coming of age experience for Indigenous LGBTQ2S+ youth is unique. We felt that our findings did not adequately represent their voices, but we are hopeful that future work in this area will involve honouring those voices specifically and ensuring that their narratives are held up high alongside others.

Conclusion

Much of the literature on Indigenous coming of age and coming of age more generally focuses on the multi-staged transition to adulthood and the cultivation of self-identity. Our findings from the youth workshops and the knowledge holder's dinner suggest a much deeper opportunity for coming of age to be a culturally appropriate positive action initiative (i.e., intervention) for Indigenous youth. Coming of age is a natural process that all youth will pass through in one way or another

on their journey to adulthood, and the absence of guidance and wisdom can steer this initiation process towards harmful paths (Sullwold, 1998). This goes beyond a high-level understanding that connecting to culture is protective for health and wellness (e.g., Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; Reading & Wien, 2009; McIvor et al., 2009) and towards an understanding that the provision of culturally centered coming of age ceremonies and rites of passage can nurture more complex emotions such as those embedded in our findings. By celebrating and honouring youth coming of age, communities repair the *kobade,* the link in the chain that connects generations and Nations, creating healing pathways for communities across space and time.

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"It's a change your life kind of program": A Healing-Focused Camping Weekend for Urban Indigenous Families Living in Fredericton, New Brunswick

Jason Hickey,[a] Hayley Powling,[b] Patsy McKinney,[c] Tristin Robbins,[d] Nathan Carrier,[e] and Abigail Nash

a PhD, Associate Professor, Faculty of Nursing, University of New Brunswick
b University of New Brunswick
c Under One Sky Head Start and Friendship Centre
d University of New Brunswick
e University of New Brunswick; Horizon Health
f University of New Brunswick

Corresponding author: Jason Hickey, jason.hickey@unb.ca

Abstract

We present a community-driven research project designed to evaluate an innovative land-based healing initiative – a traditional camping weekend – for urban Indigenous families. The initiative was developed and implemented by Under One Sky Friendship Centre in Fredericton, NB, and involved a weekend-long celebration of culture and community. We gathered data from family members, staff, and stakeholders, and completed a thematic analysis and community review before synthesizing results into a narrative summary. Themes included *Skitkəmikw* (Land), *Cəcahkw* (Spirit), *Skicinowihkw* & *Nekwtakotəmocik* (Community & Family), and *Sakələməlsowakən* (Wellbeing). These connections are echoed throughout the article by quotes from participants that capture the essence of the experience. Our research helps to fill a knowledge gap in this area and supports the limited body of existing literature in demonstrating that community-led, land-based healing initiatives support Indigenous wellbeing in many ways that mainstream approaches cannot. Future work is needed to scale up land-based healing initiatives that provide community-led approaches to health promotion, and to examine the effects of ongoing participation on long-term health and wellness outcomes.

Keywords: land-based healing, Indigenous families, early childhood education, parenting, program evaluation, Wabanaki, Mi'kmaq, Wəlastəkwey, Maliseet

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Introduction

> I NEVER wanted to be an Indian because when I grew up, there was nothing good about being an Indian. I mean nothing. There were no powwows, there were no cultural events, there was no language revival, there were no traditional things. There was none of that. It was sort of like, "well better for you if nobody knew you were Indian." That was the message. So, the message needs to be now so that EVERYBODY should want to be an Indian. We should be shooting for that, not just for Indian kids to be proud of who they are, but for other kids to say, "man I wish I was an Indian." And we could do that. And so, I always say to people they're not empty vessels; we need to fill those little people up with pride because that doesn't stay empty, in the absence of pride is shame. You need to fill it up with pride. And the sooner the better because we know a lot of that's going to spill out, right? There is nothing more beautiful than a two-year-old smudging except a two-year-old teaching another two-year-old how to smudge. (Mi'kmaq Elder, Patsy McKinney)

It is well documented that Indigenous (i.e., First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) peoples living on Turtle Island (North America) face poorer health outcomes compared to non-Indigenous Canadians. For example, higher rates of chronic illness (Gionet & Roshanafshar, 2013), substance abuse (Sullivan & National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation, 2012), violence (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls [MMIWG], 2019), and suicide (Kumar & Tjepkema, 2011) have all been widely documented. Colonial methods of cultural erasure and genocide have been ongoing for the last 500 years and have created systematic disadvantages for Indigenous peoples, leading to negative health outcomes and inequities across sectors such as healthcare, education, and child welfare. (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015)

Despite the colonial history and continuing structural barriers, a grassroots Indigenous community-driven movement for land-based healing is gaining momentum. Such programs address physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental aspects of healing by gathering Elders, youth, and communities together to reconnect to culture, language, wellness, and traditional methods of being, knowing, and doing on land (note: "land" is referred to throughout the article without using "the" in order to avoid objectification). Lamouche (2010, as cited in Robbins & Dewar, 2011, p. 13) states, "In contemporary society, this break with land is the single most important factor in health problems among Aboriginal people." The importance of place, family, togetherness, culture, and identity are often missing from Western biomedical approaches to healing, yet these are integral to Indigenous health and wellbeing.

Many land-based programs develop around the need to pass on traditional skills, using traditional intergenerational approaches to learning. These cover a broad range of activities, including food preparation, hunting and skinning, smoking meat, fishing, various forms of camping, canoeing, and more (Alfred, 2014; Lessard & Edge, 2018; Moffat, 2017; Noah & Healey, 2010; Office of Environment and Natural Resources NWT, 2005; Pulla, 2013; Radu, 2018; Ritchie et al., 2015; Stevens, 2005; Takano, 2005; Waldram, 2008). Other programs teach traditional crafts and how to participate in the economy by selling them (Pulla, 2013). Some of these include beadwork, quillwork, leatherwork, basket making, drum making, and sewing (Alfred, 2014; National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health [NCCAH], 2011; Noah & Healey, 2010; Radu, 2018; Stevens, 2005; Stuart & Gokiert, 1990; Takano, 2005). These activities have been documented as highly therapeutic and profoundly healing, providing a sense of identity and cohesion in communities.

Spirituality is an integral aspect for the land-based healing programs we reviewed. This spiritual focus can be implemented and enacted in a variety of ways, including storytelling, prayer, visits to historical sites, learning traditional songs and teachings from Elders and knowledge holders, ceremony, and the use of language (Alfred, 2014; Hare, 2012; Irlbacher-Fox, 2014; Lessard & Edge, 2018; Miyupimaatisiun Chisasibi Wellness, 2014; Moffat, 2017; NCCAH, 2011; Pazderka et al., 2014; Pulla, 2013; Radu, 2018; Radu et al., 2014; Ritchie et al., 2015; Roué, 2006; Stevens, 2005; Takano, 2005). The consistent focus on spirituality is part of reclaiming this aspect of life as an integral part of wellbeing, a focus that is frequently absent in colonial health care.

Evaluations of land-based healing initiatives have reported a range of positive outcomes such as simply having fun, developing an interest in participating in community and land-based activities, renewing the sense of value of land and the role of land and water in culture, feeling happier and less depressed after camps or other programs, and finding a strong sense of self and place in community (Healey et al., 2016; Lessard & Edge, 2018; Moffat, 2017; Noah & Healey, 2010; Pulla, 2013; Radu, 2018; Ritchie et al., 2015; Waldram, 2008). Participants also report experiencing spiritual realization and an "awakening" to the "good life" (Ritchie et al., 2015). Taken together, these initiatives highlight a broad range of potential positive outcomes for participants. However, ongoing evaluation of individual programs is important given the diversity of initiatives reported in the literature, as well as sociocultural differences among Indigenous groups.

In this article we describe an Indigenous community-driven program evaluation research project conducted in partnership between Under One Sky (UOS) Friendship Centre in Fredericton, New Brunswick (NB) and the University of New Brunswick (UNB) Faculty of Nursing. The evaluation focuses on a grassroots land-based healing initiative that was designed and implemented by UOS. Essentially, the initiative is a family camping weekend developed on a foundation of Indigenous worldviews and family-centredness. Our primary research objectives were to explore the perceived benefits of the program, identify potential areas for improvement, and provide data that UOS might leverage to secure sustainable funding.

Under One Sky's Family Camping Weekend

Under One Sky is a non-profit organization that offers programs and services primarily to urban (i.e., off-reserve) Indigenous people living in and around Fredericton, NB. One of UOS' core programs is the Aboriginal Head Start for Urban and Northern Communities (AHS) and early childhood education (ECE) program for Indigenous children funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). Within this program, UOS developed the Take it Outside (TIO) initiative, which is a modified ECE program where children learn outdoors – from land, creatures, each other, and the educators – at least twice per week. Based on input from community members this initiative grew into a culture and land-based healing initiative – the Family Camping Weekend – that aims to foster physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental wellbeing in an outdoor environment. The Family Camping Weekend is delivered about an hour outside of Fredericton, NB over the course of three days and two nights. Families sleep in cabins, a communal bunkhouse, or a prospectors' tent, and participate in cultural activities such as drumming and singing, canoeing, community feasts, medicine walks, storytelling, and ceremony. Elders attend and provide teachings throughout the weekend. All these activities were included in the family camping weekend we evaluated during this project.

Methodology

We adopted Mi'kmaq Elder Albert Marshall's concept of *Etuaptmumk* (two-eyed seeing) in this research (Bartlett et al., 2012) and applied it alongside a community-based participatory research (CBPR) methodology (Baydala et al., 2015; Viswanathan et al., 2004). Applying Western approaches to Indigenous research has the potential to impose inappropriate values on the research and has a legacy of removing ownership and control from the organizations and communities in which the research took place (First Nations Information Governance Centre [FNIGC], 2020). Additionally, research has historically been done *on* Indigenous communities, rather than with them, and prioritized Western knowledge and values above all else. Etuaptmumk acknowledges the benefits that can be gained from combining multiple perspectives and recognizes the value in different ontologies and epistemologies (Martin, 2012). We enacted this approach from the outset of the project by forming a diverse team and regularly questioning decisions, interpretations, etc., from our multiple perspectives. CBPR is a "Western" methodology that aligns with principles of OCAP®, Etuaptmumk, and Indigenous research because of its focus on creating positive social change in

partnership with organizations and communities (Wallerstein et al., 2018; Viswanathan et al., 2004). In this project, CPBR enabled us to undertake a rigorous program evaluation that was responsive to the needs of the community, open to our multiple ways of thinking about, and doing, research, and where the primary focus was community benefit.

Planning

We formed a project advisory group (PAG) of stakeholders, which included the Executive Director of UOS (a Mi'kmaq Elder), a non-Indigenous researcher of European ancestry from the UNB Faculty of Nursing, an Indigenous family member of Wəlastəkwey ancestry, representatives from PHAC of Inuit and European ancestry, and the Director of a second Atlantic region AHS Program of Inuit ancestry. Four bi-weekly meetings were held during the planning phase of the project to inform the research process. This process included drafting a logic model (Public Health Ontario, 2016) in order to identify inputs, activity outputs, and desired outcomes, and to provide a framework for evaluation. We organized outcomes in the logic model according to the six pillars common to the 134 AHS Programs across the country: Culture & Language; Health Promotion; Nutrition; Education and School Readiness; Parental & Family Involvement & Community; and Social Support.

Concurrently, we formed a research support team consisting of four undergraduate nursing students. Three of the students were Indigenous, identifying as Wəlastəkwey, Cree, and Métis and a fourth chose to identify as a settler. The research support team was mentored by the UNB researcher and Executive Director at UOS. To facilitate relationship building, the students volunteered at the AHS program during the project development to learn about the program, get to know family members, and assist with educational activities.

We obtained ethics approval from the Faculty of Nursing's Research Ethics Committee and the University Research Ethics Board (#2018-101). The study also underwent community review by the PAG in keeping with the Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network's (UAKN) Guiding Ethical Principles (UAKN, 2016). OCAP® principles were maintained throughout the project (FNIGC, 2020). We honoured family members' contributions throughout the project, and to facilitate their participation, by providing grocery cards valued at $25, and by paying for childcare and transportation expenses when necessary. We provided a gift of tobacco, considered a sacred medicine in Wabanaki territory, to the Elders who participated to honour their wisdom. The gifting of tobacco "is done to ensure things are done in a respectful or good way" (Lavalleé, 2009, p. 21). These honoraria and expense reimbursements are consistent with UOS' guidelines.

Recruitment and Participation

The Executive Director at UOS identified potential participants. The primary participant pool included families with children in the AHS program. We also recruited stakeholders who were involved in the AHS program and familiar with the family camping initiative. In total, five family members and 14 stakeholders participated in the research.

We recruited family members by sending a letter home with children to share with their caregivers explaining the research project and inviting them to participate in the Family Camping Weekend and the associated research project. Letters were sent home with 11 children and five families indicated their interest in attending the camping weekend. All five families who responded to the invitation also indicated their interest in participating in the research, although participation was not a requirement to partake in the initiative. A member of the research team contacted these families prior to the event, explained the project in detail, and obtained verbal consent. We reviewed consent forms at the event with each participant and obtained written consent. Student researchers also contacted 14 stakeholders, including UOS staff, Elders, members of the PAG, and others with knowledge of the initiative, by phone or email, to invite them to participate in the study. Those who agreed provided verbal or written consent during a follow up interview.

Four families (five parents and nine children) attended the event, along with an Elder, five staff members, four student researchers, and the nurse researcher. The families identified as either Wəlastəkwey or Mi'kmaq and so for the remainder of this article, where applicable, we will refer to the group as Wabanaki, under which Wəlastəkwey and Mi'kmaq commonly identify (Mi'kmaq-Wolastoqey Centre, 2020). Table 1 outlines the contributions of the people involved in this project. Ongoing involvement of such a diverse group throughout all stages helped us to maintain Etuaptmumk and ensure our decisions were based on community priorities.

Table 1
Contributions of Those Involved in the Project

Contributing Group	Contributions
Family members (n = 5)	Attended camping weekend Provided data Gave feedback on results
Project Advisory Group (n = 6*)	Planned project Some provided data (n = 5)
Stakeholders (n = 14**)	Some attended camping weekend (n = 5) Provided data Some gave feedback on results (n = 6)
Research team (n = 6***)	Planned and implemented project Collected data (n = 5) Analyzed data Shared results with family members and stakeholders

*includes one family member
**includes five members of the PAG
***includes one member of the PAG

Data Collection

We interviewed each family member over the phone prior to the excursion to complete a participant information form. Questions consisted of demographic data and a short questionnaire asking: why they chose to attend the Family Camping Weekend; what their definition of family is; how the initiative benefits their family; and what needs they feel the initiative addresses. Demographic information for the family member participants is presented in Table 2.

At the Family Camping Weekend, we provided participants with journals to record their thoughts over the weekend. The four undergraduate research assistants and the researcher who attended the Family Camping Weekend compiled their own feedback and observations at the end of the event. We chose not to directly collect data from participants during the initiative because the PAG felt it would take away from the families' experiences.

One week after the Family Camping Weekend, we held a research circle with family members at UOS. The research circle began with a smudge, and a traditional object (hand-carved turtle) was used as a talking stick. The research circle was audio-recorded and later transcribed for analysis.

Table 2

Demographic Data for Family Members

Characteristic	Descriptive Statistics
Age	Mean: 28 years old
Gender	5 females, 0 males
Ethnicity	4 Indigenous, 1 non-Indigenous
Employed	3 employed, 2 unemployed
Education	Completion of high school -post-secondary
Approximate Monthly Income	Mean: $1961.50
No. of Children	1–4 per family
Family structure	3 two-parent families, 2 single-parent families

After the Family Camping Weekend, we arranged conversations with stakeholders to discuss their perspectives on the initiative. Conversations occurred either at their homes, place of work, or over the phone, depending on their preference, and were audio recorded. We asked stakeholders about their relationship and involvement with the AHS program, how they see the program and land-based healing initiative benefiting families, what needs the initiative addresses, the challenges it faces, and areas for improvement.

Data Analysis

We began by uploading data from the journals (n = 4 family members), research circle (n = 5 family members, 4 student co-researchers, 26 pages), and interviews (n = 17,108 pages) to nVivo12 (qualitative data analysis software) for analysis. We then used framework analysis to identify themes. Framework analysis is a structured approach to qualitative analysis where a team-based approach can be used (Furber, 2010). Each member of the team began by coding a common transcript using the following two questions to guide their analysis: What are the benefits of this initiative for families? How could the initiative be improved? We purposefully took an inductive approach to analysis at this stage because the PAG indicated an interest in identifying unintended outcomes (i.e., those not necessarily contained in the logic model). After coding the initial transcript, we met and collaboratively identified initial themes and organized these into a coding framework. We then divided the remaining data amongst the student co-researchers who applied the framework to the remaining transcripts. About halfway through this process, we met again to review coding and make any necessary adjustments to the framework. We then completed coding and drafted a summary of the results. We also conducted a second round of deductive coding to label all instances where participants referenced specific outcomes from the logic model.

Etuaptmumk was an important part of this process; as we compared our initial codes, we had long discussions about the meaning behind the labels we applied and shared our perspectives on how we felt these connected (or did not connect) with participants' experiences. For example, one of the student co-researchers is familiar with local culture through lived experience. She was able to give background and context to expand the team's understanding of the data. The other students were able to broaden that perspective by sharing knowledge rooted in their own unique backgrounds. We consistently raised questions about each other's analytical choices in a spirit of inquiry, rather than criticism. This approach, in addition to follow-up engagement with participants, enabled us to honour their knowledge while applying a typically Western approach to data analysis.

After preliminary analysis was complete, we organized a community meal with staff and participants to present the results, seek feedback, and discuss next steps. This was an important part of our CBPR approach because it brought the community back into the research process. The Executive Director of UOS gave feedback throughout the analysis. However, this aspect of the research was the most removed from the community. Feedback from the engagement event helped us to better understand the results and particularly what aspects were most meaningful for the community. Thus, we were able to maintain our focus on benefit to the community and re-establish the community's role as driving the project. We incorporated feedback from the engagement session into our analysis, which we present here as a narrative synthesis. Family members and UOS staff reviewed this article, gave a final round of feedback, and approved our request to publish prior to submission.

Psiw-ətе ntələnapemək (All My Relations): Results

The overarching message from participants was exceedingly positive. Although we will not present the logic model outcomes in detail here, the most commonly referenced outcomes were: rediscovering a connection to land; opportunities for parents to engage in traditional activities with their children; coming to see being outdoors as a positive experience; opportunities to participate in traditional activities; and improvement and regaining of cultural knowledge. The success of the Family Camping Weekend can be seen in that *all* outcomes from the logic model were organically referenced in the data (i.e., we did not purposefully ask about any specific outcome). Detailed results from the model were provided to UOS and may be made available upon request to the author.

In presenting this thematic analysis, we have relied heavily on participants' own words with minimal rephrasing or interpretations. Rowett (2019) writes that using direct quotes from participants and interviewees honours Indigenous voices when researching alongside communities. Even with the use of extensive quotes it is difficult to replicate participants' emotional responses when reflecting on this activity and the AHS program in general. There were moments of overwhelming gratefulness, tears, laughter, and a sense of relationship and togetherness in the research circle. The primary themes identified during analysis are described in detail below and include *Skitkəmikw* (land), *C*əcahkw (spirit), *Skicinowihkw* and *Nekwtakotəmocik* (community and family), and *Sakələməlsowakən* (wellbeing; feeling strong in myself).

Skitkəmikw (Land)

Being in nature facilitates children's and families' understanding of the relationships between all things. For example, one Elder participant says,

> It's nice for the kids to understand that they're related to the standing people: the trees. They're related to the insects that are on the ground. They're a part of everything that is there, and everything that's out there is a part of them.

Through the Family Camping Weekend, children and family members built on their relationship with nature. The way nature is referred to by participants implies nature is an active, living entity, the first teacher, a companion, and one who shares wisdom and provides support. By interacting with land, children and parents learn valuable skills and lessons. Many of these cannot be experienced in the classroom because of the disconnection with the natural world and limited opportunities to engage with Mother Earth. As an Elder explains,

> … these certain ones, are going to help us save the planet. I mean, we're destroying this planet as adults, and these guys aren't like that. They want protection, they want to see the plants, they want to see the animals, they want to know that a rabbit has a house, just as a deer, or a moose, or a bear. They're non-judgmental, and to me, that's the most

> amazing part. We haven't restricted their learning outside, we haven't. Inside, we have, it's controlled. Outside is not as controlled.

Families and staff reported positive changes in their children when out on land, such as increased focus and attention, physical benefits and fitness, and improved behaviour. Two families had children living with autism and noted improvements in their social involvement and that the Family Camping Weekend helped to decrease their "flight risk." Families also discussed the way their parenting changed from "micromanagement" to "freedom" for their children. They felt confident and comfortable allowing their children to experience their environment when on land compared to urban settings. One participant makes a point that being outdoors, where children and parents become comfortable and feel safe, parents are less protective and more relaxed about their parenting. This in turn allows children to be more creative and imaginative. A family member highlights this comfort:

> Just being outside back in the woods, like they were happy as can be running around playing … Usually we are hesitant to bring [our son] anywhere because he's autistic and he's a flight risk. But out there he stays within the boundaries and we let him explore … and he just loves it, it's just the freedom out there … Cause when we're here within the city … it's like micromanaging their movements and they have to be constantly monitored and you can tell it takes a toll on them too … when we're out there at the campground … we could cut those ropes loose a little bit and just let them go and they love that freedom.

The support UOS provides allows parents to focus on their families' experience, which in turn fosters their connection to land – *Skitkəmikw*. As one government stakeholder highlighted, this activity gives participants an opportunity to experience "their traditional unceded territory." Land, in a traditional sense, is far more recognizable outside of the concrete and harsh angles of the city.

Cəcahkw (Spirit)

Families discussed their spiritual connection to land deepening through their participation in the TIO program and Family Camping Weekend. They came to see the outdoors as a positive experience and began to align themselves with the cycles of earth. One staff member talks about connecting with "the flow of things" and natural processes in life and how this connection can help ground and center one's self:

> Somebody came up with a quote last summer, "it's not dirt, it's Mother Earth," and it's all fertile and they get to see the whole cycles of rebirth and decay and the quietness of winter and everything sleeping and then everything coming alive again. From an Indigenous worldview, that's spiritual. You see yourself as a part of the circle, you are integral to it, and that's the best place to get to that, I think.

It was clear that this type of connection to one's spirituality is more easily fostered on land. Another staff member explained:

> That's who we are, so we are connected to the land, we have always had a strong connection to the land and that is the spiritual, that's what the spirit is. I think it's how we present ourselves … how we stand in who we are … You can't get any more spiritual than that because we understood our place and … you can't do that in these institutions inside. (Staff member)

One morning, the adults had a chance to participate in a pipe ceremony while their children ate breakfast at the lodge. During the ceremony we had some animals pay us a visit. After receiving teachings about the pipe, and doing the ceremony, we all stood at the edge of the lake and a participant sang the Wəlastəkw song to our backs as we offered tobacco to the water. While doing this, an eagle flew overhead, and a moose stepped out of the forest to witness the end of the ceremony and carry our prayers as one participating family member describes:

> Connecting back with mother nature, that was amazing; being able to be out there and reconnect with Her and you know, the spirit animals that came to visit us when we were having the pipe ceremony, that was powerful. It shows that they're listening. And seeing the eagle; they say he flies closest to the sky, closest to the Creator, so all those prayers that you guys had or that we said there, he came and brought them up to the Creator …

Other participants discuss the ways in which family members connect with traditional ways of being and highlight the important connection between language, spirituality, and wellbeing that is promoted by this initiative. One staff member explained:

> It's hard that the families we are serving are urban Aboriginal and they may not have access to the language or the culture anywhere else but Under One Sky. So, when you take it outside it allows you to apply some of that culture in a way that you can't inside of a classroom. I think it is an amazing opportunity to learn more about their language and ceremonies, they have done medicine walks, hikes, smudging, just learning the Indigenous *Maliseet* [exonym of Wəlastəkwey] names of animals and plants and even the history behind it.

Staff and family members told us that the children often pick up the language faster than their parents. Then they become the language teachers. Learning new words from their children brings a sense of pride and connection back to the entire community's identity, Indigeneity, and spirit. An Elder who participated in the weekend highlights the importance of giving our children the opportunity to teach us:

> The two closest groups to the creator are the ones that just came into the world and the ones getting ready to leave. And if that child is coming from [the] spirit world into this creation, then how come we're not asking them for some advice, especially when they have developed the language? They'll tell us. They're not shy at telling us.

We separated Cəcahkw (Spirit) from the other themes when we organized this narrative, but one Government stakeholder highlights the interconnectedness of people's experiences and outcomes:

> The spiritual piece just gets back to that connection to Indigenous culture, the pride in the culture, the pride in the language, whether it's strengthening or revitalizing, whether it's reconnecting or if it's learning new for some families that may have been away from their culture for quite a long time.

Skicinowihkw and Nekwtakotəmocik (Community and Family)

> Coming together, all of us together doing the family camp. They're building relationships with each other and then they end up supporting each other later in other areas.

Participants discussed how the activity allowed them to reconnect with land, culture, and spirituality as a family, not just as individuals. The families and parents that organizations like UOS serve often have inadequate personal and financial resources to access activities that might be considered unessential, despite their potential benefits. Under One Sky provides gear, transportation, childcare support, activities, meals, and so much more to facilitate the Family Camping Weekend. Therefore, families participate in this and similar initiatives run by the centre with little to no cost involved. The Family Camping Weekend may seem like a brief intervention but for many participants, it provides a rare opportunity to leave the hustle and bustle of life behind, reconnect to Mother Earth, and have time to enjoy one another. An Elder explained how the experience is a rare treat for families:

> It [brings the family] closer together because of this one-on-one time and you know what's too bad about the kids nowadays, like back home it's such a hurry-up life. It's so expensive to live out there in the modern world how everything you [have to] pay for in order for families to survive financially, to pay the rent and their car bills, or phone bills, groceries, and clothing. They both have to work, so they're juggling time and not spending as much time with their children. So just this one weekend being out here, it's like a treat for both of them.

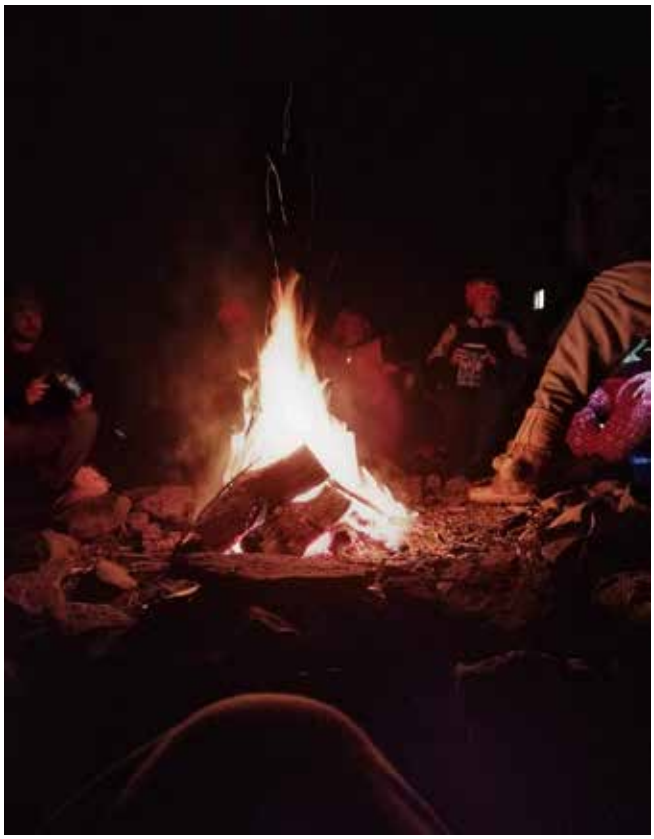
Parents also discussed having time to reflect on their parenting and get to know their children in a deeper way. Many discussed the benefits of "unplugging" when at the Family Camping Weekend. They reported that their children were more engaged with their surroundings, and they were able to leave their electronics at home. As one parent explained,

> It just made me realize how grateful I am for the children I have … and just made me realize how sometimes I can be so hard on them when I don't need to because they're really good kids … I just need to step back and let him be a child … Seeing my kids so happy and being themselves, it just made me realize that I can do a lot better. I can take my kids out a lot more.

Not only did individual families come together and strengthen their interpersonal bonds, families developed and strengthened relationships between other families and staff. The four families built memories together and bonded over a shared cultural, outdoor experience (See Figure 1). They all supported one another over the weekend in many ways.

> … out there at the camp it truly was community. All of us together; we were all like one. We were all willing to help each other any way we can. Whether it be something with the fire, or with the food, or with our kids or something like that. Everybody was pitching in, and that was the most amazing feeling. To be able to have that moment to just *exhale* and know that you had all that support around you was really nice.

Figure 1
Bonding Around the Campfire



In particular, family members felt that being around others who shared a common social and cultural background, and understood each other's daily struggles, was profound:

> … having a friend there who was … knowing how I felt and knew that I'm the only parent with my kids, and just giving me the opportunity to actually experience that with my son. And I'm so grateful because I got to see him grow and expand in great ways. And I wouldn't have been able to do that if I wasn't able to go on the canoe, so that was a big, huge highlight for me was just having someone there and just really supporting me to do those things and knowing that it's not easy for … it's not easy for … singles … its' just [having] that support system. And so, even though I don't have a partner with me and my children, having my really good friends here and supporting me and being that partner for me, is just very nice and I'm grateful for that. So, thank you [other parent].

One Elder commented on how the Family Camping Weekend and the TIO program in general promotes community in a way that mainstream educational systems cannot:

> I think that over the years [dominant society] has taught our residents to be more individual as compared to more community, because in the earlier times it was all community. It was all community-driven, community-purposed, and what I've seen over the passage of time is as our residents leave, they go on to university. It's almost like it's taken the Indian out of them and put individual needs, where cars, houses, and ego-gifts gets its way rather than the individual saying "okay what can I do for my community? It doesn't matter to me

> what education skills I have, unless I share them in the community and say yeah, I want an opportunity to brainstorm." And I find that's the difference with these kids as compared to a child that's going out in dominant society and all he or she has got to do is fend for themselves in that environment. Where these guys it's group; when they see each other and when you see the smiles and they're looking for each other, it's a group! Their ego is gone, they've [forgotten] all about that. It isn't about their needs anymore.

Sakələməlsowakən (Wellbeing; Feeling Strong in Myself)

The following quote from a staff member illustrates the foundation from which this land-based healing initiative was developed, and encapsulates the benefits that families experienced.

> … the whole wellness piece about it being non-Euro-Western is that wellness is not just about your blood pressure and your weight and all of that, it's about how you're feeling and that word I used, Sakələməlsowakən, that gave me goosebumps when, and I don't know if we ever told you that story. Well, when we were developing a wellness program and I said to [our language instructor] "I would like to use a Maliseet term for that," so she went to her Elder and the Elder was like, "what is it you're trying to do?" Because the language doesn't translate word for word, so he had to have a sense, the essence of what we were trying to do so I told [our language instructor] and she went back and she told him and he said "Sakələməlsowakən" and so it gave me goosebumps because it means "feeling strong in myself." And I'm thinking, "isn't that what wellness is?" So, it's not just feeling muscle strong, it's feeling confident, feeling good about your wellness, your family wellness, your community wellness, your cultural wellness …

This type of initiative is critical for the early developmental years of Wabanaki children and their families because of the pride and empowerment it instills. Gaining knowledge about how to be outdoors provides a sense of confidence and empowerment to participants. One mother proudly says, "I know how to make fires and I know how to chop wood," because of her experience during the camping weekend. Another participant recalls that during

Figure 2

Canoe on the Edge of Lake Waiting for Parents and Children

a previous experience learning how to light a fire with flint, "there was one girl – she was not giving up … [when she got it] she screamed she was so excited she made me jump." According to UOS' Executive Director, this sense of accomplishment is important because Wabanaki children need to see their parents feeling good about themselves and family and culture more often. One staff member emphasizes this using the traditional canoe (see Figure 2), whose design hasn't changed significantly in thousands of years, as an example:

> And to understand that what happens [too often] is much of who we are [as Wabanaki] gets minimized and I get so irritated and so pissed off cause you'd say be talking about [something traditional – the canoes for example] and people would go wasn't that clever? It wasn't clever, it was brilliant – we were brilliant, but we never ever get a chance to get portrayed that way and we need to do that with our kids. So, we need to say, "look how brilliant we were in that!" We did that. We learned to do that from observing the environment. We were so connected to the land, to the environment and what it offered, and so that's what we need to [do], get our kids to the place where they're excited about who they are.

Aside from feeling a sense of empowerment from learning new skills and connecting with others, participants also felt a stronger sense of Sakələməlsowakən through immersion in nature and increased physical activity. One staff member discusses the positive, strengths-based approach to physical fitness that emerged on the Family Camping Weekend. She mentions that going to the gym can be challenging and intimidating, but being outdoors enables you to participate in "functional fitness;" because it is unintentional and there is less pressure and fewer expectations around success. This form of fitness allows you to feel well without trying to feel well.

> I think it benefits families – I think as human beings we all have, innately have, this strong connection with nature. And when you are able to experience nature on a regular basis I think it's, you can see a gradual change in a personality and a change in the way that people respond to situations – of a stressful situation, or I just see people able to regulate themselves a little bit better when they foster that connection. And even if, for example the weekend that we did with the whole families, having that space away from the hectic world and the hectic life that we seem to always be living, is really, really helpful with just finding your inner self again and just centring yourself and being able to remind you where you came from and that we are a big ecosystem.

One participating staff member summarizes why initiatives such as the Family Camping Weekend are so important for promoting community wellbeing and recovering from colonization:

> And the general belief is that Indigenous people are in the situation they're in by their own demise [and] if they just got off their lazy asses and go got a job … But what people don't understand is that whole historical trauma piece that [has impacted] multiple generations.

> But what incredibly resilient people to have survived some of what they've survived and they're still putting one foot in front of the other. And they want the same thing everybody else wants, they want a good life. They want a comfortable life, they want the very best for their children, they sometimes just don't have the bits and pieces. And so that's what I wish I could change. We're working really hard around that and I think we have some people that are listening now. I hope. So [taking kids outside], doing the family camp, they're just small things. But it's a start so we build the relationship with them. We take the time to build the relationship and we don't do the, "well you shouldn't be doing this, and you shouldn't be doing that," thing. We just simply build the relationship.

Discussion

This article describes a community-driven evaluation of a land-based healing initiative for urban Indigenous families in the Fredericton area. The research team worked closely with a PAG to design a project that would evaluate the degree to which the Family Camping Weekend meets intended outcomes and whether there are unintended positive outcomes from the initiative. The evaluation was undertaken to meet the community-identified need for systematically collected data that could be used to improve future offerings of the Family Camping Weekend and provide evidence to support proposals to fund the initiative on a long-term basis.

Published evaluations of land-based healing initiatives in the academic literature have reported a range of positive outcomes, from simply having fun (Moffat, 2017) to increased resilience (Healey et al., 2016) to spiritual and cultural (re)awakenings (Ritchie et al., 2015). Under One Sky's Family Camping Weekend similarly produced a broad range of outcomes. Participants reported positive benefits in the AHS program's core areas: culture & language; health promotion; nutrition; education and school readiness; parental & family involvement & community; and social support. Beyond these program pillars, participants spoke of positive experiences related to land, spirit, community and family, and wellbeing. The breadth of positive outcomes encountered by participants of land-based healing programs is due at least in part to the alignment of these activities with traditional values and worldviews (Wildcat et al., 2014).

One of the principles underlying the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) Calls to Action is that Indigenous peoples have a right "to live with dignity as self-determining peoples with their own cultures, laws, and connections to land" (TRC, 2015, p. 184). The Family Camping Weekend, and many other land-based healing initiatives, are grassroots programs run by the community for the community. However, the organizations who take the lead on these initiatives often have to walk in two worlds: participating in a colonial capitalist paradigm in order to secure and maintain funding, while promoting and implementing the Indigenous paradigms that they know to be most beneficial to the community (Freeland Ballantyne, 2014). Despite this tension, land-based initiatives can still be delivered in a safe and meaningful way and achieve broad outcomes.

Our results highlight the holistic nature of this land-based healing initiative. Participants connected deeply with all their relations in a way that is often not possible in an urban setting. The camping weekend became a celebration of the relationship between all things that provided an opportunity to restore participants' sense of wellbeing. Indigenous frameworks and concepts for wellbeing are diverse but have a common focus on balance between multiple aspects of health (Moffat, 2017; Pazderka et al., 2014; Radu, 2018; Ritchie et al., 2015). Land-based healing initiatives simultaneously address many of these different aspects, and because of the range of opportunities to engage (e.g., spiritually, socially, physically, etc.), the same activity can meet different needs for different individuals (Radu, 2018), thus acting to restore balance. Because of this, we feel the healing potential for this deinstitutionalized, land-based approach, and other similar initiatives, must not be overlooked.

Importantly, Indigenous community organizations, such as UOS, are better positioned in many ways to provide health promotion services for the Indigenous population. They have a deeper understanding of what their community needs, an understanding of the cultural nuances required to meet those needs, and the necessary relationships and trust to work with those receiving services. There is substantial evidence for positive health outcomes when communities are empowered to deliver culturally relevant care for individuals and families (Chandler and Lalonde, 1998). However, organizations such as UOS often lack the capacity to deliver these services at scale. This can be due to discriminatory legislation, lack of sustainable funding, and "marginalization of indigenous knowledge" (Blackstock and Trocmé, 2005, p.12). Mainstream support of, and involvement in (rather than leadership of), initiatives like the Family Camping Weekend, is likely to reduce health inequities and provide meaningful and productive opportunities for cross-cultural learning, collaboration, and capacity-building.

Limitations

This study has provided valuable data about UOS' Family Camping Weekend and provided some insight into land-based healing initiatives in general. However, it has several inherent limitations. First, results are based on a single event. This provides a somewhat narrow view of the experience and may limit our understanding of repeated involvement in a sustained program. Also, the sample was small, and participants were likely to be positively biased towards the initiative because they were the people who called for it to be developed. That said, our (i.e., the research team's) experiences in the activity alongside family members, as well as input from stakeholders, corroborates the overwhelmingly positive results. Finally, Indigenous cultures vary greatly across Turtle Island and so what works for us in Wəlastəkewikok may not work elsewhere. That is why land-based programming must be grounded in place, history, and the local way of being, learning, knowing, and doing, and must represent the needs of the local community (Moffat, 2017; Radu et al., 2014). The consistency of positive outcomes across the land-based programming reported in the literature suggests that this approach to promoting wellbeing is broadly applicable.

Recommendations

Based on the consistent positive results from those involved, we recommend that this initiative be offered more regularly throughout the year. We held a knowledge translation event to share preliminary results with the community and attendees were excited to repeat the initiative and suggested doing so once per season. If this is possible, outcome evaluation and monitoring should continue in order to maintain a focus on continuous improvement and obtaining sustainable funding.

More broadly, we recommend scaling up this and similar land-based healing initiatives because of the wide range of potential benefits to individuals, families, and communities. This scaling up could involve both increasing the number of participants per activity, while taking care to maintain its quality, and increasing frequency. The urban Indigenous population across Canada is one of the fastest growing population segments in the country (Harrop, 2018); the scaling up of initiatives such as the Family Camping Weekend is needed. In order to meet growing demand, UOS has begun to offer training for other similar organizations to take their children and families outside.

Finally, federal and provincial governments and associated institutions should endeavour to increase support for community-led wellbeing interventions such as the Family Camping Weekend. Such partnerships have the potential for improving health outcomes for Indigenous people, thus addressing the disproportionate health burdens they experience. We acknowledge that many of these institutions are working towards improved understanding of, and relationships with, Indigenous communities. We also suggest that a priority for this work should involve transferring power and control to Indigenous organizations, and enabling them to take the lead on development, implementation, and scaling up of health promoting initiatives, while providing support and expertise as directed by those organizations.

Conclusion

The following excerpt from a participating family member embodies the essence of why and how the Family Camping Weekend was a success:

> I could just hear my son and his friend out there, and then when he comes in the cabin, he was so proud – "me and my friend were singing mom, and I was dancing!" He said, "hold this drum so I can go out there and dance" and it's dark and he's out there powwow dancing.

Land-based healing initiatives are emerging in response to ongoing trauma caused by colonialism throughout Turtle Island (Radu, 2018). Each program evidenced in the literature demonstrates profound healing, improved community connection, and resilience. Similarly, the Family Camping Weekend benefited families by fostering Sakələməlsowakən (wellbeing; feeling strong in myself) through connecting participants to land, culture, and spirituality. Our data supports the existing literature regarding land-based healing initiatives: being on land fosters wellbeing, spirituality, and a sense of coherence in community. Under One Sky provides integral support to the families involved and creates a supportive environment for families to come together. As Elder Patsy McKinney says, "It's a change your life program."

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Breaking the Cycle of Trauma – Koori Parenting, What Works for Us

Graham Gee,[a,b,c] Raelene Lesniowska,[d] Radhika Santhanam-Martin,[e,f] and Catherine Chamberlain[g,h]

a Victorian Aboriginal Health Service, Melbourne, Australia
b Intergenerational Health Group, Murdoch Children's Research Institute, Parkville, VIC, Australia
c PhD, School of Psychological Sciences, University of Melbourne, Parkville, Melbourne, Australia
d Victorian Aboriginal Health Service, Melbourne, Australia (2012–2018)
e Victorian Aboriginal Health Service, Melbourne, Australia (2010–2018)
f PhD, Victorian Transcultural Mental Health, St. Vincent's Hospital, Melbourne,
g PhD, Indigenous Health Equity Unit, Melbourne School of Population and Global Health, University of Melbourne, VIC, Australia
h Judith Lumley Centre, La Trobe University, Bundoora, VIC, Australia

Corresponding author: Graham Gee, graham.gee@mcri.edu.au

Abstract

Objective: To develop an understanding of parenting strategies used by Aboriginal Australian parents impacted by colonisation and other forms of adversity to break cycles of trauma within families.

Design: "Yarning circles" involving qualitative interviews with six Aboriginal parents were conducted. Parents who identified as having experienced childhood histories of trauma and historical loss were asked about parenting strategies that helped them to break cycles of intergenerational trauma. Interviews were transcribed and independently coded by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal psychologists who worked for an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation.

Results: Parents identified over 100 strategies associated with parenting and breaking cycles of trauma. Some strategies aligned well with research on the protective effects of safe, stable, nurturing relationships. Other strategies focused upon domains of culture, community, and history, and addressed issues such as family violence, colonisation, and the intergenerational links between trauma and parenting. The strategies were collated into a community resource that could be used by other Aboriginal parents.

Conclusion: Parental histories of colonisation and interpersonal and intergenerational trauma can have a significant impact on kinship networks and community environments that Aboriginal parenting practices are embedded within. Parents who identified with having managed to break cycles of trauma reported using a wide range of successful parenting strategies. These strategies serve a diversity of functions, such as parenting approaches that aim to directly influence children's behaviour and foster wellbeing, manage family and community conflict, and manage parental histories of trauma and trauma responses in ways that mitigate the impact on their children.

Keywords: Koori; Aboriginal; parenting; healing; intergenerational trauma

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Introduction

Family, extended kinship systems, and community are cultural foundations for the healthy development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander[1] children that pave the way for successful parenting of the next generations (D'Antoine & Bessarab, 2011). Qualitative research exploring Aboriginal experiences and understandings of healthy attachment and parenting values highlights both diversity among Aboriginal cultures and communities in Australia, and common family values centred around collectivism and interdependence (Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care [SNAICC], 2011). These types of values shape understandings of Aboriginal parenting practices, as do other factors such as the impacts that colonisation and current social and health inequalities continue to have on the structure and functioning of many Aboriginal families and parental wellbeing (e.g., Heath et al., 2011; Jia, 2000). One relatively unexplored topic is the way in which Aboriginal parents impacted by colonisation and other forms of adversity manage to overcome these considerable challenges, and break cycles of trauma.

In recent years, like other Aboriginal populations worldwide, the Koori[2] First Peoples of Victoria in South Eastern Australia have increasingly utilised the related concepts of collective and intergenerational trauma to describe and understand the effects of interpersonal and collective forms of violence on their peoples (Coade et al., 2008; Stolen Generations Victoria, 2008). The Koori clan groups of Victoria suffered brutal and rapid consequences of colonisation, which was rooted in structural violence and resulted in profound loss of life, dispossession of land and resources, fragmentation of Koori families and communities, and the suppression of their languages, knowledge, and cultural beliefs (Barwick, 1984; Howitt, 1904; McKendrick, 1993). Whole clan groups did not survive the ravages of colonisation and many Koori families still hold the stories and remembrance of the massacres and oppression of their ancestors. Aboriginal Victorians report poorer health and social determinant outcomes across most major indicators in comparison to other Victorians (Markwick et al., 2014) and the number of Aboriginal children engaged or placed within the child protection system has reached crisis levels. The number of Victorian Aboriginal children in out-of-home care more than doubled between 2012 and 2017, and is more than 12 times higher than

1 The term Aboriginal will be used throughout this paper to respectfully refer to the many different Aboriginal populations worldwide, including the diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural groups in Australia.

2 As is customary, the term *Koori* (meaning "people" in Eastern and Western Kulin dialect) is used to refer specifically to any Aboriginal person or peoples that identify as belonging to one or more of the traditional Aboriginal language or clan groups located in Victoria. The term "Aboriginal Victorians" will be used more broadly to refer to all Aboriginal peoples living in Victoria.

the rate for non-Aboriginal children (Commission for Children and Young People, 2016; Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). Victoria has the highest rate of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care, and Aboriginal children placed on care and protection orders, than any other jurisdiction in Australia. For many, these statistics signify a structural system that continues to drive inequality and perpetuate cycles of trauma within families and across generations.

Data from Aboriginal health surveys highlight the detrimental impacts of childhood removal from families. Adults who reported experiencing childhood removal from their natural families were twice as likely to report their health to be fair or poor, and more likely to report higher levels of psychological distress, in comparison to those who had not been separated from their natural families (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2002, 2008; Dockery, 2010). These findings suggest an underlying vulnerability to poorer physical and mental health for Aboriginal people who have experienced removal from their natural families. An important question is whether these types of health outcomes are linked in some way to subsequent generations. Data from the 2005 Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey provided correlational evidence consistent with such links (De Maio et al., 2005). The survey found that Aboriginal children living with a primary carer who had been forcibly separated from their natural family were nearly two and a half times more likely to be in the high-risk category for experiencing significant emotional or behavioural difficulties compared to Aboriginal children whose primary carers had not been forcibly separated. Milroy (in Zubrick et al., 2005) proposed that one important part of the intergenerational transmission of trauma resided in the interaction between child-parent relations and disrupted attachment, and Aboriginal children's exposure to high levels of stress and social disadvantage. Similar observations about the way in which intergenerational trauma manifests in the breakdown of families through the loss of parenting roles and skills have been shared over the past two decades (Stolen Generations Victoria, 2008; Swan, 1998).

Despite such health disparities and the historical impacts of colonisation, the resilience of Koori families and communities across Victoria is undeniable. Increasingly, Koori people have begun to write about the different ways in which cultural determinants of wellbeing, and other factors, continue to mitigate the impacts of historical loss and processes of acculturation (Bamblett et al., 2012; Frankland, et al., 2010). More Koori and Aboriginal-led research is needed, however, to develop a greater understanding of the specific ways in which resilience is manifest and transmitted within the context of parenting, parent-child relationships, and histories of trauma across generations.

The international non-Aboriginal research on parenting, now spanning three generations in some studies (e.g., Kerr et al., 2009), provides robust evidence for both continuities and discontinuities in parenting practices across generations. Parental histories of abuse have been linked to a wide range of parenting difficulties (Banyard et al., 2003; Bromfield et al., 2010). Importantly, however, intergenerational associations between experiences of childhood maltreatment in one generation do not inevitably lead to maltreatment in the next. Such findings have prompted efforts to

investigate what types of positive parenting practices are associated with discontinuities in harsh parenting across generations (e.g., Alexander, 2016; Merrick et al., 2013). Parenting characterised by warmth, open communication, low conflict, and consistent discipline has been found to predict the use of constructive parenting by the subsequent generation (Thornberry et al., 2003). Further, intergenerational associations between positive parenting have been found to be mediated by the presence of supportive partners, social support, safe, stable, nurturing relationships, and the development of social competence and academic achievement in second generation parents (Schofield et al., 2013).

However, it is not clear how generalizable these findings are to Aboriginal people in Australia. Milroy (2008) and others have noted that Aboriginal Australian societies involve extended kinship connections, such that child rearing environments can include multiple central caregivers in attending to Aboriginal infants' needs, thereby shaping children's attachment networks, sense of belonging, and relationships to significant others (SNAICC, 2011; Yeo, 2003). Along similar lines, recent cross-cultural, Native American, and First Nations research has argued that attachment theory's dyadic relational focus, as opposed to a communal parenting system focus, is problematic and undermines the proposed universality and applicability of attachment theory to Indigenous parenting patterns (Choate et al., 2020; Keller, 2018).[3]

From an intergenerational trauma perspective, consideration also needs to be given to how the impact of interpersonal trauma (e.g., emotional, physical, or sexual abuse) and historical trauma (e.g., effects of colonisation and cultural discontinuity) might intersect with and influence Aboriginal parenting practices. Currently, to our knowledge, there is little peer-reviewed literature that has specifically examined: *What is it that Australian Aboriginal parents with histories of trauma do in their parenting skills and behaviours to specifically try to break intergenerational cycles of trauma in their own families?* The aim of this paper is to describe a quality improvement project conducted by the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS) in Melbourne, Australia that led to the development of a community resource on parenting and breaking cycles of intergenerational trauma. There was a need for parenting resources based on local Aboriginal knowledge about parenting and healing trauma that could be utilised by Koori and other Aboriginal Victorian families attending the VAHS Family Counselling Services. The parent interviews and the resulting parenting resource were not part of a research project, and were only one of a raft of initiatives run by VAHS as part of a 12-month quality service improvement project that focussed on strengthening trauma informed practice for its staff.

3 The term First Nations will be used throughout this paper to respectfully refer to one of several Indigenous cultural groups in Canada.

Method

This project was conducted between 2013 and 2014, funded by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation,[4] and run through the VAHS Family Counselling Services. Four yarning circles were held with Aboriginal parents,[5] for a duration of 4 hours and 31 minutes in total. As a quality improvement initiative conducted in a community service organisation, formal research ethics approval was not sought. However, ethical processes consistent with Indigenous research methodologies were followed, as outlined below.

First, all quality service improvement activities, including conducting parent interviews and developing a Koori parenting resource, were approved by the VAHS Board of Directors. VAHS is an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, and all Directors are Aboriginal and voted in during VAHS annual general meetings. Second, a reference group was established comprised primarily of senior Aboriginal staff from VAHS and other Aboriginal community controlled services based in Melbourne, all of whom had a shared interest in developing a parenting resource for the Victorian Aboriginal community. The approach taken to conducting the parent interviews and developing the parenting resource was also consistent with community-based participatory action research and principles of Indigenous research methodologies, namely ensuring Aboriginal community control and design of the project, and privileging Aboriginal voices (Rigney, 1995, 2001). This included discussing the draft findings with participants prior to publication, ensuring participants are not identifiable in the publication, and receiving formal approval from the VAHS research subcommittee to submit a manuscript for publication.

The topic of breaking cycles of trauma was deemed highly sensitive by the reference group. Most reference group members belonged to Koori family groups from the Melbourne Aboriginal community, and after lengthy consideration it was decided that the most culturally safe way to recruit potential participants was for reference group members to identify and personally approach local Koori and other Aboriginal parents (including extended kin) whom they knew and thought might be interested in participating. Participation criteria included: parents feeling comfortable identifying as someone who had experienced trauma; identifying with having experienced enough personal healing that they were comfortable talking about healing and trauma recovery within the context of parenting; and parents in each group would need to have pre-existing trusting relationships, and have no current existing conflicts between their respective families.

4 The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation externally evaluated all aspects of the project, see "Social Compass: Training and education evaluations" (healingfoundation.org.au).

5 "Yarning circles" is a term used by some Aboriginal communities to refer to processes of bringing a group of community members together for the purpose of gathering specific information, in accordance with local community and cultural protocols. In a research context, yarning circles share congruence with focus groups.

Participants

Six Aboriginal parents participated in two yarning circles each. Four participants worked for local Aboriginal community controlled services in Melbourne, and two were local community members who worked outside the Aboriginal community controlled sector. Five participants were female and one male, and they ranged between 35–55 years of age. All six participating parents identified with having experienced childhood histories of trauma. This ranged from serious physical abuse, childhood sexual abuse, environments of alcoholism and child neglect, family histories of child removal, and cultural and historical loss involving disconnection from traditional cultural heritage.

Procedure

Parents who expressed an interest in participating were provided with plain language statements and consent forms that described the topic of the yarning circles, how the information would be recorded and used (including consent for a parenting resource to be developed and potential publication of findings), the risks of participating, and safety mechanisms put in place to mitigate these risks. The latter included debriefing following the yarning circles, access to a counsellor if required, and participant confidentiality being protected though anonymity and de-identification of all transcribed data. The yarning circles were co-facilitated by an Aboriginal male and a non-Aboriginal female psychologist, both employed at the VAHS counselling service. Yarning circles were either held at the counselling service or the VAHS community healing centre. The specific aim of the yarning circles was to explore what kinds of parenting strategies the parents used to raise their children to break the cycles of trauma that they, and in most cases their own parents also, had experienced.

A semi-structured tool/dialogical enquiry was devised to explore participants' experiences and perceptions regarding parenting and "breaking cycles" of trauma. Questions were framed broadly and openly in plain language, with no predetermined hypotheses. The yarning circles were designed to capture rich, idiographic data while facilitating rapport, cultural safety, and trust. Participants provided written consent to have their interviews recorded and transcribed. Their experiences and perceptions were explored flexibly and in depth, with minimal prompts. After the yarning circles, debriefing processes occurred and participants were given a $70 shopping voucher as recompense for their participation.

Data Analyses

A qualitative interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach (Smith, 2004) was used to examine how parents made sense of parenting after trauma and breaking cycles by exploring in detail their perceptions and the meanings ascribed to these experiences. IPA has been documented as conducive to capturing Aboriginal family complexities and promoting storytelling as a familiar method of communication within Aboriginal communities (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). The yarning

circles were audio-recorded, transcribed (approximately 150 pages of data), and independently hand coded by the two facilitators and the project co-ordinator (a non-Aboriginal female psychologist working at VAHS). The coding of data was focused on categorising the different types of strategies parents used to break cycles of trauma. An iterative process of coding was used, comprising three phases: "open coding," where strategies were grouped into broad categories; "axial coding," where codes were more narrowly specified; and "selective coding," where codes were arranged according to core themes (Flick, 2009). After independently coding the transcripts, the three coders met and reviewed codings to identify common categories, core themes, and sub-themes of parenting strategies. Comparative coding continued until saturation was reached regarding common themes and selected parenting strategies. When consensus was reached, the parenting strategies listed under core themes and subthemes were reviewed by the participants who provided feedback about the cultural appropriateness of the language used to describe the strategies, and whether findings accurately reflected their views.

Results

In total, 117 different parenting strategies were identified by the independent coders and confirmed by the six parents. These were coded into seven core themes, each comprising two to four sub-themes that reflected different types of strategies employed by parents for different purposes (see Figure 1). The coders and parents both noted some overlaps between themes, highlighting the potentially arbitrary division of some parenting strategies. Overall, however, parents were satisfied with the categorisation of parenting strategies into the respective themes. The strategies included those employed to directly influence children's behaviour, strategies to manage parents' own personal trauma responses, and strategies to navigate interpersonal family and community conflict. Many parenting strategies focused on fostering children's wellbeing, irrespective of histories of parental and family trauma, while other strategies identified were specific to managing parental histories of trauma and preventing the transmission of trauma to their children.

The full list of strategies identified by the parents were compiled into a booklet titled "Breaking the Cycle of Trauma – Koori Parenting: What works for us." Posters (Figure 1) and postcards summarising the core themes and some key strategies were also developed, and along with the booklet, are being used by various Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal agencies in Melbourne, regional Victoria, and other Australian jurisdictions.[6] Each theme with example parenting strategies are described below, using a narrative interpretation of the findings, highlighted with direct extracts from the data. Where appropriate, extracts have been edited with additional information inserted in brackets to clarify content. For anonymity, participants' names have been replaced with numbers.

6 Access the booklet, posters, and postcards at www.vahs.org.au/koori-parenting-resources.

Figure 1

Poster with Themes and Sub-Themes of Parenting Strategies

Theme 1: Safety

The theme of safety emerged throughout all of the yarning groups, with two coded sub-themes: "Safe people and places" and "Safe conversations." Some strategies were explicitly directed towards creating safe home environments, including P1, who said, "I will not have him raising his voice at her." Similarly, P2 told researchers, "I just said 'Look son, … I don't want you around all that drugs and alcohol. I don't have it in my home, and I don't want you exposed to it.'"

Other safety strategies conflicted with parents' own past kinship protocols, but were put in place to guard against family violence:

> P4: But you know how culturally it's in the community … . you acknowledge your uncles and your aunties … and I remember [the father] growling at the kids because they didn't go and kiss Uncle so and so … And I had to say to him "I don't want them to do that … if they're not comfortable.
>
> Moderator: That's a bit of a cultural change … isn't it?
>
> P4: It is a cultural change … He [the father] accepted it. But it was a bit hard for him to, he didn't even think for a minute that they could be at risk, but we have to let our kids … trust their own [feelings around boundaries].

Additional strategies involved decision making about when and how to inform children about the dangers of being abused. This included the need for "talking to our kids about unsafe situations, touching, and secrets," and "telling someone they trust" if anything happened to them, but also the importance of "only talking to our kids about hard truths when they are ready."

Theme 2: Healthy Mind

The theme of a healthy mind identified parents' needs to understand their own relationships with past traumatic experiences and manage recurring trauma responses. Strategies were coded under the sub-themes "Self-acceptance and reflection," "Developing a strong mind," and "Managing trauma responses." Parents stressed the importance of developing self-reflective skills, which included recognising their own resilience, as well as a compassionate acceptance and awareness of familiar recurring trauma responses: "[Sometimes] I'm overstimulated by people and I'll find myself … not listening. I now recognise it and I don't judge myself for it … I just accept that happens and pull myself back" (P5). Another participant explained, "and I guess that's [partly] the way I worked through it, to kind of (understand that) bad things happen to good people" (P6).

Managing trauma responses also featured prominently in the yarning circle discussions. One parent described how the different ages of being a parent could trigger memories of their own parents at that age, and in a similar way, the way in which different ages and developmental periods of their

children could sometimes trigger memories of themselves at that same age or stage. Some parents reported still experiencing flashbacks of early trauma and identified helpful strategies such as "understanding what situations trigger our trauma responses," "trying to observe flashbacks from a distance and not react," and "rehearsing in our mind what we will do when it happens again." However, involuntary memories were not always associated with distress. They could also evoke emotions of pride and a sense of achievement associated with the positive differences that parents observed in their children compared with their own experiences at that same age.

Theme 3: Healthy Emotions

This theme included two sub-themes of strategies titled "positive emotional skills" and "managing difficult emotions." Parents talked about "giving ourselves permission to heal," which was viewed as a pathway to experiencing positive emotions such as hope and optimism, and the value in trying to "see goodness in ourselves and others." Acceptance of experiencing grief was also identified as important, such as the need for "remembering those we have lost, without forgetting those here." Strategies for managing negative emotions were discussed by parents in ways that suggested they needed to be constructively managed rather than avoided.

One parent told researchers, "Mum used to flog us when she was wild … and I'm thinking, if she was calmer, she wouldn't have flogged us. I just go for a drive for 15 or 20 minutes to cool down" (P2). Another explained, "I've got a boxing bag, or I can go to the gym, and I can play basketball. I have alternative strategies I guess, in managing my anger so that it doesn't come inwards, it goes outwards" (P6).

Managing feelings of guilt or regret were seen by some of the parents as particularly challenging. One parent talked about the important but difficult realisation during her younger years that she had inadvertently re-enacted the relationship dynamics of her mother:

> P4: I pretty much copied my mother, as far as relationships, without even realising it back then. Like she married a drunk, and I sought out exactly the same sort of man, and I didn't know it at the time … [later in the interview] … Is forgiveness a skill?
>
> P3: I reckon, it is.

Theme 4: Healthy Actions

This theme included strategies coded under sub-themes of "self-care" and "communication." Parents acknowledged how difficult it could be to actively practice self-care amidst competing kinship and cultural obligations. However, there was consensus among all parents that self-care was critical for parents with histories of trauma, not only for personal wellbeing but also for modelling to children the need to look after oneself, which in turn enabled effective care of others: "Sometimes I need to

pause and go and be alone for a little bit … just a couple of minutes quiet really helps me to just stop … to take time out" (P5).

Other self-care strategies included trying to "avoid reading and hearing about too much violence and trauma" and "maintaining and reaching out to at least one close friend or connection instead of cutting off." Communication between parents and their children was identified as important, including the need for "being open and honest even about topics we are afraid to raise" and "communicating how we feel to our kids." However, caution about what information to disclose to children was also highlighted, including the importance of "being careful about how much of our own trauma we share with our children."

Theme 5: Healthy Parenting

Healthy parenting included strategies coded under sub-themes of "love, respect, and boundaries," "responsible, not perfect" parenting, "allowing and teaching independence," and "guiding without controlling." Many of these strategies revolved around negotiating difficult tensions that parents experienced as a result of their own histories of trauma. Parents highlighted the tension between being overprotective of their children due to past traumatic experiences and understanding the need to allow their children to make mistakes. P4 shared the following:

> Another impact is that we over-parent. We want to make everything alright, want to try and fix everything for them. It's like you become controlling … without realising it. [We] need to let them make their own mistakes and learn from them.

Parents discussed strategies to counteract being overprotective, such as reminding themselves "not to over-parent and overcompensate" and working on letting their children "stand on their own two feet." Similar parenting tensions were evident in discussions about the difficulties of setting boundaries for their children that enabled protection but also freedom, and how their own past traumatic experiences contributed to these difficulties: "I always felt that he (the participant's father) taught me that the world was dangerous … so I literally cannot stand having the kids out of my vision" (P4). Another participant told researchers, "but I had to stop and realise that (as the) kids are growing up … you have to let go, cut those apron strings, just hope to god that your teaching … is going to come into play" (P1).

Parents spoke about balancing respect and boundaries, identifying the importance of "giving our kids more responsibility," "being able to say no to our kids and follow through," and "balancing affection with firm but fair discipline." There was consensus among the parents that each had gone through a significant process of healing and learning to re-parent, and that this had involved making mistakes with their own children that were based on re-enacting dysfunctional or abusive behaviours. However, parents through their own healing processes also appeared to have come to terms with making mistakes. The sub-theme "responsible not perfect" highlighted parents' self-reflection about

"taking responsibility" and "acknowledging our efforts and achievements" rather than striving for perfection or denying or denigrating themselves for making mistakes. As one participant stated, "It's part of your healing to … acknowledge your downfalls."

Parents also spoke about how important it was to re-establish connection with their children after making mistakes, which included "being able to own our mistakes and say sorry to our kids," "letting our kids see we are human and make mistakes," and "talking about our regrets with our kids as they get older."

Theme 6: Healthy Culture and Community

This theme included strategies coded under the sub-themes "maintaining and renewing culture" and "dealing with community violence." Some of the participating parents had a continuing connection to their cultural heritage, while others, due to past histories of child removal or historical dislocation from their traditional country, described hard fought and ongoing efforts to reconnect with culture. A common issue discussed by the parents was how important it had been to not only work hard on cultural renewal for themselves, but to also ensure their children were rebuilding and strengthening their Aboriginal identities.

Some of the parents discussed the importance of Aboriginal community controlled organisations as sites where they had been able to re-connect with community, learn more about their family history, and strengthen connections with the Koori community. Strategies to support their children to maintain or renew culture and identity included being able to "identify our cultural values," "understand our cultural responsibilities," "renew cultural knowledge and practices," "connect the kids with elders," and "encourage our kids to have cultural experiences that we missed out on."

Several challenging parenting issues emerged with regards to cultural loss. For example, some parents experienced difficulty knowing how and when to disclose to their children the history of violence suffered by the family during early waves of colonisation – including massacres among some of the parents' families – in ways that would not overwhelm the children and cause too much distress. As P4 explained:

> I educated my older ones much more than I did my youngest, and one of the reasons I [hesitate] is I know how much it hurt and how angry [the eldest] is now. How do you educate them about what really happened without damaging them? How do you help them heal from that truth? And that includes racism as well, because when they experience racism, it's like a death.

Another challenge parents identified was that while feeling a sense of pride as their children's cultural identity was strengthened through performing dance and ceremony, for example, it could also trigger personal grief and loss: "I feel so proud and happy for them, but (sometimes it) also

triggers my own sense of cultural loss. I (have to) meet the experience of what I missed out on with compassion" (P5).

The sub-theme titled "dealing with community violence" reflected the parents' need to recognise and respond to the impacts of colonisation, such as cultural dislocation, the forced removal of children from their natural families, and ongoing effects of poverty and adversity within their community. Parents talked about the need to actively resist community lateral violence, referring to unhealed trauma acted out in violence and aggression towards one's own community. Examples of this included having one's cultural identity denigrated by one's own community (e.g., "you're not a real Black"), as opposed to racism from non-Indigenous Australian society. As P6 explained during one of the yarning circles:

> It's not just the fights, it's the shallow conception of one another. I remember the days when we [the community] were so united in a lot of things … [Now] you've got to accept that we can be our own worst enemy.

Theme 7: History and Education

This last theme identified strategies coded under sub-themes of "joining the dots" and "breaking the cycles of trauma." Parents talked about the importance of making sense of the present by understanding the past, and the need to maintain a clear purpose and intent on breaking the cycle of trauma. This helped parents to create meaningful links between traumatic events in the family and across generations. One parent linked her own parent's removal with a loss of cultural knowledge and family identity, which in turn impacted on her own stable sense of self and belonging:

> Because my mum was removed, she didn't tell us a lot when we were young … you only had to look at my Mum to know she was Aboriginal but … she never talked about nothing while we were growing up and maybe that was one of the reasons, because I was torn between two worlds, and that's when I went off the rails.

Another parent stressed the importance of reflecting early in her parenting years about the way in which her parents' trauma had affected the whole family, and using that insight as a basis for making strong, deliberate parenting decisions: "We chose the other path … the opposite direction … (one thing) I swore I wouldn't do, and I haven't done, is the kids would never go without food" (P2).

Parents emphasised the importance of going through a grieving process to help break the cycles of trauma and "if possible, accepting the loss of what we might have missed out on as a child." Other important strategies identified included "acknowledging even small breaks in the trauma cycle," "learning from other parents in situations we are unsure about," and "not protecting abusive partners/parents."

Discussion

This paper presents findings from yarning circles involving Aboriginal parents from an urban Victorian Aboriginal community that focused on parenting strategies used to help break cycles of intergenerational trauma within their families. Parents identified over 100 strategies that served a diversity of functions, ranging from parenting approaches that aimed to directly influence children's behaviour and foster wellbeing, to managing family and community conflict, to managing parents' histories of trauma and trauma responses in ways that mitigated the impact on their children.

The strategies identified by the parents under the "safety" theme are consistent with international recognition of safety as a universal need and right for children (World Health Organization, 2005), and the emphasis on safety as a foundation for Aboriginal children's healthy development and wellbeing (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation, 2013; SNAICC, 2015). Safety strategies that aim to create safe home environments and avoid exposing children to overwhelming negative emotions, conflict, and drugs or alcohol, are arguably parenting practices that most parents would aspire to. Other strategies discussed by parents were more trauma specific, such as talking to children about "unsafe situations, touching, and secrets." Arguably, this reflected salient attempts by parents to try and ensure their children did not experience interpersonal victimisation in ways similar to some of the parents.

Under the "healthy mind" theme, it is interesting to note that the strategies identified by parents are primarily focused on managing their own distress and trauma responses. Many of the strategies are practical and skill-based, suggesting that the parents interviewed already had a relative breadth of experience in exploring strategies and processes related to healing trauma. Such strategies could be of benefit to other parents who may be in the early phases of learning how to manage trauma-related distress.

Consistent with the broader trauma and parenting literature, strategies in the "healthy parenting" theme were linked to processes of self-reflection and the importance of healing relationships. For example, some parents spoke of their distress at not being able to adequately protect their children in the early years, and of having inadvertently re-enacted trauma that replicated their own experience of being parented (Appleyard & Osofsky, 2003; Cross, 2001; Scheeringa & Zeanah, 2001). At the same time, making up for mistakes and atonement were also prominent themes in the discussions. Most of the parents identified strategies to repair parent-child relationship ruptures and learn from past mistakes. Being able to identify mistakes and subsequently act upon this insight to repair the relationship with the child suggests that the parents interviewed were self-reflective.

It was noteworthy that all of the parents consistently highlighted a propensity for, and an awareness of the potential for, overprotective parenting practices. It is possible that this could have been associated with unresolved hypervigilance-related trauma responses as a result of parents' past histories of trauma, or alternatively, some of the parents may have been living in community

environments where there was a risk for their children being exposed to violence. In this context, hypervigilance could be viewed as a healthy, adaptive parental response. What is clear is that the parents interviewed were acutely conscious of the potential for overprotective parenting, and they identified efforts to manage anxiety (e.g., distraction strategies) and allow their children autonomy and opportunities to make mistakes and grow.

Some of the strategies identified under the theme "healthy culture and community" specifically addressed parents' recognition of community dysfunction and lateral violence. For example, some parents spoke of the need to protect children from close family members who were misusing alcohol or drugs and living in home environments that were a potential threat to their children's safety. These types of protective strategies have received less attention in the broader social and emotional wellbeing literature, where the collectivist, interconnected nature of Aboriginal kinship networks are generally recognised as sources of resilience and wellbeing (Garvey, 2008; Gee et al., 2014; Swan & Raphael, 1995). However, within contexts of family violence and intergenerational trauma, experiences of interpersonal violation and community violence impact upon family relationships and kinship cohesion. This may be a particularly important issue to consider when supporting Aboriginal parents who have experienced histories of trauma, as their extended kinship networks that would normally provide a strong cultural and relational attachment network may be compromised.

The parenting strategies listed under the sub-theme "maintaining and renewing culture" echo much of the Aboriginal literature on the critical role of maintaining and renewing cultural values, beliefs, and practices in strengthening children and youths' social and emotional wellbeing (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation, 2013; Bamblett et al., 2012). However, some of the strategies touched upon issues less explored in the literature. For example, for those parents who had experienced histories of childhood removal from family and a loss of connection to cultural traditions, attending ceremonies and cultural events could sometimes trigger feelings of grief and loss. This required parents to constructively manage sometimes conflicting emotions (e.g., pride and joy, and loss), and suggests that understanding and being able to contain or integrate complex emotional states is an important part of parenting for those with histories of trauma. Another theme less reported in the Aboriginal parenting literature was the difficulty some parents experienced in negotiating the best way to talk about significant cultural and historical losses with their children, such as past massacres. There was concern about how this information should be shared by parents, and how their construction of personal and intergenerational trauma narratives could potentially shape children's responses in important ways. One parent's metaphorical use of the word "death" signified how deeply they felt that the psychological and emotional wounds of racism could impact identity and sense of self. It was clear that with regards to their own children's developing sense of self, the parents queried to what extent the way in which histories of trauma were communicated might hold similar power. Drawing parallels with the Holocaust survivor literature, Duran et al. (1998) have similarly written about the way in which some Native Americans have experienced interpersonal processes that included an over identification with parental suffering and the compulsion to share in ancestral pain.

The parenting strategies coded under the theme "history and education" appeared to serve two functions. First, for those parents who had been removed from their natural families or had experienced a severance to cultural heritage, re-contextualising their histories of trauma within the broader context of colonisation helped them to reconstruct meaning around past traumatic events, potentially strengthening their Aboriginal identity in the process. Similar research involving First Nations peoples in Canada has documented that re-contextualising trauma within the larger context of colonisation helped trauma survivors reorient themselves toward renewed, meaningful engagement in the world (Gone, 2009). Sinclair's (2007) description of the Sixties Scoop, for example, documented some of the ways in which First Nations adults adopted as children were able to find healing through "acculturating to their birth culture and contextualizing their adoptions within colonial history" (p.5). Second, the parenting strategies in this theme highlighted that constructing meaningful links between their own histories of trauma, and that of their parents, altered the parents' relationship to both generations' experiences of trauma. It fostered greater feelings of compassion and understanding, and strengthened the relationship with their parents, which it can be argued may have potentially helped heal ruptures between the generations with regards to disrupted parenting patterns. Ing (1990) has written about the impacts of the Indian Residential School systems for First Nations survivors and described some similar challenges that survivors faced in trying to heal the rupture and breakdown of cultural child-rearing patterns. While cautious here not to draw too many parallels between different Indigenous peoples' experiences of colonisation and subjugation, we also note some congruency in the literature about the impact of colonial assimilationist policies of child removal and the impacts on subsequent parenting for survivors among different Indigenous populations.

We believe this project has contributed to the Aboriginal parenting literature and knowledge base in several ways. The first is the development of a community resource. The "Breaking the Cycle of Trauma" booklet and associated resources gather unique perspectives and interpretations of how Koori and Aboriginal parents make sense of parenting after trauma, and what they do to intentionally break cycles of intergenerational trauma. The themes and strategies to emerge from the yarning circles also strengthen findings from the existing broader Aboriginal parenting literature which has highlighted the importance of parenting processes that involve communication, conflict resolution, and parents managing their own distress (Beatty & Doran, 2007; Robinson et al., 2009; Turner et al., 2007). Finally, our findings highlight the need to be cognisant of the potential impact that socio-cultural and historical factors, and interpersonal and intergenerational trauma can have on the extended kinship, relational, and cultural attachment networks and community environments that parenting practices are embedded within. To our knowledge, the evidence base for embedding these considerations specifically within Aboriginal parenting contexts is limited, and we hope that the parenting resource developed will contribute to this much needed area of work.

There are also limitations with the project findings that need to be considered. First, due to the sensitive nature of the topic, a smaller number of parents were interviewed than originally planned. How generalizable these parenting strategies are to the diversity of Aboriginal cultural groups across Australia is not known. We also note several important sample biases related to the social and cultural contexts of the parents interviewed, including: the underrepresentation of males; the Victorian, urban location the parents reside in (versus remote, rural, or other Australian urban locations); the sexual homogeneity among the parents (all parents identified as heterosexual); and the preclusion of broad representation of the Koori and Victorian Aboriginal community by way of the selective recruitment method used. Some of these limitations are due to the fact that the yarning circles and resources developed were only one small part of a short-term community service quality improvement project, rather than an extensive and formal qualitative research study.

It is also important to note that only parents who identified as having experienced significant healing and recovery from trauma were invited to participate in the yarning groups. We do not know how relevant these parenting strategies are for parents who may have experienced little to no healing from trauma, nor how applicable they are across different phases of healing and recovery from trauma. Coping strategies are multifaceted and the effectiveness or adaptive function of strategies can change over time (Walsh et al., 2010).

One way to build on these findings would be to conduct research focused on identifying the most salient and effective coping strategies for parents who report experiencing little to no healing from past trauma. This is particularly important given that, anecdotally, we know those most vulnerable parents and families in communities are often the most deeply entrenched in crises and more likely to be involved in the child protection system. On that point, we wish to emphasise one important caveat in interpreting findings from this paper. Namely, that identifying effective coping and parenting strategies that help to break cycles of trauma should in no way obscure the urgent need to advocate for, and actively work towards, addressing the systems level change that is clearly required to overcome unacceptable inequalities such as the increasing rates of Aboriginal children in the child protection system.

Finally, we suggest there is a need for community driven, action-based qualitative research that explores the experiences of Aboriginal parents in other social and cultural contexts related to breaking intergenerational cycles of trauma. With regards to the resource developed, it will be important to consider some of the ways that it can be used, and to evaluate its use. We believe there is potential for the findings to be applied across different settings and sectors. For example, the resources could be used: as a community tool for education, training, and development; as a guide for community conversations regarding service planning and family wellbeing; in a therapeutic setting as an engagement tool; and in schools where a trauma informed framework is being used.
In closing, we would like to acknowledge and thank the parents who generously shared their experiences with us so that their knowledge may help other families in their efforts to break cycles of trauma. We also thank the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation for funding the larger project that these interviews and parenting resource were a part of.

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An Interdisciplinary Journal Honouring the Voices, Perspectives, and Knowledges of First Peoples

"No one cares more about your community than you": Approaches to Healing With Secwépemc Children and Youth

Natalie Clark,[a] Jeffrey More,[b] Lynn Kenoras-Duck Chief,[c] Duanna Johnston-Virgo,[c] Sharnelle Matthew,[c] Anonymous,[c] Norma Manuel,[d] and Jann Derrick[e]

a Métis and Secwépemc kinship community healer
b Mohawk and Secwépemc community healer
c Secwépemc healer
d Elder and Secwépemc healer
e Elder and Mohawk healer

Corresponding author: Natalie Clark, nclark@tru.ca

Abstract

This paper shares stories from multigenerational Secwépemc and Indigenous healers (including social work and counselling practitioners) with Secwépemc kinship ties. Each Secwépemc and Indigenous healer works with Secwépemc and Indigenous children and youth in Secwépemcúlucw, the land of the Secwépemc Nation. The work is a form of "ancestor accountability" (Gumbs, 2016), as it is one that is embedded in our kinship relationships and our learning on the land together with our children, family, and Elders. Through the methodological framework of *Steseptekwle* – Secwépemc storytelling – together with Red Intersectionality, these stories are examples of new tellings, or re-storying, of the *Snine* (Owl) story that not only illuminate the ongoing resistance to colonial power, but also of the resurgence and reinstatement of Secwépemc ways of addressing wellness and healing.

Keywords: Indigenous healing; Indigenous child and youth wellness; Secwépemc storytelling

Acknowledgments

Throughout this project and subsequent article writing, we acknowledge the many Elders, Knowledge keepers, those we currently walk with and those who have gone before us. We also honour the Secwepemc children, youth and families we learn from and walk beside. We acknowledge We, a multi-vocal and multigenerational group of Secwepemc and Indigenous healers, would like to begin with a story, and invite you, the reader, to join with us on this journey by reading the *Snine* (Owl) story below. Do not remain absent from this knowing. We write you into this paper with this story.[1]

Owl Story

A very long time ago, a woman who lived in a village gave birth to a baby boy who cried all the time. "If you don't stop crying, I'll leave you outside in the cold and Owl will take you away," threatened the child's mother. It was cold outside, for this was in the middle of winter. The baby boy continued to cry.

Finally, the woman took the child outside and left it there. The child continued to cry. After a while, the child's grandparents who were living with the young woman, heard Owl swoop down and land. Then the child stopped crying. Suddenly, the people realized what was happening, and they dashed outside, just as Owl was carrying the child away. "Hoo-Hoo-Hoot!" cried Owl. "Owl has gone in that direction," the people agreed. They listened until they couldn't hear the Owl any longer.

The people looked everywhere, but they couldn't find the baby boy. In the morning they resumed their search. The brothers of the baby decided to look for him, so they packed what they would need for their trip and started off in the direction that Owl had taken.

The brothers walked and walked until they came to Owl's first camp. They camped the night and started their search again in the morning. Every day the boys travelled in the direction that Owl was flying. When they found one camp, they stayed there for a night and then continued on their journey in the morning. The boys followed Owl from one camp to the next. They searched in the valleys and up the mountains.

Finally after a long journey, the boys came to the first camp where Owl had stayed for a length of time. The little boy was growing older by this time and had killed a mouse; Owl had showed him how to skin it and stretch the hide. He had then killed a chipmunk. Owl, who was the little boy's grandmother, made a bow and arrow for him and showed him how to use it.

1 This version of the Owl story was given to Clark by her Father-in law Johnny Ben Jules from his collection of Shuswap Stories. The Owl story precedes colonization but its use in this context demonstrates the key role of Secwepemc stories in helping us understand the challenges before us. Other versions of the owl story can be found in Teit (1909, p. 698) as told by Sixwilexken of Dog Creek.

Eventually, Owl moved her camp to another place. The little boy, by this time, was able to kill larger deer. Whenever they left their camp, the skins of rabbits and deers were left stretched out in the sun to dry.

The young boy's two brothers reached the camp and found the stretched skins drying in the sun. They searched and searched around Owl's first camp, but they couldn't find which way Owl had gone. After they circled around the camp, they finally came upon a sign indicating which way Owl and the boy had gone.

Then the boys reached Owl's second camp. They searched around until they found the skins that their little brother had stretched and then they looked for a sign which would show them which way Owl had gone. The boys followed Owl for a very long time.

The little boy was growing up and becoming a young man.

One day while the boys were travelling around, they met their little brother, who was out hunting. They were very happy to meet each other, for it had been a long time since the boy was taken from his home. "Owl is a very smart old lady," said the youngest boy, "she knows everything that happens! I will go home to her now, but in the morning, when I go hunting, I'll go far away and kill a deer which I will leave for her to pack home."

The youngest boy went home to Owl and went to bed. Early in the morning, he walked over the mountain ridge and killed a deer. Then he skinned and quartered it and left it with a tumpline[2] for his Grandmother, Owl, to use while packing the meat home. The boy spoke to the tumpline, "as Owl lifts the pack, I want you to break. Break several times when she tries to lift the meat." Then, leaving the meat and the tumpline, the boy went home.

It was very late in the day when the boy got home. Noticing that he wasn't hungry, the old woman felt sorry for him and said, "Oh, you poor boy, you must be tired, for you have walked a long way." "Yes Grandmother, I am very tired. Would you pack the deer home for me?" he replied.

In the morning, the old lady prepared everything that she would need in order to pack home the meat. She looked and looked for her tumpline, but she couldn't find it. "Oh, you don't need it, Grandmother. I made a tumpline for you and left it on the tree beside the deer," the young man told her. "I'll take my own, if I can find it," replied the old lady. "You don't need it,' insisted the boy. Owl agreed and left for the mountains.

2 Tumpline is "a sling formed by a strap slung over the forehead or chest and used for carrying or helping to support a pack on the back or in hauling loads." Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tumpline. Accessed 16 Aug. 2020.

> The boy waited until he was sure that Owl was far away before he called his brothers. They packed up the best dried deer meat and bundled up some hides. They pressed the packs down so that they could take as much as possible. Taking some bones, the boy placed them on his bed and spoke to them, "when Owl comes home and finds these bones, she will think that it is me. She will think that I was burned to death."
>
> When they were completely ready, they set the house on fire, and then they all ran away. Old lady Owl was far away from her house when she saw the smoke. She flew back home and looked among the ruins where her grandson used to sleep. All that she could find were some burnt bones; Owl felt very sorry!
>
> The boy passed judgment on Owl, "never again will you bother children. If someone dies, you, Owl, will tell them about it. You will deliver messages to the People, but never again will you steal children." The brothers travelled for a long, long time before they reached the home of their parents. The old couple were happy to see their sons, and comforted them after their long journey. (as told by Charley Draney, edited by Bouchard & Kennedy, 1979, p. 42–43)

Situating the Research

The Secwépemc people have been in Secwépemcúlucw – the land of the Secwépemc People – for time immemorial. The Secwépemc Nation occupies a large territory, spanning 180,000 km², throughout the interior plateau of south central British Columbia. Historically, the Secwépemc were a Nation of over 30 communities, or fires. However, due to colonization and colonial genocide enacted through small pox and other diseases, 13 villages were destroyed (Coffey et al., 1990, p. 8). The Owl Story that begins this paper has many versions within the Secwépemc Nation. It has been interpreted by a number of Secwépemc scholars (e.g., Jules, 2016, Shuswap Nation Tribal Council, 2014) to represent the harms done to Secwépemc children and youth by the colonial system of child removal.

A Secwépemc Elder, grandmother, leader, healer, and co-author shares a story of her own journey to working with children that illustrates the Owl story and the removal of children from the Secwépemc community in the 1950s:

> In 1955, '56 … There was a report about these children … where they came in and took five children and what I did was go over there and tried to stop them … I knew the parents would eventually come back so I said, "Can't you just wait for a while?" And they say, "No, because there is no food in the house." And at that time I could not provide and that was really hard. So she made all the arrangements and the saddest thing is that none of those children ever came back, they all died. Suicide, whatever. They never came back home … so from that time on, I became interested (Elder Norma Kenoras).

Colonization is not a thing of the past, it is a regular, active process happening again and again.[3] In fact, Indigenous children and youth are experiencing the "colonial fallout" (Tagaq, 2015) of past genocidal policies as enacted through residential schools and other simultaneous agents of destruction at the same time as they are subjected to unrelenting acts of colonialism through the "etiquette of lies" (Gottfriedson, 2010, p.51) "good intentions" (Blackstock, 2009, p.36) and the logics and interpretations of "best interest" (Blackstock, 2016, p. 297; Kimelman, 1985, p. 29; Sandy, 2011, p. 31). Secwépemc legal and child welfare scholar Nancy Sandy (2011) asserts that this settler-colonial logic of "best interest" through child welfare policies and practices has resulted in the disruption of Secwépemc child safety laws, and the health and wellness of Indigenous children, their families, and their communities.

This paper does not focus on a decolonization of social work or other helping professions. We honour the long history of Indigenous social workers advocating against racism within social work policies and practices (Blackstock, 2009, 2016; Hart, 1999; Reid, 2005; Sinclair & Albert, 2008). The current over-representation of Indigenous children and youth in child welfare systems[4] across Canada today highlights the need for visioning, and for immediate transformation – a transformation that has been called for over and over again by Indigenous social workers and communities and in report after report (John, 2016; National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019; Representative for Children and Youth, 2013; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). The current system of "care" is in fact a form of violence[5] against Indigenous children and youth. In other work we have examined the harms done by state "care" systems (see Clark, 2016b). This paper turns away from the focus on the transformation of social work to instead direct attention to the sophisticated resources we have inside of our Indigenous communities to support transformation for Indigenous children and youth.

Methodology: Our Xqwlewmen (Berry Picking Basket)

> Just as we can turn to the ways that our *stsptekwll* (ancient stories) refract the consequences of our colonial history, we can turn to them for wisdom about how to heal ourselves from being divided, broken into fragments, and colonized. (Ignace & Ignace, 2017, p. 496)

3 draw here on Philips (1989) decolonization of language through resistance of the passive voice as seen in her definition of the word rape; "Raped – regular, active, used transitively, the again and again against women participle into the passive voice as in "to get raped"; past present future-tense(d)" (p. 66).

4 More Indigenous children and youth in Canada have been extracted by child welfare agencies than during the height of residential schools (Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, 2016).

5 Clark defines violence as acts of abuse on the bodies of Indigenous children and youth through colonial policies, practices, and programs, alongside the everyday enactments of this "colonial fallout" of past genocidal polices, on and in their bodies and kinship networks, including non-human relations, through the intersections of grief and loss, physical abuse, sexual abuse, lateral violence, poverty, racism, heterosexism, ageism, resource extraction, and all acts of removal from land and community.

Secwépemc stories, such as the Owl story, provide a form of protection, resiliency, healing, and guidance for the challenges that we are experiencing now, as well as those that are to come (Ignace, 2008). Each story is embedded with the values and laws of Secwépemc society, including how to care for our children (Jules, 2016; Shuswap Nation Tribal Council, 2016). These values include: the value of relationship – *Kweseltnews* (we are all family); the value of individual strength and responsibility – *Knucwetsut* (take care of yourself); the value of knowing and training your gifts – *Etsxe (*vision quest/ coming of age); the value of sharing – *Knucwentwe'cw* (to help each other); the value of humility – *Qweqwetsin* (gratitude for life); and the value of renewal – *Mellelc* (take time to relax, regenerate).[6]

Indigenous storytelling is inherently relational and intergenerational and it is often done by the grandmothers to teach values and lessons (Secwepemc Elder Mary Thomas, 2010). Further, the touch of a grandmother while storytelling is in and of itself a form of healing medicine (Secwepemc Elder Flora Sampson, 2017, personal communication).

This *Xqwlewmen* (berry picking) methodology is rooted in a specific space, *xq'wle `wten*, our various berry picking locations on Secwépemcúlucw. The knowledge shared by the co-authors and healers comes together to co-construct or weave a basket of knowledge rooted in Secwépemc stories, teachings, and practices.

This basket also holds the theoretical and methodological framework of Indigenous intersectionality, or red intersectionality (Clark, 2012, 2016a), an Indigenist feminist and holistic model that follows in the tireless tradition of love, resistance, and resurgence (Allen, 1986; Armstrong, 1996; Maracle, 1988; Zitkala Sa, 1924). Indigenous feminists not only named the violence and harm found in gendered colonial policies, but also the central role of white women and the professionalization of caring within Canadian social work and other helping professions. Finally, red intersectionality recognizes the importance of local and traditional Secwépemc teachings and the intergenerational connection between the past and the present; it also acknowledges the emergent multiplicity of Indigenous child and youth identities that have arisen from colonization, the geographic movement off and on reserve,[7] and the gendered construction of Indigenous peoples through the Indian Act.

Method

Through the overarching question guiding Clark's PhD work (2018), entitled *What is in your basket?*, several themes emerge from the practitioners' stories: (a) their own story of being raised up as healers on the land; (b) "Let's do it this way first," centering Secwépemc approaches; (c) family

6 The information on the values is compiled from Elder Mary Thomas (2001); Billy, (2009); Ignace, (2008), Jules (2016) and Michel, (2012) who articulated the values shared by the Elders of Chief Atahm School.

7 Secwepemc scholar Dorothy Christian (2000) describes her own dislocation while living in Toronto, "thankfully, my ancestors were travelling with me, even in the concrete jungle … my grandmother who gave me strength as a child was still guiding me" (p.92). Also see Secwepemc scholar Georgina Martin PhD thesis (2014) for example of healing found in reconnection after dislocation.

and community as central; (d) Children and youth resistance narratives; and, (e) (re)newal of the Owl story as medicine. These narratives form a "public genealogy of resistance" (Philip, 1997, p. 25) in which all shared their story against the ongoing struggles, resistance, and sites of active colonization through policies and practices. This storytelling and the subsequent retelling or re-storying of the Owl story is part of a genealogy of resistance to colonialism and, more importantly, points to the resurgence of Secwépemc child safety laws and practices of healing.

The stories shared through this research were part of Clark's PhD work, and stand alongside the stories from our own children and youth, and the children and youth we work with in the Secwépemc Nation. A purposive sampling method was used to identify participants through a community advisory of knowledge keepers, youth, Elders, activists, Clark's own role as a healer, and her Secwepemc kinship and community relationships.

These stories are shared in the same tradition as the stories that emerged after colonialism. As described by Ignace (2008), the stories that emerge after colonialism not only tell the truth about colonialism but provide guidance for addressing its violence. Similarly, each of the healers' stories hold truths about the violence of colonialism while being a form of medicine and guidance for addressing the violence against Indigenous children and youth.

These narratives raise many important questions: What does it mean when Owl is no longer the non-Indigenous social worker removing our children and youth? What does it mean when Indigenous social workers and counsellors from Secwépemc or other Nations are working with our own children and families, and within the Secwépemc Nation? How will these stories help our future generations? What guidance will these stories provide? Will it be of resistance, survival, and, more importantly, what it means to provide protection to our children and youth? These stories all affirm the importance of not removing Indigenous children and youth from their families and communities, and instead provide examples of the "on-the-ground-practices of freedom" (Coulthard, 2013) within the Secwépemc Nation.

Findings

Raised up as Social Workers/Healers on the Land and in the Circle

For all of the healers, and co-authors of this paper, there was a story of being "raised up" to be healers or "social workers" in their family. This was further demonstrated in the family groupings that participated in this research, including two Elders and their children, as well as an aunt and her niece.

> Well, I always say I got into social work for several reasons. The first was growing up and seeing the work that was done at home. My mother was a foster parent back in the day before foster parents, that was even the definition or term, so what she did, I remember this as a little girl, getting excited because I knew the weekend was coming and I knew kids

> were going to come over and I would have a house full of kids to play with and it wasn't until I was an adult that I learned that they were actually kids that were taken by the police and brought to our house for a safe place for the weekend. (Lynn Kenoras-Duck Chief)

Duanna Johnston-Virgo shares about the modelling and teachings her maternal grandparents and mother passed on to her:

> … my journey started at a really young age … I would see my mom often taking food from the house and often jackets that we may have not fit, my mom took those in … So I got to watch her do that work and on a bigger scope my grandparents were working at a political level for the betterment of Indigenous women and Indigenous families on the reserve in BC. I just watched and observed them …

In addition to being raised up as helpers and healers, all of the authors and those interviewed cited Elders, knowledge keepers, and ceremonies as part of their training. Although we are all trained in Western trauma and counselling approaches, this training was not the focus in the stories. There was a strong sense of the ways in which "trauma" best practices were not working:

> [The Western approach] wasn't working, so how could we do things differently? So what really did it for me was my work with Jeff (co-author Jeffrey More). I mentored under him and we really talked a lot about the struggles with our Indigenous families with the youth and families we worked with … the process that our families were enduring, and decided we have to do things differently … So Jeff and I really talked about an Indigenous perspective, and who we are and how do we bring that into sessions with the kids and youth and families that we worked with. (Duanna Johnston-Virgo)

All the healers spoke of how if using a Western trauma or counselling approach, we were doing so as an Indigenous person, first and foremost, and sought training and mentorship from other Indigenous healers. Like the child in the Owl story, many of us had to leave our communities to seek formal training, yet we all identified the importance of being part of the circle with the children and youth with whom we work. This is illustrated in a story from Matthew, one of the participating healers, "I recently had an Elder who knew that my partner has been struggling badly with diabetes and she gave me. She goes on to say that is the change she would like to see for the future – having a more "we are part of the circle" as opposed to having that families and communities are there and we are separate. For example, Matthew shared in her interview, "I recently had an Elder who knew that my partner has been struggling badly with diabetes and she gave me some (traditional medicine). Like how touching is that. That's being part of (the circle)." She goes on to say that is the change she would like to see for the future – having a more "we are part of the circle" as opposed to having counsellors and healers as separate from the community.

"Let's do it this way first": Centering Secwépemc Approaches

Another important theme in all of the stories shared was the importance of advocating for starting with Secwépemc ways, and listening to and focusing on the community, family, or child and youth needs in our practice. Instead of the first intervention being a Western counselling response, the healers all shared examples of "let's do it this way first." In the example below, the Secwépemc healer challenged a colonial response to a public community tragedy, in the form of dispatching mental health clinicians from outside the community, and instead promoted the sovereignty of the community:

I was the person saying, "Whoa, what does the community want?" When we have things like this happen to us, we have a way, we have a process and it's collaborative, we need to hear what they want and what they need. So, the first couple of days, some of the things they wanted was Indigenous counsellors and they wanted Indigenous healers. So, it was a little bit of a battle because I just kept saying, "I want to hear what the community wants.": … We know we don't need to be fixed, we know, and we just have to listen to what our people are asking for. (Duanna Johnston-Virgo)

Further examples of the reinstatement and resurgence of Secwépemc healing approaches are found in the work of other Secwépemc counsellors trained in spiritual work:

> [Another Indigenous family counsellor] and I worked with these two girls that came in and they were in there and they were seeing spirits. So, I got a hold of [the counsellor], so he came out right away, he's done this before and he knows the song he was taught, the song when there are spirits around. So, we called the family, we explained to them what we wanted to do and we brought the smudge and we talked about what prayers are and why spirits might be around. So we all sat in a circle and did that, and then [the counsellor] sung the song and talked more in the language with regards to when spirits come. He had a story, so that was something that we used. So, thank goodness the principal was very open. Once we did that she was like, "Do we need to call mental health?" and we were like let's do it this way first and we did and after that there wasn't any other episodes. (Lynn Kenoras-Duck Chief)

Beyond Risk: Family and Community as Central

Instead of removing children or using a risk or deficit approach (Clark, 2012, 2016b) that is focused on problems and/or diagnosis, all the healers who shared stories in this research spoke of walking alongside children and youth – together with their families, Elders, and communities – and trusting that the families know what is required in order to address their own wellness needs. This healing practice is necessary given colonial policies' focus on the breakdown of the family and community circle with the child in the middle. As described by co-author Jann Derrick during her interview,[8] "rather than indigenize family therapy, be Indigenous and bring family therapy into it."

8 For an example of this see Derrick's PhD thesis (2017), entitled *Kahwa:tsire: Indigenous Families in a Family Therapy Practice with the Indigenous Worldview as the Foundation.*

A focus on reinstating Indigenous ways of being and knowing, and in particular family and community centred practices grounded in the strengths of the Elders, family, and of children and youth, was reflected in all of the stories shared:

> Just recognizing that people are the best judge of knowing what they want … and just that piece of when mom is well, or parents are well, then the whole family is well. So just pulling in that holistic piece and always thinking parents have the skills already so how do I enhance those. (Anonymous)

In co-author Kenoras-Duck Chief's interview she makes central the importance of respect for families, as well as taking the time to build relationships given the distrust Indigenous families have of the colonial system:

> As we talk, that's one of the main things that the family says, being so beaten down by the system that they have no trust and so whatever entity it is, if it's MCFD [Ministry of Children and Family Development] or if it's court, even at the schools, if they are in there they feel that they have no voice and maybe lack confidence to even say anything. So my role has always been to be their ally and advocate. So, garnering their trust.

All stories shared also highlighted approaches that are anchored in an understanding that the wellness of children, youth, families, and our communities are all rooted in everyday acts of resurgence and reclamation on the land, but also in our everyday lives in our homes and relationships. These everyday practices include the picking of medicines and the harvesting and preparation of food, together with ceremonies that flow from these that are embedded in Secwépemc values and knowledge.

> I think in our Secwépemc Nation we're seeing a lot more of going back to the land … and our medicines, we need to keep the medicines rejuvenated and the sacredness of it and the rituals and traditions of how we harvest and how we do things. (Duanna Johnston-Virgo)

Similarly, one Secwépemc healer shared that healthy community events are returning and she marked this as a sign of wellness for children and youth:

> I remember when I was growing up we would have community nights … I feel like there might've been a period when those went away and I think they're coming back. So I think even if communities are struggling, they are starting to find their voice … And just wellness, when we come together as a group, good things happen … So I think back to the question, *because no one cares about your community more than you do [emphasis added].* (Anonymous)

"Let's open the door and see what we can get through": Everyday acts of Resistance and Naming Colonial Harms

It is important to note that in the Owl story, the child is not passive: the child who is removed by the Owl also resists, as does their family. S/he tricks Owl after learning Owl's ways and returns home. These stories point to the resistance of Secwépemc children and youth and their ingenuity and bravery in confronting and naming the harms of colonialism in all its forms, which in this case takes the form of child welfare practices in social work. An example comes from Clark's son, Cohon, age 9, who questioned his mother saying, "Mom, I know what you do. You don't think I know history, I do. Why would you be a social worker? How does that help children?" Other healers shared similar challenges from their children or family members.

In each of the stories shared, there are encounters with the harms of colonialism and state interventions. Each of the healers shared examples of the harms done through their Western education and their resistance strategies within this system. The impact of colonial social work policies and practices on the children, youth, and families with whom we work, and on our own bodies, was also clearly identified by all participants. Some described how they made decisions to never work within the provincial social service ministry, or refused to contract with it, or report to the state: "I refused to sign a contract with a system that I totally disagreed with … it was simply, that's my boundary and they figured it out" (Jeffrey More).

The impact of witnessing the effect of this system on children, but also on one's self, is echoed again and again. The acts of trying to change the system from within, including deciding when and how to push or advocate within the system, or refusal to engage with the system, are told alongside stories of activism about ways they tried to be a force of resistance and change within the system:

> I've always kind of been a rebel, when I practiced at MCFD as social workers we only had a $25 limit of a budget, that's all we could spend on incidentals if we had a family that needed something. Say a family of a single mom of three, her two school-aged children came home with lice and she needed help, all I could spend was $25. So I would spend $25, send one check out, two checks out, three checks out, all at $25. (Lynn Kenoras-Duck Chief)

In addition to their own stories of making space in the system, what one healer described as "let's open the door and see what we can get through" (Anonymous), the participants also told stories of the resistance practices of the children and youth they worked with. They gave examples of approaches that ranged from everyday acts of resistance both during the violence, but also after in speaking up, such as disclosing and naming offenders on social media, or speaking about the ongoing violence of racism and sexualized violence.

Reinstatement and Resurgence: Telling New Owl Stories

In telling new Owl stories, participants shared their own connections to colonialism, residential school, and abuse, alongside events and stories of hope and healing. In all stories, there is a particular emphasis on the reinstatement and reclamation of ceremony and of the backlash encountered in first practicing in an Indigenous way.

Johnston-Virgo reflects back on a few years ago and how she almost lost her job for teaching a child she worked with about residential schools:

> I actually got thrown out of a school for talking with a student about residential school. I got called by the secretary down to the principal's office and they said that it's not my place to speak about it and I shouldn't be speaking about it in his school.

The principal then escalated his use of power through contacting her employer and the school district. Johnston-Virgo shared that her mother said to her, "Why so much fear?"

> I often think about that principal because he's still in the district and I wonder what he's thinking now with the Truth and Reconciliation [Commission] and we're teaching it in the school, what he's thinking now. (Duanna Johnston-Virgo)

Johnston-Virgo's story reminds us of the dangers and risks that Indigenous practitioners face in truth-telling about genocide and violence, but also in practicing social work in an Indigenous way. However, it is important to note that all of the participants described the risks they took in shifting their approach, in acts of refusal, yet all now practice from a Secwépemc or their Indigenous way. Johnston-Virgo shares that by shifting her approach to a Secwépemc and land-based approach, it also shifted her work:

> I was bringing my place and my culture into it and I did see a difference. I saw a stronger relationship building and I started to see Indigenous kids wanting to see me as an Indigenous counsellor. Jeff[rey] and I … [engaged in] a real different movement and the big one was incorporating the families which was a real struggle in a child protection agency because these parents have had their children removed, but taking a different look at it and saying "you're still the parents." Jeff[rey] and I talked a lot about some things that we really saw with our Indigenous kids, one was regardless of how long they remained in care or the behaviours that their parents exhibited, they loved their parents very much. And the other one is that they will come back to their Nation, to their land, to be connected. That was something I often say you can never take away from an Indigenous child.

These stories also highlight the courage and ongoing resistance of Indigenous practitioners and communities. Similar to the parents and siblings in the Owl story who search for their child and struggle to return them home, we suggest that the narratives of Indigenous practitioners reveal the

persistence and ongoing hope that each one of us has sustained in this work. In each story, we see how Indigenous healers are now centering Secwépemc knowledge, including using ceremony in their work and other practices. Even for those who are not of Secwépemc ancestry, all healers interviewed for this research have Secwépemc kinship ties, and work within Secwépemc protocols and practices from within Secwépemcúlucw. The healers also acknowledge the specificity of teachings from their own nations. There is a strong recognition of the importance of creating those relationships and connections, and sharing medicines and approaches across and between Indigenous nations. As Johnston-Virgo shared of her work with Mohawk healer Jeffrey More:

> And so that really enhanced my practice and my self-reflection and understanding that as Indigenous people we are different and therapies need to be different. That doesn't mean that mainstream doesn't work sometimes, but we need to do things differently and so in my practice with Jeff[rey], we started bringing in the drum and the smudge and talking about different ceremonies. And Jeff[rey], with his Mohawk ancestry was different than my Secwépemc ancestry, so we talked a lot with our youth and children how they can look different and how we do things differently as Indigenous peoples … We just started doing things differently and we started practicing differently and it was good, really good.

Discussion: The Stories are the Medicine

The authors share the insight that our wellness approaches, or practice frameworks, are found within the stories, the language, the land, and the people. In each of the interviews, the healers shared stories of our work with children and youth that had touched our hearts. The Secwépemc stories provide the medicine here. In returning to the question that guided Clark's (2018) research – "what's in your basket?" – each healer shared examples of Secwépemc or their own nation's approaches in our baskets.

What does it mean to turn away from Western trauma and mental health approaches and instead centre Secwépemc knowledge and practices as guides to our healing and wellness, as they have for centuries? We suggest that these practices have been not forgotten but they were embodied and protected until it was safer to revive them, as in the individual response to violence, but enacted on a community scale. What are the scales of colonial violence? If the body's reaction to violence is to freeze, then we must attend to the scales of violence and the survival strategies that were and are employed collectively to resist this violence.[9] Just like Coyote never dies in the Secwépemc stories (Michel, 2012), Secwépemc wellness and healing practices are being reinstated and revived through the collective resurgence of language, ceremony, and everyday practices of returning Indigenous children and youth to the centre of the circle.

9 Sarah Hunt's work continually reminds us that the binary between the lived experiences of violence and the public sphere needs to be challenged. In a review of Glen Coulthard's book, Hunt (2016) asserts that "these sites of resurgence and recognition are not separate, but unfold in the same spaces, within our territories, in relation to the same people, upon the same bodies." (p.112)

These stories are examples of renewal in the re(storying) of the Owl story within the Secwépemc Nation and more importantly of the reinstatement and re(vival) of Secwépemc laws and approaches to child safety and healing. As Secwépemc scholar Rebecca Jules (2016) states in her Master's thesis about Secwépemc ways of caring for children and families, "the story teaches about working towards creating strong, healthy children, families, and community rooted in Secwépemc ways of knowing, being and doing (language, culture, practice)" (p.110). The stories are one medicine in our berry-picking basket, along with language revitalization, traditional medicines, or *melamen*, and other practices and ceremonies that address emotional and physical injury and restore health and balance.

In sharing these stories in some length from the research alongside the Owl story, we are invited to witness the power of stories for healing through our own listening and engagement.

Kenoras-Duck Chief shared her work in co-creating story while creating a forgiveness quilt within an Indigenous girls' group:

> Again, going with what felt right – this was something that we have to do and sitting and storying with her. It was the quilt of forgiveness, so as we were saying, that was the main theme we talked about forgiveness. So, at first I shared my stories of when I forgave and what I needed to forgive and individual stories and then she started sharing hers. So then we finished it off with her quilt of forgiveness. Storytelling, it's like a magic that happens, at first we're sitting together and at first I open it up with like, "Who has a homemade quilt?" And there might be the odd girl that has a couple, and some not and those who say, "I can't even sew." And so we talked them into sewing, and they're like, "this is fun." Just sitting there quilting and eating and telling stories.

It is also important to identify that storytelling does not always happen with words; art, play, song, and dance are in and of themselves a form of storytelling. Matthew provides another important insight from her practice of how to work with children's stories from a Secwépemc perspective:

> We don't have that European "dig, dig, dig" and "probing, probing, probing." We allow people to share what they need to share. And I like the piece of not having to challenge. You're going to laugh; this is what I love. I work with children who have different realities. I've heard people say that they're liars and they challenge them, and I just say, "you know they're telling a story. People tell a story for an important reason. Try and get under what they're needing from the story. What are they trying to get?" And for me, don't ever discredit that some people might have that spiritual realm that people forget about. They might have things that aren't explainable within this sort of paradigm. So I don't ever forget about those cultural pieces. That people could be spiritually in tune. There could be all sorts of things. But when I've listened to some counsellors in the school and they tell me (how they interrupt the child's story and don't allow them to go on), and I just think,

> "wow, we've just stopped her story and her process." So she's going to hide her stories or we don't have an idea about how that impacts her.

Secwépemc stories are alive, providing guidance and transformation. The stories shared in this research are important examples of the assertion of sovereignty and self-determination of Indigenous nations in addressing our own care, wellness, and healing from violence. The stories shared also document Indigenous resurgence and creative resistance to colonial powers. Strategies and solutions rooted in the Secwepemc community are found in the "on-the-ground practices of freedom" (Coulthard, 2013) demonstrated in grassroots and intergenerational movements within Secwépemculucw, like the "Indian Child Caravan" in 1980 where Splatsin fought for sovereignty and jurisdiction over child and family services to the current Indigenous girls groups (Clark, 2013), Secwepemc family hunting camps (Adams Lake Indian Band, 2013, p. 15), and other intergenerational learning practices like the Birch Bark camp held on the land and attended by author Clark (Secwepemc News, 2013).

The Owl story and the stories of the healers and co-authors of this paper all raise multidimensional considerations of healing, of justice, and ultimately of care, love, and the best interest and protection of Indigenous children and youth. These stories illustrate the importance of not removing children from their families and communities. Thus, as Indigenous counsellors, social workers, and healers, we are transforming what protection looks like, including the multiple forms of protection from the colonial state, from the neglect of parents, or from sexualized violence in all its forms. The narratives of healers are multidimensional and they combine together to form a larger basket of knowledge that both bears witness to the realities of ongoing colonialism but also acts as a basket that holds the medicines of love, resistance, and activism of Indigenous peoples. In the words of Secwépemc scholar Rebecca Jules (2016), "In creating a new story, there is a chance for creating a new experience for future generations: a story based on culture and language" (p. 19).

Again and again in the stories offered, the themes of love and respect resonate. Secwépemc healer and co-author Sharnelle Matthew answered the question about Indigenous best practices with, "You know what, I'm going to say it, love. Unconditional love."

Matthew goes on to share her understanding and teachings about love, connecting the loss of the experience of love and loving relationships to residential schools, and the healing to the return to these loving practices in our communities.

This perhaps is the greatest evidence of Secwépemc resurgence – the return of the radical possibilities of intergenerational love.

Implications: Limitations and Future Research

The everyday acts of resurgence and reinstatement of Secwépemc laws and healing practices are present not only within ourselves as Indigenous healers, but also in the narratives of the children and youth we work with. This captures the essence of the research findings of returning our children and

ourselves as healers to the circle through Indigenous family and community-centred approaches, and the centering of love and resurgence in our practices. This research and the stories shared are only a small part of a genealogy of resistance to colonial intervention and, more importantly, resurgence and revival of Secwépemc laws, practices, and processes – including in research. We are all witnesses to these and other stories and the ways that they call into account the workings of colonialism, in particular through and between Indigeneity, sex, gender, age, and violence. This "hydra-headed quality of violence" (Alexander, 2006, p. 3) has now touched everything and everyone on this planet, but we are dreaming together inside of and through these intersecting oppressions,reinstating Secwépemc laws and healing approaches in everyday acts of relationship and kinship.

The stories shared in the basket and in this paper are only part of a larger revival of Secwépemc child and youth wellness practices, and current and future research will centre the voices of Elders, children, and youth of all genders in considering wellness and through our love and yearning towards Indigenous futures.

As Kenoras-Duck Chief shared, these approaches are passed down through stories from grandmother to mother to daughter:

> I'll share with you what my mother shared with me [about traditional Secwépemc healing approaches]. When she was a little girl she would see that her granny was a medicine woman, her granny always had a medicine pot brewing, on the fire. And people would come. So, for the physical sense, so, if they had a sick child they would come see her or they would bring the child to her and she would fix them up with the medicines and stuff and then as my mother grew older, my granny Susan kind of took on a role too when there was chicken pox, didn't see this, her granny was telling her this story, my granny was really lucky in that she must've had some sort of resistance to chickenpox or smallpox because as a young girl she was able to help her mom and go help the other kids and nurse them and she never got it but she does know that there is this big part of the Neskonlith graveyard that's all children. And my granny would go out there and tell whoever was listening, like that's all the babies and when I was a girl they all died of smallpox and chicken pox and me and my mom try to help them but they didn't make it. So that's kind of like the physical.

Kenoras-Duck Chief's story of her great-grandmother describes not only the ways in which healing happened in the Secwépemc community in the past, but how it continues to happen, and the important role of intergenerational storytelling in keeping these traditions alive. This story also holds a powerful metaphor for the raising up of healers with an ability to work with and resist violence.

Elder Norma Kenoras shared a story in contrast to the one that she shared earlier in this paper, where a non-Indigenous social worker removed the five children and none of them ever returned to the community. She offered instead a new story where through her love and work in opening her home as a foster parent to Secwépemc children and youth, she has been keeping Secwépemc in the community:

> Afterwards when the police did not bring them, the kids just came on their own. Some nights I'd have 25 kids just playing in the yard. I'd only got 12 cinnamon buns we had to cut them in two. … And now I get fish and they know to give me little packages. They know I like liver so they give me these little packages.

The stories like the intergenerational ones shared by Kenoras-Duck Chief and Kenoras capture the feeling of the healing work and the love with which it is being done intergenerationally in the Secwépemc community and of the power and wingspan of the renewal of the Owl stories.

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Le comité *Witcihitisotan* (entraide) par et pour les familles d'adolescents autochtones en ville

Natasha Blanchet-Cohen,[a] Giulietta di Mambro,[b] et Minic Petiquay[c]

a Co-titulaire de la Chaire-réseau de recherche sur la jeunesse du Québec, professeure agrégée, Département des sciences humaines appliquées, Université Concordia
b Professionnelle de recherche, Université Concordia
c Centre d'amitié autochtone de Lanaudières

Auteure correspondant: Natasha Blanchet-Cohen à natasha.blanchet-cohen@concordia.ca

Résumé

Cet article présente le processus et les apports du comité *Witcihitisotan* (entraide, en atikamekw), mis en œuvre par des parents d'adolescents dans un Centre d'amitié autochtone au Québec. À ce jour, les formes de soutien adéquates pour les familles d'adolescents autochtones demeurent sous-documentées, ce qui représente une lacune, considérant les ruptures et transitions particulières vécues par les jeunes autochtones en milieu urbain. L'analyse de la documentation des 14 mois d'activité du comité fait émerger trois formes de soutien interdépendantes et complémentaires : le comité permet de « se dire », pour échanger et partager des conseils entre parents ; de « se raconter », où l'écoute permet de cheminer vers la guérison ; et de « se projeter », afin de s'exprimer sur la façon de vivre sa culture en ville. Mettant en œuvre une approche semblable à celle du *storytelling*, le comité offre un lieu intergénérationnel de valorisation, de renforcement et d'autoguérison qui soutient l'apprentissage collectif des familles vers la réappropriation de compétences parentales et un mieux-être de la communauté. L'occasion de se rassembler dans un lieu émotionnellement et culturellement sécuritaire fait partie intégrante de l'approche décolonisante axée sur les forces. Cette étude de cas démontre l'importance de stimuler l'entraide entre pairs et de se moduler aux besoins du groupe. Ce type d'initiative permet de cheminer vers une amélioration des relations parent-jeune et une meilleure communication et connaissance de soi, qui seraient irréalisables par l'intermédiaire des approches apportées par des experts extérieurs, qui sont souvent préformatées et centrées sur les lacunes.

Mots clés : parent, autochtone, comité, adolescents, entraide, urbain

Introduction

L'implication parentale est reconnue comme un des facteurs déterminants pour l'apprentissage, le mieux-être et le développement des jeunes autochtones (Barlow et coll., 2011; Macvean et coll., 2015). À ce titre, il existe plusieurs programmes visant à soutenir et à développer les compétences des parents de jeunes enfants (Gerlach, Browne, et Greenwood, 2017), mais peu d'outils s'adressent spécifiquement aux parents d'adolescents. Pourtant, cet âge correspond à une période complexe pendant laquelle les relations avec les parents peuvent être plus difficiles, alors que la quête identitaire des jeunes s'intensifie et qu'ils se trouvent le plus à risque d'envisager des comportements problématiques.

Cet article présente les formes de soutien qui ont émergé au sein du comité *Witcihitisotan* (entraide, en atikamekw), mis en œuvre par des familles d'adolescents vivant en milieu urbain. L'expérience de ce comité ouvre une fenêtre sur les préoccupations des familles autochtones ainsi que sur les formes collectives de soutien que ces dernières préconisent. Documenter cette initiative permet de mieux comprendre le potentiel de l'implication familiale et des approches culturellement pertinentes pour les parents et familles de jeunes autochtones en milieu urbain.

Perspectives sur l'implication des familles

L'approche centrée sur les forces (*strength-based approach)* sert de cadre de référence pour aborder l'implication des familles autochtones (Greenwood et de Leeuw, 2005). Ce positionnement se distingue du discours qui prédomine dans l'intervention et dans le milieu de l'éducation selon lequel les parents sont perçus comme inactifs, et incapables d'aider leurs enfants (Kaomea, 2012 ; Scott, Anaquot et Healt, 2013). Cette perspective négative présuppose que les parents dépendent de l'aide extérieure pour développer leurs compétences parentales. Les programmes et services visent donc à « régler les problèmes » et à « combler les déficits » des parents, considérés comme des victimes impuissantes (Irvine, 2009, p. 3). Ceci engendre le plus souvent des évaluations d'irresponsabilité, de négligence et d'incompétence parentale chez les familles autochtones (Scott, Anaquot et Healt, 2013).

L'approche centrée sur les forces se base sur la reconnaissance de la résilience des communautés autochtones et de leur capacité à mettre en œuvre des processus de changements et à générer des solutions par elles-mêmes (Greenwood et de Leeuw, 2005). Cette posture prend en considération les séquelles des pratiques coloniales et les politiques discriminatoires qu'ont subies les Autochtones sans pour autant voir les Autochtones comme des victimes passives (Grammond et Guay, 2016). Ainsi, les traumatismes et autres effets intergénérationnels liés au déracinement, à la perte du territoire et au placement dans les pensionnats ou en foyers d'accueil ont affecté les habiletés parentales et rendu les liens affectifs plus complexes. Aujourd'hui encore, les inégalités structurelles perdurent et façonnent les réalités familiales : une grande proportion d'Autochtones vit dans la pauvreté, est victime de racisme et souffre de conditions inadéquates de logement (Allan et Smylie, 2015 ; Arya et Piggott, 2018). De plus, les enfants autochtones sont surreprésentés au sein du réseau de protection de la jeunesse (CERP, 2019; Levesque, Clarke et Blackstock, 2016).

La reconnaissance de l'agencéité et de la résilience des communautés autochtones s'accompagne d'une mise en valeur de leurs savoir-faire (Kulis et al., 2019 ; Irvine, 2009). Ceci inclut la prise en compte de la parentalité autochtone comme un rôle qui va au-delà de la famille nucléaire, qui concerne notamment un réseau élargi incluant les aînés, la fratrie, les cousins et les amis des parents biologiques (Guay, Grammond, et Delisle-L'Heureux, 2018). Comme le démontrent Tam, Findlay et Kohen (2017), la conception de la famille en contexte autochtone est plus complexe et fluide que dans les définitions institutionnelles, qui ne tiennent pas compte de la mobilité des populations et du fait que le soin et l'éducation des enfants peuvent être partagés.

La socialisation des enfants s'exprime aussi différemment dans les communautés autochtones : on accorde une grande place au respect de l'autonomie et au rythme personnel du développement de l'enfant (Muir et Bohr, 2014). Ceci contraste avec les phases standardisées du développement sur lesquelles reposent les programmes et services pour les jeunes (BigFoot et Funderburk, 2011). Bien que beaucoup de pratiques autochtones aient été perturbées par le passé colonial et assimilationniste, ces dernières n'en demeurent pas moins vivantes et se manifestent notamment dans la forme que prend l'organisation familiale autochtone (Muir et Bohr, 2014).

Cette contextualisation est importante pour déconstruire les perceptions de l'implication parentale qui perdurent. C'est le cas dans le milieu scolaire, où les parents sont perçus comme étant désintéressés par l'éducation de leurs enfants et reçoivent même le blâme pour l'échec scolaire de ces derniers (Kaomea, 2012 ; Trudgett et coll., 2017). Or, des études montrent que les parents de jeunes du secondaire sont préoccupés par leurs enfants, mais qu'ils ont l'impression que ceux-ci ont moins besoin d'eux (Anonymisé, 2018 ; Levesque et coll., 2015). D'autre part, ils ne se sentent pas équipés pour soutenir leur cheminement scolaire.

D'autres écrits présentent des interventions facilitant l'implication des familles auprès des enfants. Plusieurs expériences positives de participation parentale ont notamment été documentées dans des programmes pour la petite enfance (Bowes et Grace, 2014). Ainsi, une recherche sur le programme *Aboriginal Head Start,* mis en œuvre hors communauté en Colombie-Britannique, démontre que l'implication familiale est liée au mieux-être de la famille. Les familles ont particulièrement apprécié les pratiques d'intervention qui adoptaient une approche de nature relationnelle et qui permettaient de prendre le temps de connaître les membres de la famille. Ces pratiques mettaient en valeur les forces et la place du parent ainsi que l'importance de renforcer le sentiment d'appartenance à une communauté (Gerlach et Gignac, 2019). Une étude de cas australienne portant sur l'appréciation d'un programme de visite à domicile et d'entraide par les pairs autochtones en milieu urbain a aussi fait valoir l'importance d'un lieu sécuritaire dans lequel les participants ont un sentiment d'appartenance, de contrôle et de confiance. Ainsi, les interventions qui reflètent leurs besoins, qui s'adaptent à ceux-ci et qui maintiennent la communication à travers des moyens variés sont porteuses (Munns et coll., 2017).

Les recherches sur l'implication familiale autochtone mettent en lumière la contribution positive des programmes culturellement sécurisants pour favoriser le fonctionnement familial (Henson et coll., 2017), la culture faisant partie intégrante de l'ancrage identitaire et du cheminement vers le mieux-être. Ainsi, selon une étude longitudinale auprès d'adolescents maöris, le lien de proximité familiale, l'identité ethnique et le bien-être sont des variables liées les unes aux autres (Stuart et Jose, 2014). Une des rares études menées sur un programme pour parents autochtones d'enfants entre 10 et 17 ans vivant en milieu urbain (*Parenting in two worlds*), démontre l'impact positif d'une intervention qui suscite des discussions entre les parents. À travers ces groupes de partage, les participants sont en mesure de dégager des moyens pour rappeler, récupérer, redécouvrir, réintégrer et restituer le sens de leur héritage culturel et sa pertinence pour la parentalité et le fonctionnement positif de la famille dans l'environnement urbain (Kulis et coll., 2019). Malgré ce que révèlent ces recherches, les interventions préformatées prévalent pourtant encore comme façon d'intervenir auprès des parents autochtones (Barlow et coll. 2011).

Cette présente étude s'inscrit dans ce contexte où encore peu de documentation porte sur les formes de soutien adéquates pour les familles d'adolescents autochtones. Ceci s'avère une importante lacune considérant les ruptures que vivent les jeunes autochtones. Ces derniers sont aux prises avec la difficulté de devoir réconcilier leur besoin d'appartenance et de fierté identitaire avec les exigences quotidiennes, dans un contexte urbain de racisme et de non-reconnaissance culturelle (Fast et coll., 2016). Cette expérience s'ajoute à la réalité familiale, où les tensions entre les adolescents et les parents sont teintées par l'isolement et l'insécurité du quotidien en milieu urbain.

Contexte et déroulement du comité

Cette étude documente la formation et l'évolution du comité de parents *Witcihitisotan*. Ce comité a été formé après un évènement concernant plusieurs jeunes atikamekw de la ville de Joliette. Des parents fréquentant le Centre d'amitié autochtone de Lanaudière (CAAL) ont alors exprimé leurs inquiétudes quant aux nouveaux comportements et habitudes de consommation de leurs adolescents. « On a décidé de se mobiliser pour nos enfants, pour mieux les aider […] en tant que parents » (#13), raconte une des mères du groupe.

C'est lors de la première rencontre rassemblant plusieurs mères, pères et grands-parents que l'idée du comité s'est concrétisée. À l'image du nom que les parents ont donné à ce comité, *Witcihitisotan,* ce groupe veut rendre disponible un espace de soutien et de discussion aux membres des familles autour de leurs préoccupations communes. C'est au sein du CAAL que le comité a décidé de se réunir. Cet organisme, qui existe depuis 2001, offre plusieurs services et programmes pour améliorer les conditions de vie des Autochtones en milieu urbain de la région de Lanaudière. C'est aussi un lieu de rencontre hors communauté pour un nombre grandissant de jeunes autochtones et leurs familles, majoritairement d'origine atikamekw, qui déménagent en ville pour poursuivre leurs études ou pour trouver un emploi (RCAAQ, 2018).

Les réunions mensuelles du comité ont pris la forme de rassemblements de parents et de grands-parents (*kokums*), auxquels se sont ajoutés deux soupers-causeries incluant les adolescents dont les parents et grands-parents participaient au comité. La plupart du temps, les réunions mensuelles avaient lieu à l'heure du dîner, et leur durée d'une heure trente était rythmée en trois temps : d'abord le partage de nourriture, ensuite, un cercle de parole (activité et discussion selon un thème choisi), puis la planification collective de la prochaine rencontre. Le format de ces rencontres est demeuré ouvert et flexible ; les activités et les thèmes des rencontres ont été établis selon ce qui émergeait des besoins et intérêts exprimés par les participants. La création d'outils visuels (collage, dessin et peinture) a été proposée pour stimuler la réflexion individuelle et faciliter le partage (voir Tableau 1 sur le déroulement des rencontres). Le nombre de participants présents aux rencontres fluctuait, allant de quatre à dix personnes, avec une présence en continu de quatre mères d'adolescents. Les

Tableau 1
Rencontres du comité entraide

Date	Objet – déroulement
1. février 2018	Début du processus ; Validation de l'intérêt des parents Choix du nom : entraide
2. mars 2018	Aborder la problématique d'être parent autochtone en milieu urbain Collage « le parent que je suis, le parent que j'aimerais être »
3. avril 2018	Aborder la problématique d'être parent autochtone en milieu urbain Activité de dessin « l'arbre de soutien »
4. mai 2018	Thème : la communication parent-jeune
5. mai 2018	Souper-causerie sur le thème de la communication parent-jeune
6. juin 2018	Explorer la communication parent-jeune à travers des saynètes Cercle d'écoute et de partage sur des situations spécifiques vécues
7. juillet 2018	Thème : consommation chez les jeunes
8. septembre 2018	Tour de table – bilan de l'été 2018 avec mon jeune Planification de la soirée communautaire sur la consommation
9. novembre 2018	Souper-causerie – sensibilisation des jeunes à la consommation Témoignage d'un parent
10. janvier 2019	Tour de table : perspectives familiales pour 2019 Aborder le thème de la grossesse précoce
11. février 2019	Activité de peinture sur la valeur du comité ; Planification autour d'un montage vidéo portant sur le comité entraide
12. mars 2019	Activité de collage pour rassembler les idées pour la vidéo
13. avril 2019	Tournage de la vidéo
14. mai 2019	Souper-causerie. Présentation et validation de la vidéo
15. varia	Entrevue individuelle

participants réguliers étaient majoritairement des femmes, à qui se sont occasionnellement joint des hommes, participant à titre de pères et de grands-pères.

La grande majorité des femmes participant à titre de mères d'adolescents étaient monoparentales, et certaines, (ayant plusieurs enfants), étaient aussi grand-mères. Nous soulignons aussi la présence ponctuelle d'une aînée plus âgée qui était présente à titre d'accompagnatrice d'une mère participante dans le cadre d'un service de soutien intergénérationnel mis en place par le Centre d'amitié.

Des soirées communautaires ont aussi été organisées par le comité, regroupant en moyenne 15 personnes, incluant des membres des familles (parents et aînés), des jeunes adolescents issus de ces familles, des intervenants du CAAL, et l'équipe de recherche. Ces rencontres se déroulaient sous la forme de soupers-causeries incluant des activités portant sur des problématiques choisies. Un format ouvert a été préconisé, pour favoriser la discussion et l'échange. Pour partager l'expérience du comité, une capsule vidéo a aussi été réalisée avec les participants.

La promotion et la mobilisation des familles pour les rencontres ont été assurées par deux intervenantes du CAAL également participantes du comité en tant que mères d'adolescents dont une est 3e auteure de cet article. Les participants étaient contactés au moyen d'une conversation de groupe sur Messenger, par téléphone ou par texto. Le CAAL offrait le transport entre le domicile et le lieu de rencontre pour faciliter l'accès au comité. En plus de documenter les séances, l'équipe de recherche a joué un rôle de soutien. Ainsi, l'auxiliaire de recherche (2e auteure) a collaboré avec l'intervenante du CAAL pour accompagner le groupe, ainsi que pour la recherche d'activités et de thèmes à aborder.

Méthodologie

Cette étude repose sur une approche collaborative à la recherche, les priorités ayant été établies par le partenaire communautaire lors de rencontres entre la chercheure principale (1re auteure), la directrice et l'intervenante en éducation du CAAL, et validées par le CA de l'organisme. La posture adoptée par l'équipe a été celle de chercheures « invitées » dans le sens développé par Mataira (2019), qui rappelle l'importance de bâtir une relation flexible et une co-construction entre chercheurs et participants lors d'une recherche en milieu autochtone. Dans cette optique, nous avons priorisé le développement de liens sociaux, de l'écoute et de l'adaptation.

Il est à noter que cette recherche s'inscrit dans une démarche de collaboration antérieure autour d'une recherche-action avec les jeunes sur les enjeux de la persévérance scolaire autochtone en milieu urbain (voir article 2018). En fait, le CAAL avait initialement identifié l'implication des familles dans le parcours scolaire et éducatif des enfants comme sujet prioritaire. Un dîner exploratoire avait eu lieu avec les parents, lequel n'a pas eu de suite. La recherche avait été alors orientée vers les jeunes du CAAL. Ce n'est qu'un an et demi plus tard, lorsque les parents ont manifesté leur intérêt, que la démarche du comité de parents a commencé. L'association à un projet de recherche a vraisemblablement été facilitée par les liens déjà établis avec l'équipe de recherche et les membres de la communauté.

Au cours de la phase de collecte de données, qui a duré 14 mois (avec une pause lors d'un décès), le choix des outils a été modifié. La démarche de documentation a commencé par une série d'entrevues individuelles portant sur les défis et les besoins des parents autochtones en milieu urbain, incluant des questions sur l'histoire familiale, la relation parent-école et la relation avec les jeunes. Après cinq entrevues, nous avons constaté que ces entretiens ne captaient pas la richesse des rencontres de groupe. Notre intérêt était en effet, à l'instar d'une étude de cas (Yin, 2012), d'observer et de raconter ce qui se passait au sein du comité. Plusieurs sources de données ont donc nourri cette recherche : les notes d'observation, le matériel visuel produit durant les séances (voir Tableau 1), ainsi que les transcriptions des rencontres du comité entraide. Les rencontres ont été enregistrées à la suite du consentement verbal et écrit octroyé lors de la première rencontre et revalidé au début des séances subséquentes. Le verbatim des séances a ensuite été codé thématiquement (Guest, MacQueen, et Namey, 2012) à l'aide du logiciel HyperResearch. Le processus de rétroaction collectif mené lors de la création du vidéo a été important pour faire ressortir et confirmer les thématiques de l'article.

Un espace de soutien

Le comité *Witcihitisotan* a représenté avant tout un espace permettant aux familles autochtones de se rassembler pour échanger dans un contexte émotionnellement et culturellement sécuritaire. Les témoignages, les discussions et le matériel issus des séances du comité mettent en valeur son utilité à plusieurs niveaux : les familles ont construit un espace leur servant non seulement à exprimer leurs préoccupations quant à leurs jeunes, mais aussi à se soutenir mutuellement et à construire ensemble. Une participante précise « le but, c'est de donner, c'est le partage parce que quand le comité se réunit ici, on écoute ce qu'il y a à dire » (#12). Une autre témoigne du soutien qu'elle y reçoit : « [le comité] aide beaucoup. [..] Des fois, je pleurais dans les réunions, puis les autres parents, ils donnent de bons conseils aussi » (#10).

La prévalence de l'aspect collectif ressort vivement des commentaires des parents. Ainsi, tous les dessins réalisés lors d'une activité de peinture visant à identifier les apports du comité illustrent l'importance de ce lien communautaire (voir Figure 1 sur la page suivante). Les parents ont utilisé des symboles qui font allusion à l'ancrage du soutien collectif. Une participante s'explique : « Les deux mains que j'ai mises ensemble, c'est se tenir ensemble puis prendre [les] conseils, tous les conseils pour que nos enfants soient bien » (#10). Une autre présente son œuvre en affirmant : « J'ai mis un arbre [...] l'arbre, c'était grandir ensemble, tu sais, comme le soutien qu'on s'apporte à chacune d'entre nous » (#10). Comme l'explique cette mère, l'idée qu'en groupe, les parents pourront avancer, prédomine : « Créer des liens, tisser des liens, sortir de la maison, tu sais, sortir du quotidien, puis pas être tout seul, pas se retrouver tout seul. C'est avec les autres qu'on est capable de s'en sortir » (#10).

Figure 1
Dessins sur les apports du comité

Plus spécifiquement, le comité est décrit comme étant un espace qui offre trois formes de soutien, à savoir un contexte pour : (1) se dire et échanger en tant que parent ; (2) se raconter pour cheminer vers la guérison ; et (3) se projeter pour prendre en considération les préoccupations quant à la vie en ville collectivement.

Se dire : échanger en tant que parent

L'occasion d'échanger en tant que membres de familles d'adolescents constitue la première forme de soutien apporté par le comité. L'adolescence amène de nouveaux défis pour les parents, comme l'explique une mère : « Ça commençait à 12–13 ans, l'influence de ses amis. À un moment donné, ça ne marchait plus mon rôle de mère, au niveau de l'encadrement, sa crise d'adolescence et mon pouvoir d'agir en tant que parent » (#13). À cet égard, le comité s'avère un contexte où les participants sont à l'aise de se confier à des personnes qui vivent des situations similaires. Une participante explique :

> On était avec d'autres parents [...], on pouvait discuter où est-ce que mon enfant [est rendu], [est-ce qu'il n']est pas correct, ou est-ce que c'est moi [qui n'est]pas correcte, [qu'] est-ce que je devrais améliorer [...]. On peut aller chercher des outils avec certains parents. Tu sais, on voit qu'on n'est pas tout seul, à ce moment-là. (#15)

Lors d'une rencontre dédiée à la communication entre les jeunes et leur famille, on évoque le fait que les jeunes s'isolent souvent dans leur chambre et qu'ils ne respectent pas les règles. Certains font des fugues, ce qui cause de l'inquiétude pour une mère qui craint un autre signalement auprès de la Protection de la jeunesse. Pour une autre, le milieu urbain amène une inquiétude supplémentaire : « on ne connaît pas le monde qui [vit] ici, ils sont des étrangers » (#13).

Dans les échanges, le sujet de la grossesse durant l'adolescence a été abordé à plusieurs reprises, démontrant l'inquiétude des parents à l'égard de cette réalité bien présente dans les familles. Certaines mères ayant elles-mêmes eu des enfants jeunes s'expriment sur la vie qu'elles souhaitent pour leurs enfants : « c'est important la famille, mais il faut pas aller trop vite, [il faut prendre le temps d']avoir la base [...] Quand ils ont la fondation, quand ils ont fini leurs études, ils pourront songer à faire une famille, à leur choix, c'est sûr. (#3). Les mères maintiennent une attitude positive, même si les émotions sont partagées. D'un côté, elles accueillent l'arrivée de leur petit-enfant de manière positive, mais de l'autre, elles sont conscientes des défis liés à la grossesse à un jeune âge. C'est le cas de cette mère qui, lors d'une rencontre du comité, annonce la grossesse de sa fille de 15 ans. Elle éprouve un sentiment de culpabilité, mais a l'intention d'accepter cette situation au meilleur de ses capacités et d'être présente pour soutenir sa fille :

> Quelque part c'est comme si j'avais manqué mon coup en tant que parent, étant donné qu'elle est tombée enceinte [...], c'est comme si j'avais manqué mon coup sur la prévention, les précautions [...], mais si c'est comme ça que ça arrive, c'est comme ça que je le prends. (#10)

Il est aussi arrivé que la séance soit axée sur les préoccupations spécifiques d'une mère vivant une problématique familiale. Les participantes lui ont laissé la place pour s'exprimer, pleurer, et se taire lorsqu'elle en avait envie : « on ne veut pas qu'elle se sente toute seule, ça fait qu'on est là quand elle en a besoin. Puis c'est à ça qu'il sert, le comité » (#10). Elle était accompagnée par une aînée collaboratrice auprès du CAAL, pouvant ainsi profiter du soutien d'une femme d'expérience.

Le lien de solidarité entre générations est d'ailleurs souvent évoqué, reflétant l'importance du rôle de la famille élargie dans l'éducation des enfants. Une grand-mère raconte comment elle a aidé sa petite-fille à poursuivre ses études tout en prenant soin de son jeune enfant :

> En secondaire 5, pendant l'année, elle est tombée enceinte, puis au milieu de l'année, elle voulait lâcher. On a continué à dire non, non, continue. On l'a supportée, on lui a montré qu'on était présent, puis au mois de juin bien elle nous a invités à aller chercher son diplôme. (#2)

Plusieurs autres histoires d'entraide familiale ont été partagées. C'est le cas de cette participante qui parle du soutien qu'elle a reçu durant l'enfance et l'adolescence de sa fille de la part de membres différents de sa famille :

> J'ai beaucoup de problèmes avec ma fille [depuis qu'elle a 13 ans], beaucoup, parce qu'elle parlait du suicide [...] J'ai demandé à mon frère qu'[il] m'aide. [Je n']ai pas demandé aux services sociaux parce que je [ne] voulais pas que.... Puis j'ai demandé à mon frère, qu'il l'amène dans le bois. (#4)

Ainsi « se dire » en tant que parent fait émerger le besoin d'échanger sur la parentalité, la place de la famille élargie, le soutien des aînées et la connexion au territoire, toutes des stratégies gagnantes pour accompagner les jeunes qui vivent des moments difficiles.

Se raconter : l'écoute qui fait cheminer vers la guérison

Le comité a également fourni un espace aux membres pour s'exprimer sur leur propre vécu. Cette occasion donnée aux parents d'être écoutés à propos de leurs histoires de vie respectives les aide à poursuivre leur propre guérison : « moi aussi, quand je viens ici, le partage, ça me fait du bien » (#11).

Les participants ont souvent fait des parallèles entre les difficultés traversées dans leur vie personnelle et les réalités d'être parent. Certains aspects de leur passé teintent leur sentiment de compétence parentale actuel. La grande majorité des participants ont ainsi témoigné avoir manqué de modèles parentaux lorsqu'ils étaient enfants. Ce manque amène un sentiment d'insécurité face aux choix et aux attitudes à adopter en tant que parent ; les parents veulent par ailleurs donner à leurs jeunes l'attention qui leur a fait défaut : « moi, tu sais, c'est pour ça que je veux donner de l'amour à mes enfants parce que moi je [ne] l'ai pas eu » (#4). Une autre lors de la même séance raconte : « C'est dur d'être un parent quand tu n'as pas eu un parent » (#4).

> Une mère explique les difficultés de sa fille à la lumière de son propre vécu :
> Je pense à ma fille aujourd'hui, et je me dis, c'est peut-être pour ça qu'elle a de la misère parce que mes parents ont été séparés, ils ont divorcé, j'ai eu de la misère à l'école […] Sans le vouloir, j'ai été dans le même cercle vicieux que mes parents. Là, aujourd'hui, ma fille, elle a tellement, tellement de misère à l'école, elle [ne] veut pas y aller. (#2)

Les réflexions des parents sur leur propre vécu aident à mettre en contexte les difficultés de leurs jeunes et font ressortir la résilience des parents :

> Aujourd'hui, je parle avec ma fille de cette situation-là. J'essaie de lui montrer à ne pas être dépendante envers une autre [personne]. Je [lui] dis : « il faut que tu sois capable, toute seule. [Ne] compte pas sur un, puis sur l'autre […] c'est bien important, si tu [ne] vas pas à l'école, il n'y a pas d'emploi plus tard, oublie ça ». (#3)

Lorsque les parents ont participé à une activité de collage sur la parentalité ayant comme but de se représenter en tant que père ou mère actuel(le) idéal(e) les images étaient très diversifiées. Plusieurs parents mentionnent se sentir seuls parce qu'ils sont monoparentaux, ou remettent en question leurs comportements trop autoritaires. Cet exercice d'introspection a été apprécié, mais a aussi été éprouvant pour certains : « c'est trop dur, je suis trop émotive » (#2).

L'activité de « l'arbre de soutien » (voir Figure 2 sur la page suivante) va dans ce sens. Invités à dessiner un arbre dont les racines symbolisaient les sources de soutien perçues et les branches, les rêves et les aspirations, les participants ont pu réfléchir à leur perception des formes de soutien

auxquelles ils ont accès. La grande majorité n'a nommé que la famille nucléaire et élargie comme sources de soutien. Une participante a représenté des racines qu'elle a recouvertes par la suite d'une feuille blanche pour refléter sa réalité : elle n'a pas eu accès au soutien de ses parents ou de ses grands-parents. Elle rêve donc que ses enfants étudient le plus longtemps possible, qu'ils se sentent bien dans leur environnement, qu'ils aient un travail, des amis, mais qu'ils n'oublient pas l'importance de la famille. Ceci l'amène à faire le lien avec son parcours de mère aujourd'hui, jalonné de doutes :

> Essayer de trouver [...] c'est quoi tes bases. Tu as beau regarder autour de toi pour essayer de trouver ce qui est bon, qu'est-ce qui est à faire. Quand on t'a toujours autant abandonné... À partir de là, c'est sûr que tu te poses des questions, à quelque part [...] Ta mère t'a abandonnée, ton père t'a abandonnée ; bon, où est-ce que sont mes bases ? (#3)

Figure 2
Exemples d'arbre de soutien

Certains parents évoquent la complexité de montrer le bon exemple face à la consommation de drogues de leurs jeunes, ayant eux-mêmes eu à surmonter ce problème dans le passé.

> Je suis préoccupée par la consommation de mon jeune parce que j'ai peur qu'il soit pris avec ces problèmes-là. Tu sais, ce n'est pas facile de sortir de ce problème-là. Moi j'ai beaucoup consommé. Me sortir de là, ça a été quelque chose. J'ai trouvé ça très dur, mais je suis passée à travers. Je suis bien aujourd'hui. (#7)

Plusieurs préfèrent être transparents avec leurs jeunes par rapport à leurs expériences passées : « Mes enfants le savent, parce que des fois je vais leur parler de mon temps où quand j'ai consommé et c'est quoi que ça a donné, c'est quoi que ça fait » (#7).

Reconnaissant le besoin de sensibilisation des jeunes face à la consommation, les parents se sont mobilisés pour organiser une soirée sur ce thème, menée par un parent qui a offert un témoignage personnel. L'intention était de faire profiter les jeunes de son expérience : « Avoir des discussions avec eux autres, avoir des partages, leur parler de qu'est-ce que j'ai vécu, qu'est-ce [qui est] arrivé, tu sais, faire de la prévention avec eux autres » (#7).

L'occasion de « se raconter » en tant qu'individu, avec son histoire passée, ses blessures et ses questionnements personnels devant un groupe qui offre une compréhension et un soutien collectif permet aux parents de cheminer personnellement vers une guérison. Ce processus aide particulièrement dans la création de ponts avec leurs jeunes.

Se projeter : le besoin de mieux vivre sa culture en ville

Le comité est un espace où les familles partagent leurs difficultés de vivre la culture atikamekw en ville. Plusieurs parents se préoccupent de la transmission de la culture auprès des jeunes. Ils veulent conserver leur culture et les liens familiaux tout en élevant leurs enfants en ville : « Aussi, mon plus grand souhait, c'est que mes enfants aient des amis autour, mais qu'ils n'oublient pas leur base que c'est les parents » (#3).

Le fait d'habiter en ville est parfois une source de tension avec leur jeune : « Bien, c'est plus moi qui est déchiré entre mes deux cultures, tu sais. Moi j'aimerais mieux qu'il vienne dans la communauté, vivre dans la communauté, qu'on aille à la chasse, qu'on aille à la pêche, on va faire un peu de trappes et tout ça. Mais elle, c'est plus je vais aller au centre-ville » (#3). Les participants parlent de la difficulté de vivre la culture atikamekw en ville étant donné la non-reconnaissance et l'intimidation vécue dans plusieurs contextes urbains. Il y a « toutes les remarques qu'ils te font, ce qu'ils disent, ce qu'ils font » (#3).

L'éloignement de la communauté est souvent mentionné comme obstacle à la transmission de la culture. Les participants souhaitent préserver le lien au territoire comme source d'identité : « J'aimerais ça aller vivre dans le bois, dret dans le bois » (#3). Les parents discutent du besoin d'exposer les jeunes au territoire pour y maintenir une continuité. Une mère précise : « C'est de [les] amener avec nous autres, faire des activités avec eux, il faut aller à la pêche avec eux autres, s'ils aiment ça. Aller camper, il y a la chasse. Ça, les jeunes, ils aiment ça. Ils aiment ça quand on leur montre qu'est-ce que leurs ancêtres faisaient » (#7). Les participants au comité se donnent des conseils à ce sujet. Un père raconte : « Quand je vois des enfants qui naissent ici puis qui résident ici, je me dis souvent, essaie d'amener ton enfant le plus possible à la forêt pour qu'il maintienne certaines, qu'il s'identifie, de ce que sont leur origine » (#3).

> On considère d'ailleurs que le CAAL facilite la culture autochtone en milieu urbain : Si tu viens ici, tu te retrouves parce que tu as des affaires qui sont culturelles, à nous. Mais si je restais à la maison, s'il n'y avait pas un lieu de rassemblement comme le CAAL, ça aurait été encore plus difficile de maintenir la culture, organiser des activités qui se rapportent aux traditions. (#3)

Selon un jeune : « quand je vois ma mère au Centre, elle a tendance à être plus souriante, je sais qu'elle a été en contact avec son peuple » (#13). Le Centre d'amitié a ainsi été un facteur favorisant les partages entre les membres du comité *Witcihitisotan* puisqu'il est considéré comme étant un espace culturellement sécuritaire, connu et utilisé autant par les plus jeunes que les plus âgés. Ce genre d'endroit, où chacun peut se réunir, est rare (voire inexistant) pour les parents autochtones de Joliette.

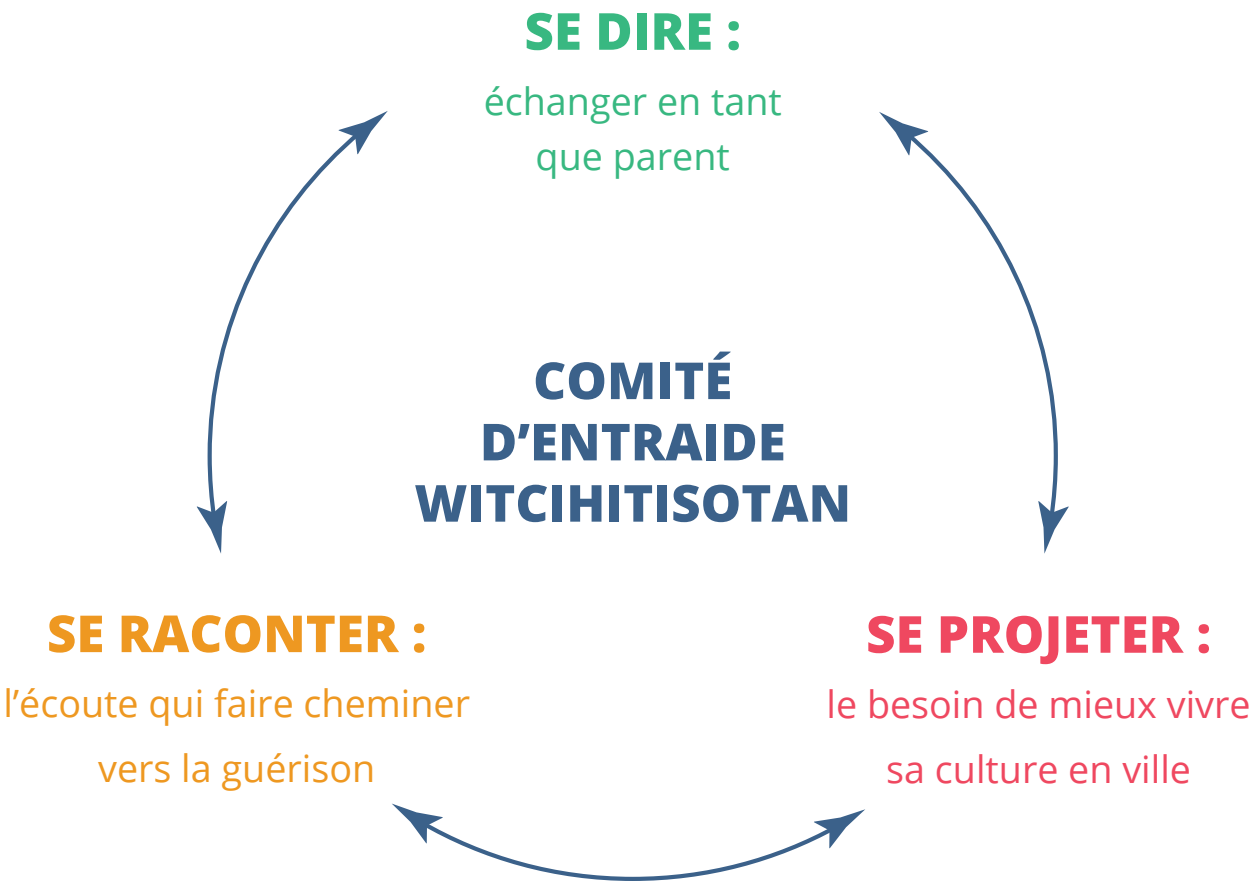
Le comité offre ainsi un espace culturellement sécuritaire pour « se projeter », où parents, jeunes et aînés réfléchissent ensemble à la manière de continuer à transmettre leur culture auprès des jeunes en ville. Ils se rassemblent pour célébrer leur fierté identitaire et confronter le racisme.

Discussion

Résultat d'une démarche amorcée et modulée en fonction des besoins des familles pour soutenir les jeunes en milieu urbain, le comité *Witcihitisotan* (entraide) est significatif à plusieurs égards. Des aspects bénéfiques se dégagent de cette expérience, qui pourraient donner des informations pour permettre des initiatives similaires dans d'autres contextes.

L'aspect collectif constitue un élément central de l'expérience du comité. Ce rassemblement de membres de famille offre un contexte favorable pour permettre aux parents d'aborder des problématiques actuelles, de se soutenir mutuellement et de construire un réseau de solidarité. D'abord, c'est un espace pour « se dire », au sein duquel il est possible de partager ses préoccupations et recevoir des conseils de ses pairs. Ensuite, le comité permet de « se raconter », c'est-à-dire de partager son propre parcours pour cheminer vers la guérison. Enfin, le comité est un espace pour « se projeter » dans l'avenir. À travers les discussions, les familles se questionnent quant à la façon de vivre la parentalité et la culture autochtones en milieu urbain. Bien que ces formes de soutien aient été présentées de manière séparée dans cette analyse, elles sont interreliées, interdépendantes, et complémentaires dans le fonctionnement du comité (voir Figure 3 sur la page suivante).

Figure 3
Les formes de soutien du comité du comité Witcihitisotan (entraide)



Ces formes de soutien, dans une temporalité fluide, font écho au *storytelling*. Le partage des histoires personnelles favorise la valorisation, le renforcement et l'autoguérison (Episkenew, 2009). Les récits offrent une occasion de s'exprimer et de (re)trouver sa voix. Ceci permet de reprendre confiance en ses compétences, ce qui constitue un élément particulièrement important dans le contexte où, comme nous le rappelle la mère dans la citation d'ouverture, les parents vivent un sentiment d'échec, et se sentent souvent seuls dans leur rôle. Laisser une place au récit a permis de mettre l'accent sur les forces des membres du groupe et d'envisager une réelle décolonisation de l'intervention (Pihama et coll., 2019). Le format choisi fait également écho à la manière dont la plupart des peuples autochtones appréhendent le monde qui les entoure. Leur mode de vie est ancré dans une vision du monde circulaire et relationnelle et fondée sur des valeurs de partage, de respect, d'écoute, de responsabilité, d'entraide qui dictent la plupart des choix qu'ils font (Absolon, 2010). De telles valeurs sont aussi ancrées dans et par le mode de vie traditionnel sur le territoire (Guay et Delisle-L'Heureux, 2019), d'où l'importance pour les parents de maintenir le lien au territoire et à la culture atikamekw.

Au-delà d'une recherche de solutions aux défis que vivent les parents d'adolescents, l'apport plus fondamental du comité a été la création collective d'un espace émotionnellement sécuritaire pour pouvoir se raconter, se dire, et se projeter comme mères, pères et plus largement comme familles membres d'une communauté autochtone vivant dans un contexte urbain. Cette (ré)appropriation par les parents de leurs capacités dans une optique d'apprentissage collectif de compétences parentales et d'un mieux-être personnel n'est pas possible lorsque les programmes sont préconçus pour livrer une information standardisée par des experts extérieurs. L'importance de la guérison individuelle et collective est aussi ressortie comme partie intégrante du cheminement des parents pour soutenir leurs jeunes, un constat qui rejoint d'autres études sur le sujet (Clément, 2007; Guay et Delisle-L'Heureux, 2019). L'histoire coloniale et les traumatismes intergénérationnels sont indissociables des réalités présentes dans les communautés autochtones. C'est pourquoi les pratiques et les programmes développés pour les allochtones ne peuvent pas simplement être transposés en contexte autochtone (Bedi, 2018 ; Brascoupe et Waters, 2009).

Le comité s'est réuni dans un espace culturellement sécuritaire comme celui que représente le CAAL. Étant donné l'éloignement de la communauté et le racisme envers les Autochtones qui perdure en ville (RCAAQ, 2018), cette occasion de se rassembler semble une condition essentielle pour pouvoir échanger, se soutenir et surtout « être soi-même » (#13). Puisque pour les Autochtones, la parentalité englobe la famille élargie, limiter la participation au comité *Witcihitisotan* aux parents biologiques aurait été inapproprié. Ainsi, l'aspect intergénérationnel du comité se manifeste par la présence d'aînés et de jeunes aux soupers-causeries. D'une part, les aînés ont un rôle de soutien et de transmetteurs de culture. D'autre part, les adolescents ont été dans une posture d'écoute et de partage enrichissante pour les parents. Cet aspect confirme l'importance de refléter les conceptualisations différentes de la famille dans les interventions (Tam, Findlay et Kohen, 2017).

Tout en soulignant l'autonomie qui a caractérisé ce groupe de soutien par les pairs, il faut reconnaître également l'importance du rôle d'encadrement qu'ont joué le CAAL et l'équipe de recherche. Ces derniers ont rendu accessibles des ressources matérielles (l'espace physique, les repas, l'accès au transport), une structure et les moyens de communication, facilitant la mobilisation des familles et stimulant la participation des membres de la communauté urbaine (Greenwood et coll., 2017). Ainsi, l'expérience de ce comité soulève l'importance des espaces de soutien des familles dans des organismes autochtones, pour favoriser les conditions adéquates à la mobilisation des familles.

Il sera intéressant de poursuivre la documentation du comité à long terme pour comprendre la portée de ce type d'entraide auprès des parents, des jeunes et des membres de la famille élargie. Ces démarches de partage collectif de compétences parentales peuvent aussi être un tremplin pour améliorer les liens de collaboration entre la famille, l'école et les jeunes. Des expériences de valorisation parentale comme celle-ci peuvent renforcer la confiance des parents et contribuer à rendre plus équitable leur interaction avec le milieu scolaire, dans une dynamique qui transcende, entre autres, l'approche centrée sur les déficits des individus ou des familles.

Conclusion

L'expérience du comité *Witcihitisotan* est inspirante, car elle démontre le potentiel d'une démarche entreprise par et pour les familles qui fait place *à l'agencéité des* membres de la communauté dans la définition des besoins et priorités pour soutenir leurs jeunes. Ce projet illustre les multiples formes de soutien nécessaires pour que les parents, les familles, les jeunes et les aînés autochtones puissent s'épanouir dans un contexte d'urbanisation grandissante. Se dire, se raconter, se projeter, contribuent à briser l'isolement, à renforcer et à retrouver la confiance en ses capacités à soutenir les jeunes adolescents. Cette entraide entre pairs à travers un processus de *storytelling* permet de se doter de stratégies porteuses adéquates au cheminement individuel et collectif, vers un mieux-être qui favorise une autochtonie urbaine forte, incluant toutes les générations.

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> Le comité, ça permet de briser le silence et l'isolement parce qu'on a tendance à être gênée quand on perd notre capacité parentale; c'est comme un échec [...] [Le comité] renforce notre capacité comme parent, avec le soutien qu'on reçoit de notre communauté et avec notre *kokum*. (Mère membre du comité)

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Early Childhood Education Training in Nunavut: Insights from the *Inunnguiniq* ("Making of a Human Being") Pilot Project

Ceporah Mearns,[a,b] Gwen Healey Akearok,[a,c] Maria Cherba,[a,d] Lauren Nevin[a]

a Qaujigiartiit Health Research Centre
b Nunavut Network Environments for Indigenous Health Research
c Northern Ontario School of Medicine
d University of Ottawa

Corresponding author: Maria Cherba, cherba.maria@gmail.com

Abstract

In the past two decades, evidence has shown that quality early childhood education (ECE) has lasting positive impacts, enhances wellbeing in many domains, and contributes to reducing economic and health inequalities. In Canada, complex colonial history has affected Indigenous peoples' child-rearing techniques, and there is a need to support community-owned programs and revitalize traditional values and practices. While several studies have described Indigenous approaches to childrearing, there is a lack of publications outlining the core content of preschool staff training and exploring Indigenous early childhood pedagogy. This article contributes to the literature by highlighting the features of a highly effective training model rooted in Inuit values that has been implemented in Nunavut. After describing how early childhood education is organized in Nunavut, we outline the challenges related to staff training and present the development and the pilot implementation of an evidence-based training program. We then discuss its successes and challenges and formulate suggestions for professionals and policymakers to enhance early childhood educators' training in the territory.

Keywords: Early childhood education (ECE), Nunavut, Inuit models of child-rearing, early childhood educators training, evaluation of training models.

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Introduction

The critical importance of the first years of life is well acknowledged. According to a World Health Organization report on the social determinants of health (Commission on Social Determinants of Health [CSDH], 2008), three broad domains of early child development contribute to health and have a role to play in reducing health inequities: physical, social/emotional, and language/cognitive.

In the past two decades, evidence has shown that quality preschool or prekindergarten education has lasting positive impacts, enhances wellbeing in many domains, and promotes economic benefits to society (Barnett, 2011; Reynolds et al., 2011; Zigler, 2006). The premise is based on the life-course perspective, which focuses on understanding how early life experiences can shape health across an entire lifetime and potentially across generations. This approach systematically directs attention to the role of context, including social and physical context, along with biological factors, over time (Braveman & Barclay, 2009).

Early educational interventions have been proposed to partially offset the impacts of poverty and inadequate learning environments on child development and school success (Barnett, 2011). A broad range of early educational interventions produces meaningful, lasting effects on cognitive, social, and schooling outcomes (Barnett, 2011). These early learning experiences initiate a pattern of cumulative advantages that can translate into enduring life-course effects (Braveman & Barclay, 2009; Reynolds et al., 2011; Schweinhart, 2004; Tagalik et al., 2018).

In Canada, complex colonial history has affected Indigenous peoples' child-rearing techniques, and there is a need to support community-owned programs and revitalize traditional values and practices (Karetak et al., 2017; McShane & Hastings, 2004; Muir & Bohr, 2019; Tagalik, 2018; Tulugarjuk & Christopher, 2011). In a review of early childhood education for Indigenous people living in Canada, Preston et al. (2011) highlight that successful programs promote Indigenous languages, cultures, and pedagogy, are adequately staffed by qualified Indigenous educators, and empower parents and communities. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls for developing culturally appropriate early childhood education programs, protecting Indigenous language rights, and enabling parents to participate in their children's education fully (TRC, 2015; see also Taylor, 2017).

In 1995, the Government of Canada launched the Aboriginal Head Start (AHS) initiative to provide early childhood education programming to Indigenous children and families. AHS was modelled after an American early learning program "Project Head Start" (Barrieau & Ireland, 2004; Preston, 2008). There is no standard curriculum for AHS sites, but each program reflects the Indigenous culture of the community in which it is offered (Barrieau & Ireland, 2004; Dela Cruz & McCarthy, 2010; DeRiviere, 2016; Mashford-Pringle, 2012; Nguyen, 2011; Preston, 2008). Programming generally follows six core components: (1) education and school readiness, (2) Aboriginal culture and language, (3) parental involvement, (4) health promotion, (5) nutrition, and (6) social support. In

2017, 134 sites in 117 communities across Canada provided full- and half-day programming for 4,600 First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children (Public Health Agency of Canada [PHAC], 2017).

To encourage language learning and revitalization, several Indigenous communities in Canada and other countries have implemented "language nests" (*Te KÇhango* in māori), immersive preschool childcare programs developed in New Zealand in the 1980s (McIvor, 2005a, 2005b). In Nunavut, Inuktitut-only immersion programs include the *Tumikuluit Saipaaqivik* daycare in Iqaluit and *Ilinniariurqsarvik* Head Start in Igloolik (Beveridge, 2012; Dalseg, 2016).

Many of these programs rely on Elders to teach the traditional language and culture. Elders are consulted when building programs and participate by speaking to the children in their traditional language, telling stories, playing games, teaching traditional skills (such as building toys, tools, and cleaning animal skins), and leading traditional ceremonies (such as healing circles) (Beveridge, 2012; McIvor, 2005a). Parental involvement is also an important part of many initiatives and is recognized as essential in maintaining traditional language and culture at home (Dalseg, 2016; DeRiviere, 2016; Mashford-Pringle, 2012).

Hiring and retaining qualified early childhood educators is a common challenge reported by different programs for various reasons, including difficulty in accessing training, language requirements, and low wages and benefits (Barrieau & Ireland, 2004; Beveridge, 2012; DeRiviere, 2016; McIvor, 2005a). Early childhood educators play a critical role in the success of ECE programs, but staff training is a challenge for many daycare facilities in Indigenous communities across Canada due to the high demands (e.g., long hours, short-staffed) on early childhood education workers and the limited flexibility in scheduling to arrange time away from children to pursue professional development (Friendly et al., 2018; Qikiqtani Inuit Association [QIA], 2017). While several studies have described Indigenous approaches to child-rearing (e.g., McShane & Hastings, 2004; Muir & Bohr, 2019; Rowan, 2013, 2014), there is a lack of publications outlining the core content of preschool staff training and exploring Indigenous early childhood pedagogy. This article contributes to the literature on community-based training programs for early childhood educators grounded in Indigenous culture and knowledge by highlighting the features of a highly effective training model rooted specifically in Inuit values that was implemented in Nunavut, where there are presently no formal training requirements for early childhood educators. After describing how early childhood education is organized in Nunavut, we outline the challenges related to staff training and present the development and the pilot implementation of an evidence-based training program. We then discuss its successes and challenges and formulate suggestions for professionals and policymakers to enhance early childhood educators' training in the territory. Specifically, two systemic barriers to accessing training were identified: the financing model that disincentivizes daycares to support staff training opportunities and the staff shortages resulting in training programs disrupting the daycare services available in the communities. Policies must be adjusted to provide financial support and incentives for early childhood educators' training and early childhood educators' support staff recruitment and retention initiatives.

Early Childhood Education in Nunavut

According to the 2016 census, the average age in Nunavut was 27.7 years, the youngest in the country. Nunavut has the highest proportion of children aged 14 and under at 32.5% and the lowest proportion of people aged 65 and over at 3.8% (Government of Nunavut, 2017). Quality early childhood development has been identified as one of the critical social determinants of Inuit health in Canada (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami [ITK], 2014a). There is a strong need to enhance early childhood education in communities, including access to Inuit-specific opportunities and support for parents and families (Cameron, 2011; Friendly, 2004, cited in ITK, 2014b). A recent Government of Canada (2018) report based on engagement sessions with Inuit partners highlighted that "Inuit view early learning and child care as an opportunity for cultural revitalization that holds the possibility of connecting Inuit with their land, culture, language, and histories" (p. 14). Early childhood education can provide "the best possible start to life" by giving children "the opportunity to learn and speak Inuktut" and "grow up prepared to live a harmonious life rooted in Inuit ways of knowing" (Government of Canada, 2018, p. 14).

All daycare facilities in Nunavut are operating as non-profits and are regulated by the Nunavut Department of Education (2020a). As of January 2020, there are 59 licensed childcare facilities in the territory (Nunavut Department of Education, 2020b). The government's responsibilities regarding early childhood education are legislated under the *Education Act* (Nunavut Department of Education, 2008), which states that the education authorities shall provide access to programs that promote fluency in the Inuit language and knowledge of Inuit culture, as well as the opportunity to employ Elders to assist in instruction. There are no formal training requirements for early childhood educators in Nunavut, but they must be at least 19 years old (younger people may work as support staff) and "have the maturity, knowledge, and skills necessary to manage their responsibilities in a professional and ethical manner" (Nunavut Department of Education, 2014, pp. 17-2, 17-3). Also, "as much as possible, the cultural and ethnic backgrounds of children attending the child daycare facility [must be] reflected in the cultural and ethnic backgrounds of staff" in order to encourage children's language and culture (Nunavut Department of Education, 2014, p. 17-2).

Since 1988, an early childhood education program has been available at Nunavut Arctic College in Iqaluit (Friendly & Beach, 2005). There is no data on the number of graduates in relation to the early childhood educator positions available in the territory, nor whether the graduates are working in early childhood education settings. There is a need to develop community-based programs rooted in Inuit worldview and delivered in Inuit languages, and to increase funding for training and retention of qualified staff (Government of Canada, 2017; ITK, 2014b). Existing ECE training has not historically been based on Inuit child-rearing philosophy or worldview, which is a challenge that has been highlighted in previous research (Pauktuutit, 2007).

Other evidence suggests that insufficient pay and benefits for daycare/preschool workers have resulted in trained workers pursuing work in other fields with more competitive benefits (Beveridge, 2012; DeRiviere, 2016). Daycare workers often earn minimum wage and struggle to obtain professional development (ITK, 2013, 2014b). In addition, given the shortage of early childhood education workers, there is a need for training programs that early childhood educators could take without leaving their daycare for long periods to pursue formal training, such as the Nunavut Arctic College program. In 2017, funding for a territory-wide early learning and childcare professional development action plan was to be completed in 2020 (Government of Canada, 2017), further underscoring the need for community-based research and evidence in this area.

In the following section, we present the results of the training needs assessment survey of daycare staff in Nunavut and how it informed the development of a training model. The training needs assessment survey was intended to describe the types of training that respondents have completed as well as their needs and interests. In addition, the respondents were asked to reflect on how they best see training delivered in their context. This study was led by a community-based research centre and involved a team of researchers who are also community members. One of the research team members is a board member and parent of the daycare where the project took place. The relationship between the researchers and the pilot project site was developed over years of collaborative work.

Nunavut Early Childhood Education Survey

Method

In fall 2018, an online survey was distributed by email to all the licensed daycares in Nunavut (n = 59). The survey was carried out by the *Qaujigiartiit* Health Research Centre using the Qualtrics platform. It contained demographic questions as well as questions (both multiple choice and text answers) covering the following topics: the length of service in early childhood education, types and location of training completed, the training needs and interests, and the best ways to deliver training. Questions were developed in consultation with a subset of long-term early childcare workers in Nunavut via telephone and in-person discussion. Twenty-eight (28) daycare workers with various experiences (ranging from a few months to up to 18 years of working in childcare) from all three regions of Nunavut completed the survey. Descriptive statistics were tabulated for the multiple-choice data. Text-based data were small in number and reported directly.

Survey Findings

Previous training experience. Twenty-four (24) out of 28 respondents had received some professional development training, and four (4) respondents had not received any training. The most common types of training were early childhood education courses or certificates (13 respondents) and first aid training (17 respondents). Few participants had received other types of training,

including workplace safety, food safety and nutrition (e.g., see Government of Nunavut, 2020; Hamilton et al., 2004), annual territory-wide early learning and childcare training for daycare managers, and working with high-risk children. Participants mostly received previous training in Iqaluit (12 respondents); five respondents received training in other communities, and five respondents received training outside of the territory. One person mentioned online training.

Training needs of Nunavut early childhood educators. When asked about their training interests, participants identified five top areas: traditional knowledge, special needs education, day planning, child development, and first aid. Other areas of interest included "uplifting welcoming to kids," basic training in speech therapy, and conflict resolution. Given the demands of early childhood education workers and the difficulty of taking time off to participate in training, the survey also explored different scheduling methods. Four delivery options for a five-day professional development course were outlined in the survey: (a) training on evenings or weekends, (b) one or two staff per training to minimize interruption to daycare operations, (c)close daycare for five days to train everyone at the same time as a group or (d) training during the summer when daycare is closed/fewer children attending. The respondents favoured training on evenings or weekends or closing the daycare for five days to train everyone in the same group. The least favoured model was doing training during the summer months. We developed a training pilot in one of the licensed daycares in Nunavut based on the survey results.

Inunnguiniq Daycare Training Pilot

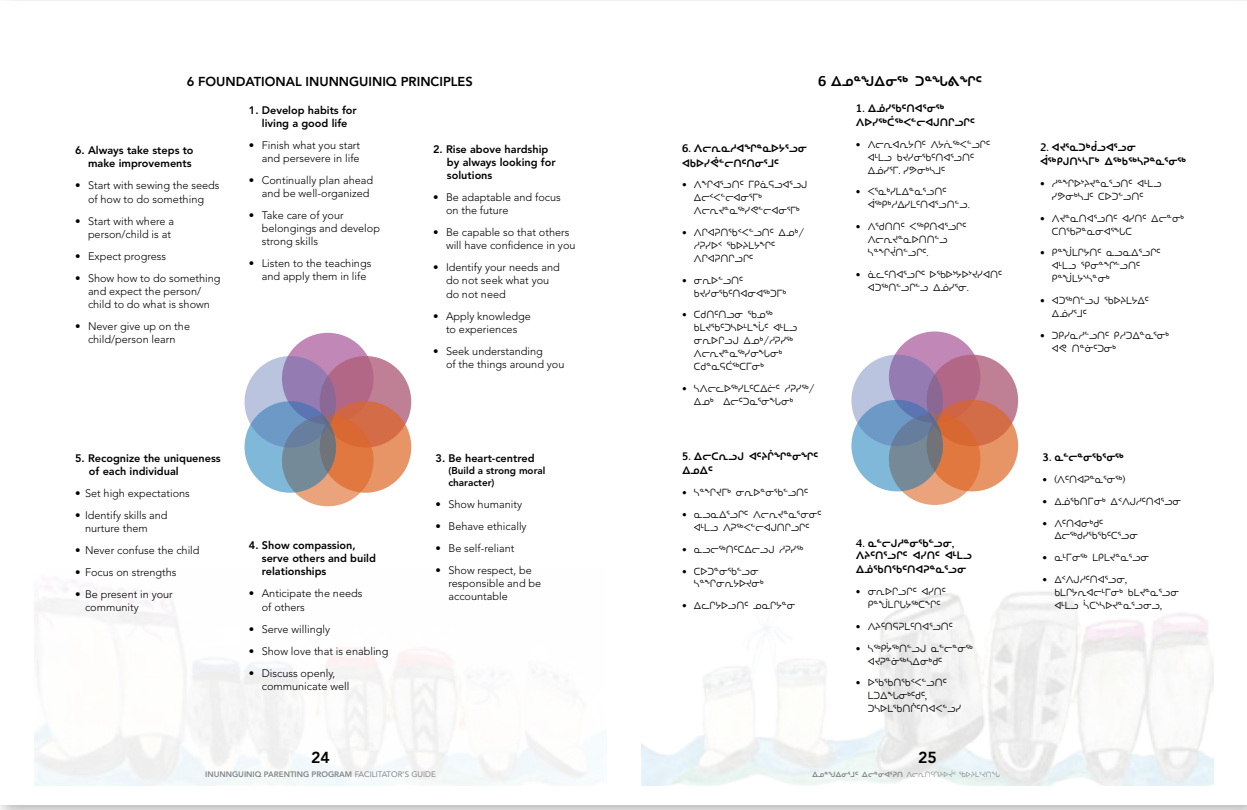
The early childhood educators' professional development pilot project was conducted at *Tumikuluit Saipaaqivik* (Iqaluit Inuktitut Daycare) in Iqaluit. The daycare was founded in 2008 by a group of Inuit mothers who wanted culturally based childcare services offered in Inuktitut (ITK, 2014b). It is the only childcare in Nunavut with an Inuktitut-only policy: all staff speak Inuktitut, Inuktitut is spoken all the time, and all educational materials are in Inuktitut (ITK, 2014b). The centre also brings in Elders to work with children.

The professional development course's focus was the *Inunnguiniq* ("making of a human being") Childrearing Program – a made-in-Nunavut program to revitalize Inuit child-rearing practices in families' lives (Tagalik, 2010). The training course for *Inunnguiniq* is 35 hours, typically delivered over five days. The *Inunnguiniq* curriculum for early childhood education (children aged 0–5) workers is a well-established and recommended best practice in Nunavut for individuals working with Inuit children (Government of Nunavut, 2016). This course provides participants with an opportunity to learn best practices in Inuit child-rearing using a strength-based, empowerment approach to support healing and rebuild the role of extended family and community in early childhood education.

The program is embedded in Inuit ways of knowing (*Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit*) (e.g., see Nunavut Department of Education, 2007) and was developed following the *Piliriqatigiinniq* Community

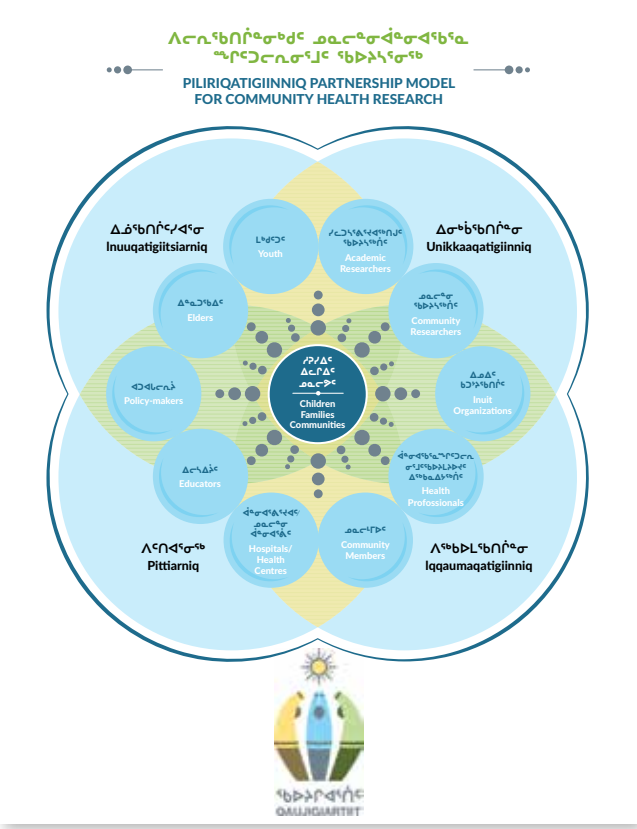
Health Research Model based on the Inuit concepts of *inuuqatigiittiarniq* (“being respectful of all people”), *unikkaaqatigiinniq* (storytelling), *pittiarniq* (“being kind and good”), *iqqaumaqatigiinniq* (“all things coming into one”), and *piliriqatigiinniq* (“working together for the common good”) (Healey & Tagak Sr., 2014). Specifically, the *Inunnguiniq* curriculum is based on four components: (1) cultural revitalization and healing, (2) rebuilding authentic identity, (3) reconnecting with the land, and (4) healing collectively and individually (Tagalik et al., 2018). The foundational principles of the *Inunnguiniq* program and the *Piliriqatigiinniq* model are outlined in Figures 1 and 2 below.

Figure 1
Foundational Inunnguiniq *Principles*



Developed by *Qaujigiartiit* Health Research Centre (QHRC) over five years (2010–2015), the *Inunnguiniq* program has primarily been offered to community members, maternal-child health workers, shelter workers, social workers, and community justice outreach workers. More than 350 Nunavummiut (the Inuktitut language term for “people of Nunavut”) have been trained as facilitators of the program, ranging in age from 19 to 85. Typically, facilitators have been individuals working in the health and social services sectors, teachers, and interested community members (QHRC, n.d.). Participants who have either taught or led the program are asked to provide six-month follow-up feedback to the instructors, and many have reported a range of benefits, including: stronger

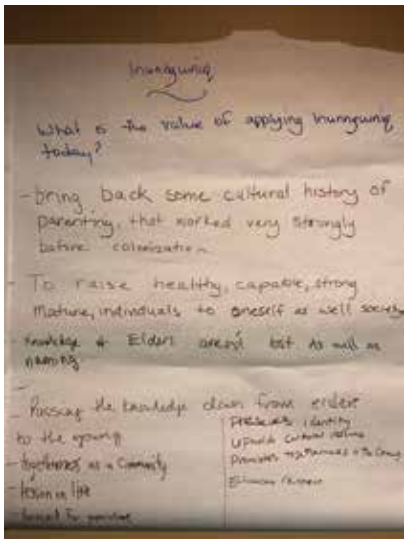
Figure 2
The Piliriqatigiinniq *Partnership Model for Community Health Research*



relationships in their families; a greater connection to their culture and identity; support in coping with grief; changes in attitudes and behaviour in children; greater engagement in activities such as sharing food, harvesting, and being on the land; a greater understanding of the events that separated families and children in Nunavut's past and present; and a strong love for Inuit values and practices in relation to child-rearing (QHRC, n.d.). Figure 3 further illustrates the importance of *Inunnguiniq* in the lives of Inuit families today.

In 2014, instructors for the *Inunnguiniq* child-rearing program were invited to present to students in the early childhood education program at Nunavut Arctic College. The program had not been introduced to early childhood workers until that date. During the eight months after providing the training to the students, we collected anecdotal evidence from some of the daycares in Iqaluit, where students completed practicum placements, and the students successfully integrated *Inunnguiniq* activities from the program into the daycare setting. The anecdotal evidence and the survey results led to the *Inunnguiniq* pilot's development for Iqaluit's daycare workers. During the *Inunnguiniq* daycare pilot presented in this article, the program was formally tested for the first time as part of early childhood educators' professional development. The delivery format was developed based on a series of training options provided to daycare workers. The training was delivered by two *Inunnguiniq* instructors and an Elder instructor.

Figure 3
Flip Chart Discussion About the Importance of Inunnguiniq *in the Lives of Inuit Families Today*



To evaluate the pilot project, we conducted a post-training sharing circle on the last day of training. A post-training follow-up survey was distributed after 14 days and filled out

anonymously. In addition, the training instructors recorded their observations in a journal, and their reflections on the training structure, content, and delivery model complemented the analyses. This mixed-methods approach is consistent with previous *Inunnguiniq* program pilots in other settings (Healey, 2015, 2017). The evaluation was completed in March 2019. Data were analyzed using the process of *Iqqaumaqatigiinniq, which* involves deep thinking and critical reflection on information until realization is achieved (Healey & Tagak Sr., 2014). This process is similar to "immersion and crystallization" as described by Borkan (1999).

Pilot Site Recruitment and Pilot Implementation

To choose a daycare for the pilot project, we reached out to two daycares in Iqaluit whose staff expressed interest in the training. One daycare volunteered to participate, and the other, while interested, could not participate due to a shortage of staff. After consultation with the director, the daycare decided to close one day per week for four weeks to deliver the training and omit one day of the five-day course. The omitted day focused on healthy meals and nutrition, a topic in which the daycare staff had already received training. The pilot included a budget to cover travel costs and provide the daycare fees for the days that the daycare was closed.

Eleven daycare staff enrolled in the training, and five participants completed the four-week program in February 2019. These five participants, all women aged from early 20s to approximately 40 were from Iqaluit, Arctic Bay, and Resolute Bay. They have lived in Nunavut between 25 years and all their life.

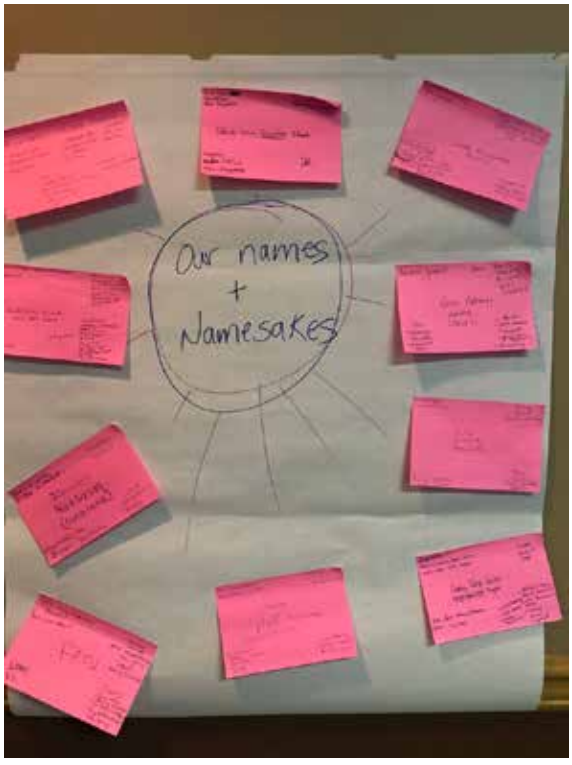
Success and Challenges of the Weekly Pilot Training Model

In the post-training survey (completed by all five participants), participants said that they felt better prepared to deliver the *Inunnguiniq* program and that the training materials would be useful to them in their future practice with young people.

Participants identified content they were excited to share with families and in the daycare setting, including family budgeting, goal-setting, and traditional Inuit naming and namesake teachings (see Figure 4). Participants were also excited to share Inuit storytelling, specifically the Rock and the Egg

Figure 4

Inuit Naming Activity



Note. During this activity that was used as part of the training, participants had the opportunity to share their names and stories about their namesakes.

story describing Inuit perspectives on attachment, disorganized attachment, and child development, as explained by Rhoda Karetak (Elder from Arviat, Nunavut) (Tagalik et al., 2018). These content areas are summarized in Figure 5 below. The participants indicated in the survey that they appreciated their experience and the tools that were provided, and that they believed that practicing the program together would "help create an environment of common learning – for the better good!"

Figure 5

Professional Development Content Areas Beneficial in the Daycare Setting

Family Budgeting	Inuit Storytelling	Inuit Naming Practices	Goal-Setting Activities	Egg, Rock, Inuk Story
Role playing games Budgeting template activity	Incorporation of old stories and the values therein Kaujagjuk, Kiviuq, Nikanaittuq, and others	Revitalizing and explaining Inuit naming practices Discussing the role of naming in identifying supportive relationships for a child	Identifying a child's strengths Setting goals for cultivating their strengths and expanding their knowledge Doing the same for ourselves as caregivers/ parents	Describes Inuit perspectives on attachment, disorganized attachment, and child development

Note. The pilot project participants found these content areas beneficial to their work.

Potential challenges for implementing the teachings in participants' practice included ensuring continuity with the parents' approach outside of the daycare. The participants felt that it was as important as implementing the *Inunnquiniq* tools in their work, but noted that having parents commit to attending the training can be challenging because of family obligations.

The six participants who did not complete the training program expressed two primary reasons for non-completion: competing family commitments at the time (the need for childcare was noted in retrospect for staff who had their children in the daycare), and the delivery model of one day per week that did not allow for enough immersion to engage with the material in the same way an immersive five-day course would.

The *Inunnguiniq* training course instructors reported that the program content was relevant to the participants and the activities undertaken within the daycare. Opportunities to be innovative in sharing course content were identified at the end of the course, including:

1) to offer *Inunnguiniq* nights to parents of children in the daycare to reinforce learning at home;
2) leaving less time between course sessions to keep momentum, but at the same time giving participants enough time between sessions to prepare and practice; and
3) inviting additional Elder instructors who can share their rich experience and knowledge.

Systemic Barriers to Accessing Ongoing Training

As part of the pilot's evaluation, participants identified two barriers to accessing early childhood education training and suggested how they could be addressed.

The first barrier is the risk of losing revenue. All daycares operate as non-profit organizations under the Government of Nunavut, and their revenue comes from parental fees and subsidies, as well as operational grants from the government. These funds are contingent on the days that the daycare is open. If the daycare is closed due to a non-weather issue, such as training or repairs, it loses subsidies and revenue. This loss of revenue disincentivizes daycares to support training opportunities for staff. As part of the pilot project, funding was provided to the participating daycare to cover staff wages and revenue loss due to closure, hire relief staff, and pay for childcare services. To promote early childhood education training, government policies need to be adjusted to provide financial support and staff training incentives. In addition, other avenues to support training without imposing a financial burden on daycares could be explored, such as leveraging external funding grants.

The second barrier was the impact of training programs on the daycare's day-to-day operations, given the shortage of staff and the commonality of staff shortages across daycares in Nunavut. Training models must be developed in partnership with daycare workers and administrators and must be tailored to their needs. In addition, there is a need to develop staff recruitment and retention initiatives. Our pilot project caused unavoidable disruption to the daycare program: approximately 20 families did not have access to childcare during the four days of training. One of the solutions that were suggested in this regard was to "afford early childhood educators professional development days, as in the case with teachers" (ITK, 2013, p. 23).

Study Limitations

Since only one daycare participated in this pilot project, the results may not represent the reality of all daycare centres in Nunavut, especially those located in remote communities. Further investigation of the barriers and facilitators related to training at daycares is needed to inform future policy and program initiatives. While the training model presented in this article worked reasonably well for the daycare that participated in the pilot project, different models might be more appropriate in other settings. At the same time, all participants in the pilot project found the *Inunnguiniq* training program useful. We believe that it will be beneficial to explore its implementation in other communities.

While our pilot project covered travel costs and provided the daycare fees for the days that the daycare was closed, recruiting participants remained a challenge due to understaffing and daycares being unable to send staff to training. This underscores the need for made-in-Nunavut training programs, which are tailored to the needs, realities, and the working conditions of local daycare staff (ITK, 2013).

Lastly, a request was made to the Government of Nunavut to review policies or directives related to professional development and training for early childhood education workers. The response was that there were no policies available to review. There exists a lack of clarity regarding which agencies are involved in providing training to early childhood education workers, and it appears to be largely up to the individual person or daycare to engage in such opportunities.

Conclusion

For Nunavummiut, early childhood education is valued and recognized as an essential contributor to current and future wellbeing among children. Implementing effective and accessible early childhood education and associated professional development opportunities for early childhood educators are critical steps in actualizing the vision of early childhood education in our territory.

Overall, our pilot project highlighted both the need for training for early childhood education workers and the systematic barriers that prohibit this capacity development. A database of training opportunities, such as through Nunavut Arctic College, Inuit organizations, the Government of Nunavut, and community organizations could help raise awareness about opportunities. A gap and strength analysis of those opportunities could further highlight specific areas for improvement to address daycare staff and administrators' needs.

Barriers related to daycare funding and accessibility of training should be addressed so that all children in Nunavut can access quality spaces for learning during the critical first years of life. The current fragmented funding system contributes to inequities across the territory. Systemic change is needed to ensure equitable investment in early childhood education in Nunavut because this is a critically important and well-established determinant of health in the territory (Government of Nunavut, 2005). These findings make an important contribution to the literature in this field and can and have helped inform new and ongoing initiatives to address this much-needed area in Nunavut. Future research should expand on these findings to explore professional development models for early childhood education workers that meet the unique needs and circumstances of Inuit communities.

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