# Xàgots'eèhk'ǫ̀
## JOURNAL


**EDUCATION IN THE NORTH**

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Xàgots'eèhk'ǫ̀ Journal , Vol. 1, Issue 1, (Nov. 2022)
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# Cover Art: Back from the Rabbits

**Antoine Mountain**

This painting depicts a grandmother and her granddaughter on their way back from checking rabbit snares in springtime. The birch trees are included because they are a factor in snaring rabbits. The buds on birch trees – where the leaves come out – are a favourite rabbit food. When setting snares in the old way, the way I learned is to use a string and a long pole. It's safer, too, because the rabbit is lifted off the ground once it's caught. Wherever the snare is set, cut some branches with some buds and shake the buds loose – that will attract rabbits to the area.

*__Antoine Mountain__ is Dene from Radilih Koe (Fort Good Hope) in the Northwest Territories. His love for the land and its people is the root of his artwork, for which he uses acrylics on canvas, favouring the Impressionist style. He is driven by a deep-rooted spiritualism to depict landscapes, the Dene way of life, and portraits. Antoine has a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the Ontario College of Arts and Design at the University of Toronto, a Master's of Environmental Studies from York University, and is currently pursuing a PhD in Indigenous Studies at Trent University.*

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# Godı haı̨ht’ee

**John B. Zoe**

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Each fall our people would travel on our ancestral trails to hozìı (the barrenlands) to harvest everything they needed to prepare for the winter. On one of the major trails called the Hozììdeè Etǫ K’è, on a small river lake just above the outflow of Tsı̨k’eèmı̨̀tì, there is a monumental island called Dedats’etsaa where people would leave the things they didn’t need beyond the tree line.[1] From there the people would travel to hunt in hozìı, collecting all the necessary materials for the coming winter: hides for clothing and drymeat to carry them through freeze up.

On their return to Dedats’etsaa, the people would retrieve everything they left behind, and everyone would come together again. As the lakes and rivers froze, they spent time working on equipment and tools and building sleds for winter. When everyone was together, it was also a good time to tell stories.

*There was a time when the animals and the people intermingled with one another. Satsǫ̀gaà, upon seeing an encampment with many campfires from above, landed high up on a tree. Looking around, he saw Nǫ̀htà (Grebe) and Kwoh (Merganser) walking towards their tent. He could see that the two birds had long beautiful hair, and he began to think about how he could convince them to cut it. From his perch he coasted down to the ground and turned into a man. Then he walked into the camp. The residents greeted him and followed him as he made his way to where Nǫ̀htà and Kwoh shared a tipi. Both people and animals followed him because they were excited to hear his stories and news from his travels.*

*Nǫ̀htà and Kwoh greeted Satsǫ̀gaà and invited him in to sit next to them. The older ones crowded around the hearth, while younger aggressive ones poked their heads in at the entrance. Others spread around the outside of the kǫ̀nihba (caribou hide tipi), leaning in with their ears to hear better. Nǫ̀htà and Kwoh fed their guest. When Satsǫ̀gaà finished, they introduced him as the one who travels and sees everything and has many stories to tell. Satsǫ̀gaà used his hands and arms and body movements when he told stories, so he sat with space between him and everyone else so the community could see him clearly. Goxè hodıı k’e nı̨̀tla (he started telling a story). Satsǫ̀gaà talked about the outside world, what he had seen and heard, and shared news from relatives far away.*

*Once he had the camp totally fixated on his every word and movement, Satsǫ̀gaà turned to Nǫ̀htà and Kwoh. Looking directly at his hosts, he said, “Hęʔę nǫǫ. Yes, I have seen and travelled to many different places. Some godı (news) are good and some are not. I had heard that the people of Nǫ̀htà and Kwoh, gık’e hodeh.” His two*

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1 *Dedats’eetsaa is the name and logo for the Tłı̨chǫ Research and Training Institute, “the island where our people stored something for the way back for retrieval for continued use” (Zoe 2013).*

*hosts looked at him in disbelief. They cried out loudly, sending shock waves through the audience. In shock, Nǫhtà and Kwoh began to grieve, and the audience grieved with them as Satsǫgaà sat looking on.*

*Nǫhtà and Kwoh grieved uncontrollably. The audience finally started to murmur. Someone said, "There's a point when gots'eèdıı (grief) can go so deep that it leaves you in a state of no return." Hearing that, the two inconsolable hosts were frightened. They asked Satsǫgaà if he had ever observed something like this in his travels and what the remedy was, if any. Satsǫgaà, looking at the two birds, said, "Yes, I have seen this in my travels, and the remedy is to have your hair cut, which will relieve your grief. If Nǫhtà and Kwoh agree, I can cut their hair." The two birds, still deep in grief and unable to say anything, nodded in agreement.*

*Satsǫgaà grabbed the base of Nǫhtà's long hair, took out his stone knife, and sliced down. That's why to this day when you look at Nǫhtà from the side you can see Satsǫgaà's cut. He then grabbed Kwoh's long hair at the base. As he sliced through the hair with his knife, he blurted out that what he said about the people of Nǫhtà and Kwoh was not true. Upon hearing Satsǫgaà's admission, Kwoh pulled his head forward, and that is why when you look at Kwoh from the side, it looks like he has an unfinished haircut with sparse, long, and thin hairs trailing down the back of his head.*

*Caribou skin tipi at Elizabeth Mackenzie Elementary School and a Raven.*
*Photos by Cody Steven Mantla (@codystevenmantla on Instagram).*

*The audience was furious. All at once everyone lunged towards Satsǫgaà. He casually leapt just out of reach of the angry audience, spread his wings, and flew out of the mǫwà (the opening of the tipi) between the poles crying, "CAW, CAW!"*

The story of Nǫhtà and Kwoh is an old story, a story from the time when the animals and people could change places. Colonization has tried to erase the past, our past, and create futures using the knowledges and methods of the colonizer. But there is another way. We can retrieve those things that are ours – our land, language, culture, way of life – and move into the future guided by our own stories and practices.

In our traditional territories, there are many godı haįht'ee (listeners that absorb the stories). When a godı haįht'ee is present, the story flows much better. The storyteller knows there is someone there who is really listening and who will make sure the stories and storytelling will continue on into the future. Godı haįht'ee also attract goxèhodıı (storytellers) because they are the scribes who keep the information, like an enįhtł'è (book).

Dè goįzì (place names) are the bookmarks, a reminder of events told and retold by storytellers, past and present. Goxèhodıı are energized by dè goįzì and share more in these places. Some stories are old; they tell of a time of giant animals. These places are revered; silence is important when passing them to not awaken the dormant entities there. An offering left in the direction of the place helps to appease the Woyèedı.

Our goxèhodıı are fading now and reaching less of an audience. The further we step away from our original journaling and the descriptions of our original authors, as told by goxèhodıı and absorbed by godı haįht'ee, the less we know of ourselves and the more we begin to believe the narrative that our own ways of teaching, learning, and remembering are not sustainable in this day and age.

Here in the North, we're hoping to have our own polytechnic university. But we don't want to go into it the way we went to residential or public schools. We want to go in there as we are, bringing our whole selves with us. The idea isn't to leave some parts behind and make space for it later. We want to build in our ways of being, knowing, and doing from the beginning. The people who left what they needed at Dedats'etsaa would always return to retrieve those things. It's possible even now to make sure we take those things with us. When you're going into the school, into the university, it's like coming from the source of hozìı. We don't have to choose between godı haįht'ee and the southern university. We can take everything with us, as whole people.

The same is true in this journal. We have worked together in the spirit and intent of the treaties. We come together as whole people, bringing all of our knowledges with us. The stories that appear here have been submitted by a variety of people from across the North, about who they are, who they were, who they understand themselves to be. These are people who have learned in the old ways or in institutions or maybe both, and now they are bringing their stories to the public.

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***John B. Zoe*** *was the Chief Land Claims Negotiator for the former Treaty 11 Council of the NWT from 1992 until its conclusion with the establishment of the Tłı̨chǫ Government in 2005. Dedicated to preserving, reviving, and celebrating the culture and language of the Tłı̨chǫ people, he helped revitalize canoeing with Elders to strengthen youth to follow the traditional Trails of our Ancestors. John is an advisor to the Tłı̨chǫ Government, Chair of Dedat'seetsaa: the Tłı̨chǫ Research and Training Institute, and Chair of the Governing Council for Hotıì ts'eeda.*

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# Introduction: We Are Our Stories

**Lois Edge and Sara Komarnisky**

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"There is a story I know… The truth about stories is that that's all we are." (King, 2003)

Welcome to the inaugural issue of Xàgots'eèhk'ǫ̀ Journal! The journal creates a space for conversation among and by northerners – a space to exchange knowledge and bring together diverse voices from throughout the North. We express deep gratitude to all contributors to and readers of this first issue. We hope northerners will see yourselves reflected within the content and be inspired to join the conversation in future issues.

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## ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND RELATIONS – LOIS EDGE

Tan'si. Wapisk'kahkahkew nehiyaw nitsihkahson. Kiwetinohk ohci niya. I acknowledge the homeland of my ancestors, Dene Métis of Denendeh - people of the land, land of the people. I acknowledge my French Nehiyaw Denésoliné âpihtawikosisân maternal ancestors and Dinjii Zhuh Scots and British paternal ancestors who have lived in relationship to this land for multiple generations.

I am from Thebacha, at the foot of the Rapids of the Drowned on the Slave River, Deh Ndee, at Fort Smith, Northwest Territories. I am a member of the Northwest Territory Metis Nation. I give thanks to earth, air, water and fire. I give thanks to our ancestors and give thanks for the gift of this day and the gift of life.

In the early sixties, my family lived in the Old Town of Hay River on Vale Island. Our house was located on the shoreline of Kátå'odehche where the Hay River enters Tu Nedhe, Great Slave Lake, directly across from St. Anne's Roman Catholic Church at the old village on the northside of the Hay River Reserve[1], home of the Katl'odehche First Nation.

One of my earliest memories as a child is walking to school… I can feel my breath frosting over my nose and mouth against my scarf and hear snow crunching beneath my feet. I ignore the shadows of willows thick along either side of the road quickening my step towards the lights of St. Paul's school shining bright in the early morning darkness…

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1 *The Hay River reserve was formed in 1974.*

Undertaking the role as co-editor of the inaugural edition of Xàgots'eèhk'ǫ̀, with colleague Sara Komarnisky, focused on the theme "Education in the North" was inspired by various factors.

I have strong ancestral relationships throughout the Northwest Territories. My ancestors precede the arrival of early explorers and are inextricably interwoven within the social and cultural landscape of multiple generations shaped by river systems to form a "web of being" as depicted in maps of the Mackenzie River Valley.

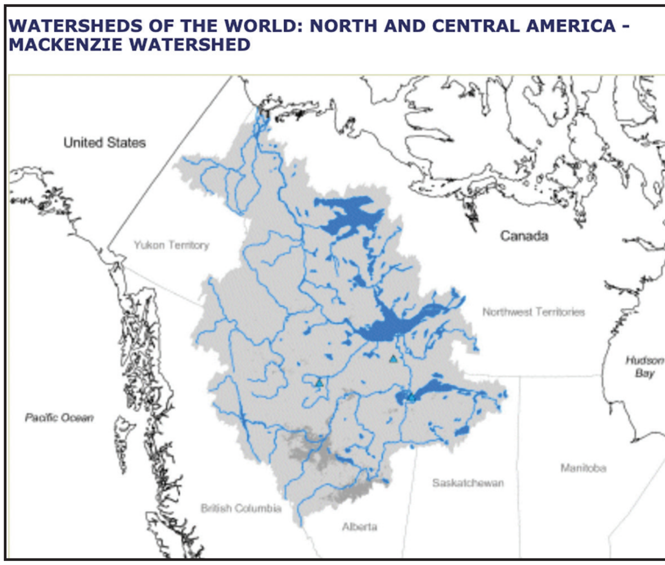


**Figure 1**
*Watersheds of the World*
*(World Resources Institute, 2022)*

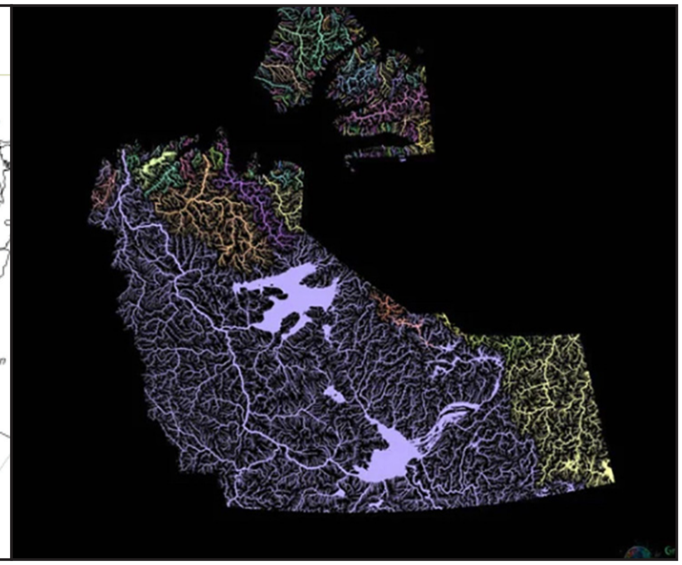

**Figure 2**
*Rivers of the Northwest Territories*
*(Robert Szucs, Grasshopper Geography, 2022)*

More recently, following a decades long absence, I returned to my home community of Fort Smith to teach Indigenous Studies at Aurora College for a five-year period, a lived experience held dear within heart and spirit. I remain bereft pining still for the sound of the river and rapids, wind in the trees, my friends, the ravens, and my relations.

Further, I am guided by a sense of obligation to my relations, roles and responsibilities as Dene Metis and as an educator, scholar and researcher from the North for past, current and future generations.

Finally, I remain committed to Indigenous Education as a field of study beyond encouragement by the 94 Calls to Action by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015a) and Articles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007).

Specifically, I take constructive action in "supporting Aboriginal peoples' cultural revitalization and integrating Indigenous knowledge systems, oral histories, laws, protocols, and connections to the land into the reconciliation process" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015b, p. 4) contributing to public education and dialogue on an ongoing basis.

## ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND RELATIONS – SARA KOMARNISKY

I grew up in rural Alberta, the descendant of Ukrainian settlers to Treaty 6 and Métis lands. I am also the descendant of Irish, French, and Italian settlers to what is now Ontario. I did not grow up thinking of myself that way – and even now, I can say I only partially understand who I am in relationship to the Land I grew up on after years of grad school, experiences in community based research, and some very generous teachings.

I am a newcomer to the North, having moved to Yellowknife with my family in 2018. Like many other newcomers, I came here for work. True to its name, "money place" continues to bring people here, myself included. I also moved here to explore what exactly the roles and responsibilities of a settler researcher on Indigenous land could be. This has been a very slow wake up call for me, beginning with witnessing racism against Indigenous people as a young person, to studying history and culture of Latin America which includes colonization, genocide, and settlement, studying on traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Musqueam people with colleagues who were actively working to decolonize research, to working to understand the cross-continental lifeways of Mexican migrant-immigrants in Dena'ina territory (Komarnisky, 2018), joining Idle No More protests in 2012 and learning from organizers how settlers should participate, working as a researcher on projects related to Indigenous health and history (Komarnisky et al., 2015; Komarnisky, 2019), to volunteering on community based reconciliation initiatives in Edmonton, and co-authoring a list of acts of reconciliation (Fraser and Komarnisky, 2017). Ultimately, what I have learned through all of the different projects and protests I've been fortunate to participate in is that communities know what they need to be well, even within systems that do not facilitate wellness. This shifts my role out of "expert" and my responsibility to peoples and communities not well served by existing systems.

Knowledge systems were imposed on Northern Indigenous Peoples as colonial and capitalist institutions took over power through the fur trade, churches, and federal and territorial governments. Over time, colonial science and government management of research became dominant, privileged, and exclusionary, done only by credentialed experts. But Dene, Métis, and Inuvialuit knowledge systems have always been here, developed out of the Land and in community.

I now occupy a research-focused role, and I have been re-thinking through my responsibilities. I draw links between health, community, and research: First, self-determined communities are healthy communities. Next, full recognition and exercise of Indigenous peoples' collective rights supports health and wellness. For ethical positioning to support health and wellness in the North, then, research has to be grounded in frameworks and laws that centre Indigenous rights and cultural resurgence. For the context I work within this includes United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations, 2007), the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) (TRC, 2015a), Calls to Justice of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG), Treaties 8 and 11, Tłı̨chǫ Land Claims and Self-Government Agreement, and Dene Laws. I am learning, slowly. And, I am being taught:

I forgot the tobacco
Again.
Half way to our destination.
I meant to
Pay the land and water
In gratitude
Ask for safe passage
Once again.

I accepted the role of co-editor in line with my responsibility to support Indigenous rights and resurgence with the intention to prioritize Northern knowledges. I participated alongside Indigenous and non-Indigenous northerners central to developing the journal concept, elaborating a vision for the journal, ensuring the journal is open and welcoming to diverse knowledges, age groups, and levels of experience, and suggesting processes to ensure the journal is relevant, responsible, and rigorous from Northern and Indigenous perspectives, as well as from 'academic' perspectives, which tend to prioritize colonial scholarship norms, but must include scholarship from Indigenous scholars and knowledge holders (among many other knowledge systems).

## EDUCATION IN THE NORTH – LOIS EDGE

In 1977, education in the North was described as a system of education intended to assimilate the Dene into a southern way of life:

> It is my belief that the Dene are unique, different from the people in other parts of Canada; that education in the North should reflect this uniqueness; that our own uniqueness must be built on the traditional values of the Dene along with the ideas and views we now have from our experience as a colonized people…
>
> The Dene wish to decolonize so education should aim for that goal. By reflecting on our experience as a colonized people, we can strive to understand what it really means to be free, to be able to decide one's own future (Kakfwi in Watkins, 1977, p. 143).

Denendeh: A Dene Celebration (Dene Nation, 1984) describes the Dene system of education as beginning very early in life:

> Extended families have been the basic unit of Dene society. Children are easily adopted between families and the sharing of food is strongly emphasized. Through a consensual process, each group recognizes a leader, usually an elder, who has the respect of all. This consensus form of government is the foundation of the Dene Nation. It ensures participation and responsibility in decision-making by everyone. Thus, the real power stays with the people rather than being delegated to one person or group.
>
> Learning encompassed every aspect of daily life from how to get along with family and neighbours to survival skills. Today we still use many of the old ways in teaching our children. Respect and peace are shown to males addressing them as brother, uncle or grandfather; to females by addressing them as sister, aunt or grandmother even if they are not related. Children must learn that everything is shared – all kinds of

> foods, any game killed. As the young take more responsibility, parents have the duty to talk to their children to explain the work that must be done and how these tasks must be done safely.
>
> Not only parents are teachers; everyone takes part in the education of children. Leaders in every group are teachers too. At some gatherings good leaders talk late into the night and most parents take their children with them to these meetings and they are encouraged to listen. Grandparents are expected to teach their grandchildren as well, thus old values and traditions are passed on to younger generations. The most important part of a child's education is to learn to show love for his people (p. 11-12).
>
> The Dene way is very democratic because we talk things out until everyone agrees and there must be patience and respect for one another to do this. Under the struggle for consensus is the principle that we are all one and the circle must not break. It is often hard for a non-Dene to understand because the meetings start so slowly. The rules of order depend on good manners and respect. No one challenges anyone. Everyone has a chance to save face (p. 15).

Currently available recommended resources sharing the worldview, system of education and lifeways of Dene and Metis knowledge and perspectives in the North include:

a. A Brief History of the Dene (CBC North and Dene Nation, 1979)
b. Dene Laws (Dehcho First Nations, 2020)
c. Fort Good Hope (Orieux, 1977)
d. The Beacon Project: Stories Along the Slave River (Rebel Sister Productions, 2022)

Indigenous education in higher education as an emergent and growing field of study is bursting at the seams since earlier inception by Indigenous scholars (see early works by Batistte, 2000; Cajete, 1999 and Little Bear, 2000). Key concepts in contemporary discourse in higher education speak to truth, healing and reconciliation interconnecting processes of Indigenization and decolonization with celebrating Indigeneity in Indigenous arts as catalyst to Indigenous cultural resurgence.

Northern educators are encouraged to adopt a critical perspective to locate oneself in the midst of challenging power relations implicit within the "legacy of educational paradigms within the colonial territories of Canada" (Heppner and Heppner, 2021, p. 28). These authors encourage privileging of multiple perspectives in educational research and privileging Indigenous voices and experiences in Indigenous contexts as evidence of implementation of culturally-responsive education.

Reconciliation in higher education is premised upon concurrent processes of Indigenization and decolonization that together examine and explore taken-for-granted knowledge and experiences sparking uncomfortable and unsettling moments for Settler Canadian colleagues and allies (Mooney, 2021). As a settler scholar, Mooney (2021) asserts, "I need to allow Indigenous stories, knowledges, epistemes, and ontologies to reshape my thinking and understanding of myself and our relationships with one and another" (p. 236).

The experience of decolonizing and Indigenizing teaching and curricular practice, described as an unfamiliar landscape for non-Indigenous settler scholars educated exclusively in colonial educational institutions, calls for a deeply personal vulnerability involving mental, physical, spiritual and emotional dimensions of being. In this context, re-visioning and reshaping postsecondary education understands reconciliation as "a process for repairing broken relationships between non-Indigenous and Indigenous people" (p. 232).

A survey of 2,000 First Nations, Inuit and Metis students in postsecondary education programs in Canada highlights the need to bring Indigenous content, coursework, role models and instructors into the classroom and postsecondary environment. Indigenous cultures, identity and belonging are perceived of as a source of strength and protection to reconciliation in post-secondary education (Indspire, 2018).

When Indigenous worldviews and pedagogies inform teaching practice, a strengthening of positive Indigenous identity and sense of relationality and belonging are created in learning taught by family and community member knowledge and cultural practices and teachings (Peterson, Manitowabi, and Manitowabi, 2021). Elements specific to Indigenous pedagogies include intergenerational learning; experiential learning; spiritual learning involving interconnections with land; and learning about relationality (Ibid).

Indigenous student experiences with Indigenization yield policy recommendations for academic institutions to: a) Ensure authentic Indigenous representation in Indigenization processes, b) acknowledge and mitigate impact of Indigenous student engagement with Indigenization, c) co-create an Indigenous and non-Indigenous community that privileges Indigenous voices, input and meaningful representation to lead Indigenization processes, and d) make Indigenous knowledges and values fundamental in Indigenization processes (Efimoff, 2022).

The Advisory Committee on Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Decolonization of the Federation for the Social Sciences and Humanities in Canada considers decolonization as fundamental to the sustainable future of higher education,

> a necessary and ongoing process of unlearning, uncovering, and transforming legacies of colonialism, as well as utilizing the educational and knowledge systems available to relearn and rebuild the social, cultural, and linguistic foundations that were lost, or eroded through colonialism. Decolonization also requires making space, balancing, generating, and enabling diverse knowledge systems to thrive in the academy as well as in and through educational and knowledge transmitting places for Indigenous Peoples, the formerly colonized or continuing colonized nations, peoples, and cultural knowledge systems (Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, p. 7).

Today, Indigenous arts function as "a vehicle for the resurgence of Indigenous knowledge, philosophy, and aesthetics through which Indigenous communities can imagine and move toward Indigenous survivance and futurity" (Goeman, 2011; Martineau, 2015; and L.B. Simpson, 2017 in Yoon-Ramirez and Ramirez, 2021, p. 119). An emerging line of inquiry in art education examines connections between contemporary Indigenous art practices and settler colonialism as pedagogical sites where Indigenous aesthetics and creative practice challenge, disrupt and dismantle settler colonial perceptions, narratives and feelings (Yoon-Ramirez and Ramirez, 2021).

Educators and scholars are encouraged to adopt a more rigorous critical reflexivity in the questioning of knowledge construction, reproduction and maintenance in favor of a "pedagogy of refusal" (Tuck and Yang, 2014 in Ibid, p. 126) and "restoration and revitalization of Indigenous knowledges and philosophies" (Martineau and Ritskes, 2014 in Ibid, p. 125) in recognition of Indigenous sovereignty and futurity.

## CRITICAL REFLEXIVITY, RELATIONALITY, OPENNESS – SARA KOMARNISKY

Critical reflexivity in questioning knowledge construction has been essential for our work as co-editors. In our conversations, we talked at length about knowledges and representation and voice and positionality. For me, one of the processes that supports a questioning of knowledge construction and authority is the intention for "relational review." This is intended to be a way to ensure rigour and relevance of publications for scholarship and within a northern context. What is written or produced on a topic should be accountable to, and reviewed by, those with relevant expertise, training, and knowledge – whether that be in scholarship, within a cultural world, from community, or ideally – all three and then some. This means that scholarly peer review is only one facet of assessing the rigour and relevance of a piece. And it leaves the door open for publishing across Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledges, including global knowledges that have come to the North from all parts of the world.

To that end, editors have worked to implement a relational review process that included scholarly and community reviewers. Instead of an anonymous review process, it is an open and relational process where reviewers are invited to enter into conversation with a work and explore what that could look like. This relational process:

- Acknowledges the interpersonal, where knowledge is produced, shared and co-created through relationships (Tynan 2021);
- Operationalizes accountability, respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility to northern Indigenous peoples, languages, cultures, and ways of life (Kirkness and Barnhardt 2001);
- Brings knowledge systems into dialogue and encourages working within frameworks like Strong Like Two People (Dogrib Divisional Board of Education 1991); Etuaptmumk (Two-Eyed Seeing) (Iwama et al. 2009); and ethical space (Ermine 2007); and,
- Is welcoming, inviting and supportive.

For this issue, all articles and artwork were reviewed by at least two reviewers, some from the journal's editorial committee, some invited in as external reviewers, or both. All reviewers had scholarly or lived expertise relevant to a work, and oftentimes both. Reviewers and contributors were known to each other, tasked with giving and incorporating feedback to strengthen a given piece. In its fullness, this relational process will be appropriate for a northern context. The process will generate responsibility to scholarship and community, to limit competitive and extractive tendencies in published research.

The practice of relational reviewing aligns with decolonizing or anticolonial innovations in scholarly review and publishing in general. For example, the International Review of Qualitative Research published a special issue on Indigenous knowledges that used a relational peer review process (Fast, Cameron, Helferty, and Lewis, 2016). The process was open, in that reviewers and authors were known to each other, and reviewers were encouraged to suggest ways to strengthen the author's paper (Ibid). A new section in the Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation called "Roots and Relations" is working to develop Indigenous-centered review and submission processes and anticolonial agreements and policies (Bremner and Bowman, 2021). The Turtle Island Journal of Indigenous Health seeks to foster "respectful collaboration and co-creation of knowledge within the field of Indigenous peoples' health" (TIJIH, 2022, p. 2). According to the journal submission guidelines, the editorial team facilitates a review process at regional and community levels, accepts a wide range of work somehow related to Indigenous health, and encourages Indigenous authorship (TIIJH, 2022). Drawing on the experience of co-producing a special issue of Arctic Science across Western and Indigenous knowledges, the journal is looking for ways to increase Indigenous representation in scientific publishing, including in advisory, editorial, and peer review processes (Loseto et al., 2020; Sidik, 2022) New Zealand journal Commoning Ethnography uses a “peer engaged” review process where the reviewers have the option to reveal their names, and turn the review process into mentorship, creating opportunities for open dialogues and peermaking (Commoning Ethnography, 2022; Docot, 2022). The recent volume Ndè Sìì Wet'aʔà: Northern Indigenous Voices on Land, Life & Art compiles a richness of northern Indigenous perspectives on land, culture, and northern life, with contributors supported and strengthened through the process of writing and publication (Lesage et al., 2022). Finally, Lorisia MacLeod developed templates for citing Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers that allow for appropriate in-text citation and referencing (MacLeod, 2021).

Another way that critical reflexivity comes into editorial practice is in the openness towards genre and form of submissions. Xàgots'eèhk'ǫ̀ Journal publishes work from within multiple knowledge systems in the North, in any NWT language, and intends to be inclusive of and appealing to diverse audiences. This approach is intended to create a welcoming space to connect a wide Northern readership, initiate conversation on important issues, and potentially shift power relations in publishing.

Ensuring rigour and relevance by Northern standards via relational review and allowing for openness in form and genre are all tactics to change existing power dynamics about whose knowledges count, why research matters, and who gets to participate in the conversations. To that end, the 25 submissions published in this first issue range from artwork, research and review articles, interviews and personal experience, program reports, book reviews, and memorializations of Northerners. Although diverse in form and content, each takes up the theme of Education in the North in some way. As editors, we have organized them into overlapping themes, or settings for Northern teaching and learning.

The first section, “Land” contains pieces that centre Land as the foundation for learning and education, from artistic representations of Land (Mountain, Blow), to the meaning of Land-based education in theory and practice (Dragon Smith and Lahey, Cluderay et al.), and personal narratives grounded in experiences with the Land (Andrew, Lafferty et al.).

The next section, “Culture, Language, Way of Life” features art and writing that share elements of culture and language in educational practices. An art work shares experience and teachings about fixing caribou (Mountain), and written works share experiences of and ideas about culture and education in Igloolik and a social work program in Yellowknife (Chau and Arnaaq, Little, et al.). Finally, Early Child Care students share their experience developing home kits for teaching Indigenous languages in the home (Eisazadeh et al.).

“Family and Community” highlights education that happens across generations. In “The Two of Us,” one tree bends towards another, like a teacher to a student or an Elder to a younger person (Cartwright). The image echoes the description of the Wellness Elders Program created by the Tłı̨chǫ Government (Whenham and Hyden). In “Believe it and You're Half Way There,” Paul Andrew shares a reflection about next generations, and the future (Andrew). An interview features the educational experiences of Joni Tsatchia as a student and now, as an educator, sharing her dreams for northern education grounded in culture and community (Tsatchia and Komarnisky). “Rayuka Sunrise” depicts a mother and child, in the context of a split in the family (Mountain).

Finally, “Institutions and Organizations” concludes with submissions that link to schools, colleges, institutes as places of learning. A poem creatively reflects on the experience of schooling (Patterson), and a literature review gives insight into how higher education institutions could work towards anti-racism, Indigenization, and decolonization (Mychael). Students from Aurora College’s nursing program share their prize winning research posters (Gonzalez et al). “Reaching Out” shares about the activities and impacts of the Aurora Research Institute’s STEM outreach program (Graham). Finally, a youth shares a message of hope about the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation (Bernabe).

Together, these pieces share insight into what Education in the North means from a breadth and multiplicity of perspectives, knowledges, and forms of expression. To echo John B. Zoe, in the preface, the journal extends an invitation to northerners to join together into a shared collective space opening possibilities of growing the conversation in the future.

## CLOSING WORDS - LOIS EDGE

The collaborative experience of journal development mirrors contestation entrenched within critically relevant and significant spaces and places encountered and inhabited by individuals subsumed within the ebb and flow of historical and contemporary intergenerational relations and relationships generated as outcome of competing dynamic and diverse systems of knowledge, ways of knowing, teaching, learning, doing, being, and lifeways.

Entering into a contested space generated not unforeseen, yet unanticipated, tensions premised upon entrenched normative discourse and hierarchical power relations emergent within former and present-day intercultural relations. Most relevant is the degree to which one has acquired awareness, knowledge and understanding of respective knowledge systems, either that of the Eurowestern intellectual tradition, and/or of Indigenous systems of knowledges. Stated succinctly, we don’t know what we don’t know. For example, awareness of key terms, definitions and concepts proved challenging.

As increasingly reflected in multiple sectors and/or fields of study, barriers persist in efforts to integrate, incorporate, blend, merge and/or infuse knowledge systems together when compartmentalized within the confines, constraints and limitations of a binary opposition frame of “us vs. them” or vice versa. In such instances, systems of knowledge function to retain respective authenticity and integrity as unique stand-alone yet interconnected relational systems: representations of diverse human social, cultural, political, economic and ecological experience through time in space and place.

Ultimately, willing entry into an ethical space (Ermine, 2007) of shared intentionality premised upon commitment to lifelong learning and activation of love, patience, mutual respect and shared envisioning coalesced as pieces came together to merge into the whole as in this celebratory inaugural edition of Xàgots’eèhk’ǫ̀.

Kinanâskomitin, hiy hiy.

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# Learning Around the Camp Fire: Developing Xàgots'eèhk'ǫ̀

**Janat Ibrahimi, Kerry Lynn Durnford, Pertice Moffitt**

## ABSTRACT

In this paper, three scholars involved with the development of the journal share their insights and experiences. A vision for a new, online, and open access Northern journal was created through inclusive and collaborative meetings between Knowledge Holders, Elders, youth, and scholars. This allowed for the sharing of diverse knowledges, perspectives and experiences and led to the identification of the grounding concept of a campfire as a place where Northerners share knowledges. This is the intention behind Xàgots'eèhk'ǫ̀, a new journal by and for Northerners.

## INTRODUCTION

Although the idea of developing a journal in the Northwest Territories (NWT) had been discussed for many years, work towards the creation of a journal concept, structure, and processes began in 2020 with a successful grant application to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). Potential participants were identified and invited through the networks of SSHRC grant partner organizations. These included Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning and Hotıì ts'eeda. This paper shares the process of the creation of Xàgots'eèhk'ǫ̀ Journal from the perspective of three scholars involved. Through a series of meetings with Indigenous and non-Indigenous Northerners, participants identified themes, concepts, and processes to take forward into the journal. In these meetings, we[1] heard aspirations for creating a journal that provides a vibrant space for Northerners to share and generate knowledge. The need for a journal that brings people together, fills a gap by creating a vehicle for knowledge mobilization, and where creativity and knowledge exchange among Northerners occurs was communicated. Indigenous leaders described the need for a space where Indigenous voice reverberates; students, scholars and Elders are celebrated; and many diverse modalities of knowledge expression and interpretation are revealed.

1 *Use of the term "we" reflects the authors perspective developed in collaboration with many stakeholders, Elders and Knowledge Holders. This term is not meant to assume ownership by the authors of the process but rather identify the inclusive nature of the journal. In addition, verbatim quotes highlight the shared process of co-learning and co-development in the creation of the journal. Consent for using these quotes was received from all and with one participant an anonymous notation was agreed.*

Drawing on the name of the journal, Xàgots’eèhk’ǫ̀, which means “having a campfire” in the Tłı̨chǫ language, this paper uses a campfire as a metaphor for the process of this journal’s development (Figure 1). We describe the steps that led to the inaugural issue through the process of starting a campfire. Beginning with the intent to create warmth to sustain Northerners by starting the campfire (describing ways of knowing and foundations of the journal), we proceed to collecting the firewood (creating structures and guidelines for the journal), and stoking the fire (seeking, reviewing, and accepting submissions).


**Figure 1**

*Developing Xàgots’eèhk’ǫ̀*

## STARTING THE CAMPFIRE

The campfire could be lit once SSHRC funding was secured in December 2020. A journal coordinator was hired (Janat Ibrahimi) to coordinate the journal development process. A diverse group of Tłı̨chǫ Elders, Knowledge Holders, Northern students, and Indigenous and Non-Indigenous scholars with diverse backgrounds, expertise, and knowledge from across the territory were invited to attend a virtual gathering on April 14, 2021. The purpose of this gathering was to have a conversation about how Northern and Indigenous Peoples share information and how these processes can be integrated into the journal. A discussion paper was written prior to the initial meeting that reviewed potential concepts from the published literature reported to be culturally congruent and that could stoke the fire leading to a viable vision and scope (Lemky et al., 2021). These conceptual ideas included respect, reciprocity, relevance, responsibility, reverence, anti-racist and sex and gender diversity.

Twenty-three people attended to share their insights and opinions at the first gathering. Two further gatherings were held on May 20, 2021, and November 25, 2021. These gatherings were a chance to discuss initial journal development and ensure that work being done resonated with this group of people. As the structure of the journal came together, we began to refer to this group as an “Advisory Committee” – a group of knowledgeable Northerners who could inform and guide the journal as it was developed

From these gatherings a number of key journal elements were identified. In conversation about how Northerners share information, the space of a campfire was raised and discussed during the second workshop where we engaged in discussion of a draft vision statement for the journal. The group was invited to brainstorm important concepts relevant to Northern Indigenous peoples that should be included in the vision. A campfire, specifically, was described as a place where knowledge transmission happens through storytelling:

> “The more campfires you have, the more knowledge you get by telling stories and feeding the fire” (Zoe, 2021a).

Rosa Mantla (2021a) identified the Tłįchǫ concept of Xàgots’eèhk’ǫ̀ or having a campfire. To further understand the importance of having a campfire to Tłįchǫ people, we interviewed Rosa Mantla, an Elder and Tłįchǫ culture and language expert from Behchokǫ̀:

> “A fire that you see on the land, or in a teepee, or outside a person’s house, it draws people in. When we have a fire outside my house too, people come… Sometimes they ask for food, sometimes they help themselves. Fire is special because it is spiritual. People stand around a fire, and inhale the warmth, the smoke, and they feel the heat” (Mantla, 2021b).

Rosa’s contributions have been an integral part to the development of this journal. With Rosa’s language expertise, we have been able to correctly identify the Tłįchǫ term for having a campfire, Xàgots’eèhk’ǫ̀. Xàgots’eèhk’ǫ̀ was decided as the name for the journal.

Use of Tłįchǫ rather than any other of the eight Indigenous languages in the NWT was decided primarily because much of the discussion for the name occurred with Tłįchǫ speaking people. Before finalizing the name for the journal, we needed to ensure that ‘having a campfire’ was significant to Indigenous communities outside of the Tłįchǫ, as this journal was meant to be a space for all Northerners. We were honored to hear back from a Gwich’in Elder, Joanne Snowshoe. In the Gwich’in language, Kwàn’ Deek’it means fireplace:

> “Gwich’in people use to tell stories by the campfire a long time ago. My mom and auntie Rebecca used to make dry fish, while the children used to cut the fish heads off, while that they tell stories and there used to be a fire. Sometimes people used to laugh so hard when telling stories. When they go up to the mountains, on sundays, people use to talk and tell stories and be singing hymns all day because they did not work on Sundays [and would spend time] by the stove or in tents. In Aklavik, where the school used to be, the Inuvialuit used to have tents and they would be cooking fish, telling stories and women used [to] even sew around the fire. In Tsiigehtchic, people used to go on the flats and have a big fish house and women used to be telling stories. When women used to cut fish in the summer, inside the fish house would be a fire. There would be a stone pot by the fire and there would be hot coals where people used to clean fish pipes and coney stockings and put [them] on the coals to cook slowly. While they are working, the food cooked slowly, and it cooked really good, and they had a good meal after it [was] cook[ed]” (Snowshoe, 2021)

Furthermore, fire is significant to the Inuit people in order to light the quilliq, a traditional oil lamp that was used to heat the home and for cooking (Walton & O’Leary, 2015). The quilliq is a tradition of the Inuit people and one that also signifies fire as meaningful.

Others in attendance at our initial meetings spoke about gathering around a campfire as a space for sharing stories, a way that Indigenous knowledge is generated, translated, and preserved by Elders as knowledge keepers. Scholars have written about storytelling around a campfire as a source of knowledge exchange for Indigenous peoples (Archibald, 2008; Hausknecht et al., 2021). Narratives in Indigenous communities serve as a tool to transmit knowledge (Archibald, 2008; Hausknecht et al., 2021, Scott, 2012), and as a research methodology (Archibald, 2008; Cruikshank, 1990; Datta, 2018; Kovach, 2009; Rieger et al., 2021). Storytelling is also described as a “pedagogical tool for learning life lessons” (Iseke, 2013 p. 565), whereby storytellers share knowledge through visiting the past, present, and future; and listeners create new connections for themselves in understanding the story. Having a campfire and gathering to share knowledge around it is also an experience that resonates with non-Indigenous Northerners. The campfire, then, can be a space to come together.

Those involved in developing foundational journal concepts at the initial meetings agreed that the journal must be accessible to everyone. This means that the journal editorial and publication processes need to be mindful of language. Often, authors who publish in peer-reviewed journals use difficult scholarly language that can be exclusionary. One participant in the initial meetings explained how Indigenous languages should be included in order to be truly Northern based and inclusive of Indigenous and non-Indigenous contributors:

> “We have eleven official languages and I notice English, and French are always there but I don’t see the nine Indigenous languages so I would really love to have either an audio clip or abstract to ensure that Indigenous languages are included. If [this journal is] going to be Northern and Indigenous then it should be really representative” (Lemky, 2021).

Inviting submissions in Indigenous languages is especially important in spaces such as this journal which seeks to share, strengthen, and celebrate Northern peoples’ relationships to land, languages, cultures, and way of life. Tłı̨chǫ Elder Rosa Mantla describes the importance of language in her thesis:

> “Languages are spiritual and powerful. They are sacred, beautiful, pretty, and cute, especially when they are spoken from the heart. Languages are amusing. Language can be a habit of speaking, entertaining whether loud or whispering. Languages are colourful and very lively. The joyful sounds of various languages fill the air with jokes and teasing. Let’s go forward with the gift of languages. Let’s embrace our world with languages and pass them on to all those who will fill up their ʔǫhtsì (packıng bag). We have to love all languages from the heart and body to respect, cherish and speak our mother tongue every day. We have to accept all languages because they are all creations of mother earth that gave us the words from the soil” (Mantla 2017, p. 69).

Participants involved in journal development meetings also shared that accessibility means openness in terms of genre or type of submission. Art-based forms often allow for creativity in self-expression that written forms sometimes cannot and this extends the possibilities for authorship and accessibility. Participants recommended the journal represent multiple forms of communication, including art and storytelling. One participant described this as “the integration of multi-modal approaches to learning including art forms, oral forms (through video and audio), and text-based research” (Soanes-White, 2021). This meant looking beyond accepting only written scholarly publications towards creating a journal that invites knowledge sharing in many possible forms.

Considerations of ethical practice and support for Indigenous sovereignty was incorporated throughout the entire discussion, particularly when discussing knowledge in an online, open access format. One participant cautioned about the potential for published work to harm rather than strengthen Northern peoples:

> "The nature of the research that we do is always very relevant but is also highly sensitive. When we think about modern land claims and about the status of court cases, all of our research is definitely relevant to ongoing processes of justice with the colonial settler state and how we come to think about and exercise our sovereignty as a nation in the North" (Fraser, 2021).

These conversations led to the understanding that journal processes must include Indigenous Peoples and those with lived experiences and knowledge alongside scholarly knowledge and expertise. Article 18 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) emphasizes the importance of Indigenous participation in "decision-making in matters which would affect their rights" (United Nations, 2007, pp. 15-16); and the need to "revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and person" (United Nations, 2007, pp. 12-13). Going forward, this includes the composition of the Editorial Committee for the journal, the choice of co-editors for each issue, the review process developed, and the request for a cover letter from contributors to invite them to explain the significance of their work and relevance to the journal, the relationship of authors to the Indigenous contexts, and the benefits of the research/work for the collaborating Indigenous community.

Participants in initial journal development meetings also stressed the need for inclusivity in readership and authorship. Although universities and colleges across Canada have responded to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action (2015) with implementation of Indigenization strategies, Indigenous knowledge systems are not always welcomed in academic spaces. One participant described their experience as a graduate student:

> "One thing I've really struggled with is the methodology of my research and having to defend and prove why using an Indigenous paradigm and Indigenous research methods are valid and credible. I actually used the 4R approach to show that my data collection and analysis were valid and credible from an Indigenous perspective by showing respect, responsibility, and how it was relevant throughout the process" (Ens, 2021).

Ensuring inclusivity can mean to ensure a focus on strengths which celebrates Indigenous and Northern peoples. As one participant explained, "Use a strength-based perspective rather than focusing on problems that need to be solved" (Anonymous, 2021).

This orientation towards inclusivity extends to knowledges and initial meeting participants stressed the importance of working across Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge systems. As John B. Zoe said,

> "What we are talking about is a learning institution concentrated on the future generation; and that is where the North and the West meets together. For Northern Indigenous people[s], it's about knowledge transfer, and for the West, it's about skill development. So how do we fuse those things together? We're talking about a journal that's going to recognize that form of fusion" (Zoe, 2021b).

Indigenous scholars and leaders have proposed frameworks for working across knowledge systems. For example, Two-Eyed Seeing, as proposed by Mik’maw Elder Albert Marshall in 2004, refers to acknowledging and using the strengths and ways of knowing of both Indigenous knowledges and Western knowledges (Bartlett et al., 2012). Strong Like Two People is a philosophy shared by Tłı̨chǫ Elder, Elizabeth Mackenzie, referring to the words of Chief Jimmy Bruneau. Strong Like Two People draws from two knowledge systems, Western and Tłı̨chǫ worldviews, while retaining Tłı̨chǫ cultural identity, practices, and traditions (Bruneau, 1971; Mackenzie, 1990; Dogrib Divisional Board of Education, 1991). Antoine Mountain expanded upon this by stating:

> “Yes, we were given numbers [at residential school] … we must get beyond that…Tradition is what we call it. Respecting each other’s boundaries. The Dene way is not categorizing but is “Strong like two People”” (Mountain, 2021).

To honour and mobilize Indigenous and Western knowledge systems, participants stressed the importance of implementing decolonizing approaches in the journal (Battiste, 2013; McGibbon et al., 2014: Moffitt, 2016; Smith, 2012; Zappas et al., 2020). This means being critical with openness and humility and deconstructing racist and colonial notions embedded in our narratives, our processes and practices, and ongoing consideration of power and privilege “to get the story right and tell the story well” (Battiste, 2013, p. 226). This section has described the foundational concepts identified by journal advisors, these include identification of the orienting concept of Xàgots’eèhk’ǫ̀ or having a campfire and the importance of accessibility, ethics, and inclusivity in working across knowledge systems. Indigenous and non-Indigenous Northerners who attended three meetings identified these concepts to guide development and decision making.

Starting the campfire required all of these worldviews, principles, and themes for development so that the fire would ignite and its flame shine brightly; but the fire needed fuel to be sustained.

## COLLECTING FIREWOOD

To fuel a campfire, someone needs to collect the firewood. Others may be involved in deciding what kind of wood to use, selecting a location for the campfire, and inviting and welcoming people to gather around it. Similarly, in creating a journal, firewood was gathered throughout the territory by engaging with a broad spectrum of interested community members, encouraging everyone to feel welcome at our campfire and to contribute to the creation of the journal. Participants in initial meetings were invited to join several committees to finalize the vision and scope of the journal based on the initial meetings, choose a logo for the journal, create the editorial committee, review roles and processes, seek options for online and open access publication, and look towards the journal’s launch. The realities of collaborating with a diverse group of people online led to challenges; however, we remained committed to our spirit of dialogue and inquiry, and we made adjustments when needed. We learned by doing and by learning from each other. Antoine Mountain reminded us that:

> “We learned how to do things by watching an Elder and then demonstrating it back. You got your kindling, your matches, but you need lots of air. There are lots of things to attend to” (Mountain, 2021).

One part of thinking about stoking the fire was the development of a vision statement that would embody the meaning of the journal. It is all around us but how are we using it? The vision and scope committee created vision statements out of the foundational concepts and principles discussed in initial meetings. Creation of a vision statement, like other components of this journal, was an iterative, evolving process. Each discussion led to changes to the vision statement, which currently reads:

"This journal is a space to exchange stories and unify Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars and artists regardless of regional boundaries in their goal of further strengthening and sharing Northern Peoples' relationships to land, language, culture, and ways of life." (Xàgots'eèhk'ǫ̀ Journal, n.d.)

Once a name and vision were created for the journal, a logo committee invited Northerners to participate in a contest that offered a cash prize for the winning artwork. The logo contest offered participants freedom to be creative; the only real criteria was that it must represent our vision statement. The winning logo was created by Aidan Cartwright, with input from Simone Tielish, both Yellowknife residents.  Aidan described the logo as follows:

> "The overlaid sticks are the foundation of the fire, representing collaboration and cooperation between distinct entities with a common purpose. (LAND)
>
> The two flames of the fire are representative of learners, scholars, youth, and Elders. The one with greater knowledge is the larger flame and the learner or student is the smaller flame. Eventually the smaller flame becomes the larger flame through experience, an example of the cycle of learning and knowledge-sharing. (CULTURE)
>
> The rings of light emanating from the fire are representative of what comes from knowledge sharing – stories, research, philosophy, and art. (WAYS OF LIVING)" (Xàgots'eèhk'ǫ̀ Journal, n.d.)"

An editorial committee was formed to create submission, editorial, and publication processes for the journal. This group worked to create submission guidelines, develop the theme for the first issue, choose co-editors, and extend calls for submissions publicly and through editorial committee member's individual professional and personal networks. The editorial committee was also responsible for deciding upon and setting up a website for the journal. Finally, the editorial committee accepted and reviewed all submissions and developed the first steps towards a relational review process. Creation of vision, editorial committee, choosing a theme for the first issue, and innovating first steps towards a relational review process were instrumental to building the campfire. It allowed for the firewood to be lain, and the foundational structure for the campfire to be in place before the sparks flew.

## STOKING THE CAMP FIRE

Keeping the campfire burning means constant rekindling, attending to the draft, and adjusting the placement of the firewood to allow the flame to grow. For the first issue, the editorial committee chose the theme of "Education in the North."  When deciding on this topic, we had to consider the purpose and target audience of the journal. The importance of youth was raised frequently in not only our larger workshops, but in most of our discussions within the smaller committees. Elders and scholars emphasized how youth were vital to the success of this journal, often referenced as the target audience. They are viewed as the fuel to keeping the campfire burning. To many of the participants this journal is considered a strengthening exercise built by Northerners. This journal issue is meant to engage youth and help them build capacity for education and learning in the North, rather than seek educational opportunities outside of the North. As Aurora College expands into a Polytechnic University in the upcoming years, there will be further opportunity for Northern youth to stay in the North for post-secondary education; a point mentioned often in our journal advisory meetings.

We aimed for an embedded relationship in Xàgots'eèhk'ǫ to grow a journal that was respectful, relational, relevant, responsible, and reciprocal – one that strengthens the relationship to land, culture, and way of life. We welcomed submissions that were representative of all forms of knowledge production, including narrative, art, audio, visual, poetry, and video. Then, we envisioned a review process that would be interactive and iterative and provide a culturally safe yet rigorous space to mobilize ideas and perspectives (Moffitt & Durnford, 2021). Indeed, peer-review may not be appropriate for all forms of knowledge. The use of peer-review for Indigenous methodology was a concern raised in initial meetings. As one participant explained, "Community based knowledge does not have any merit in the peer-review process. It's disrespectful to even question someone's experience or knowledge" (Anonymous, 2021). Instead, we sought to develop a review process to acknowledge the validity of Indigenous methodology and ontologies. As well, rather than reviewing with an objective gaze and a place of anonymity, we assess submissions from a place of subjectivity, that is, where knowledge is shaped and understood by our environment, our relationships with each other and who we are as people of the North. When we talk about fit in this regard, it is a place for all around the fire. When we anticipate positionality, it is one of sharing and coming to know each other in new forms of scholarship. With this type of review, we embrace cultural humility.

For the journal, this meant being flexible as submissions were received and sent for review. Submissions were initially accepted for the first issue in December 2020. This was later extended to April 2021, and then summer 2021. Review of all submissions was first done by editorial committee members, then by external community and scholarly reviewers – and in a variety of forums. Reviews have been completed via email, in meetings, via the journal website, and in one-on-one meetings. To get all submissions to publication, additional supports for copyediting, layout, and web development were needed. This was a collective and collaborative enterprise, led by the editorial committee, with many hands to stoke the fire and keep it burning.

## CONCLUSION: SPARKS FLY

As we collected our wood and stoked the fire, sparks began to fly. From the current vision which included culture and a way of life, we sought the space where this occurred. Learning around the campfire is a metaphor to describe the processes and steps of developing an open-access journal by and for the peoples of our territory and other interested writers who share this vision. During the development of Xàgots'eèhk'ǫ, we practiced the principles founded for the journal. Knowledge production occurring from a heart-felt place of sharing in a good way and accounting for mindfulness in how and what we share. Involvement in this journal development has been an honoring and reflexive process for the authors and gave voice through verbatim quotes from the gathered participants.

This is just a beginning of what is hoped to be a long-standing source of knowledge sharing in the North. Envisioning and developing this journal has been an exercise in relationship building, participating in the journal development, and writing for the journal has been a learning experience for the authors. The opportunity to join with Northern Elders, Knowledge Holders, leaders, scholars, and artists has resulted in a journal that speaks to the campfire and the knowledge that exists within and among the strong and resilient people of the Northwest Territories. Respectful collaboration must remain the foundation of this work.

***Janat Ibrahimi*** *is a settler from Southern Ontario who was living and working in Yellowknife to support the creation of the journal in 2021. Janat was actively involved in developing the integral components of the journal as the journal coordinator. She is a doctoral student at the University of Alberta.*

***Kerry Lynn Durnford*** *is a settler living in Yellowknife for over 20 years. She is a nurse educator, researcher, and co-applicant on the SSHRC grant that funded journal development and the inaugural issue. She lives and works in Denendeh.*

***Pertice Moffitt*** *is a settler and academic scholar from Yellowknife. She is a Northwest Territories health and social researcher in the field of women's health, Indigenous health, and rural and remote nursing. Pertice is the principal applicant for the SSHRC grant that funded journal development and the inaugural issue. She has lived and worked in Denendeh since 1990 and previously worked in the Inuvialuit region (1982 to 1986).*

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# Land

Xàgots'eèhk'ǫ̀ JOURNAL

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# Spring Sunrise, Somba K'e

**Antoine Mountain**

Somba K'e is the Dene word for Yellowknife; it means money town. This painting is based on a photo I took from the Explorer Hotel in Yellowknife looking out across Niven Lake towards the Back Bay area.

***Antoine Mountain*** *is Dene from Radilih Koe (Fort Good Hope) in the Northwest Territories. His love for the land and its people is the root of his artwork, for which he uses acrylics on canvas, favouring the Impressionist style. He is driven by a deep-rooted spiritualism to depict landscapes, the Dene way of life, and portraits. Antoine has a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the Ontario College of Arts and Design at the University of Toronto, a Master's of Environmental Studies from York University, and is currently pursuing a PhD in Indigenous Studies at Trent University.*

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# Nahadeh

**Paul Andrew**

*Nahadeh, or South Nahanni River*

"Will you accompany a group of students into the south Nahanni River?" I was stunned. Although I was born in the Mackenzie Mountains and spent my early years there, the southern Deh Cho area is not my traditional area.

Trepidation, butterflies, fear. My body wanted to say no but my spirit told me it was an offering, a gift, a responsibility, an obligation. I heard of the beautiful and special place that Nahadeh or Nahanni River is, but I did not know the sacred areas or stories behind the campfires.

In times like this I walk. I meditate. I listen for voices in the wind and look for signs in the clouds and land. I ask myself: What would Elders do? Deep down I knew they would say Mahsi Cho and accept.

I went to see an Elder. He said when in doubt, sit and listen for voices of the ancestors. Think Dene songs and the beat of the drum. Think traditional teachings. I visited another Elder in Fort Simpson from where we were to fly out. The Elder told me to keep all senses open. Listen. Look, touch, smell. And always ask for humility and be grateful.

Traditional teachings say all lands and water and everything on or in it are sacred. I did not know the history of the area but I can treat everything as blessed and revered. I also remembered telling an Elder of my pilgrimage in Spain. He said we have a lot of trails here, why do you have to go to the other side of the world to walk? Besides I always said as part of reconciliation, people should travel in the north and visit Dene and Inuit communities.

Flying out, the mountains are coming closer and closer. Breathtaking, spectacular row of beautifully lined formation. Magical! Spiritual! Beautiful!

Words, photos, videos cannot, do not do justice to the land that is the South Nahanni. I feel totally inadequate in trying to convey what I saw and felt. I could not and will not try to.

We landed above Virginia Falls. Our journey was set to start just below what the Indigenous people in the area call Nailicho, the big falls. The river above the falls is calm and reassuring but even without trying one can hear and smell the falls just a few kilometers away.

First order of business, feed the land and the water. It became a daily ritual.

*The river brought back memories of days gone by. The days of travel by moose skin boat. As a child of five or six I remember looking for spruce gum to plug needle holes and helping out making the "thread" to sew the skins together.*

*I will never forget the rides and the beauty of shuh tah or the Mackenzie Mountains. The powerful, strong, spectacular and awe-inspiring mountains. The clean, ice cold, and powerful water. As we travelled Begadé or the Keele River I remember thinking we must be in the most beautiful part of the world but turning every corner, another 'Kodak' moment as nature revealed its beauty. Each moment seemed more stunning than the last.*

The day before we are to set out on the river, the group decided to walk the trail to the top of the mountain. I stayed behind. I needed to think Dene, to think Shuhtao'tine (Mountain Dene). I need my senses to come alive.

*No matter the time of the year we were on the land, it was home. There was silence when you want it, when you didn't want it, and every other time. There was the peace of watching animals in the early mornings as they played and sang. The beauty of learning how the animals took care of you and how you care for and respected the animals. For example, you never hit a caribou or rabbit with a stick.*

I chopped some wood, then sat down and listened to the wind, the air, and strained to hear sounds other than the falls. I tried to smell the river, land, and water and tried to feel everything around me. Being out of practice, I felt like being in residential school for the first time. Alone and frightened, I walked a bit. Then: I am not alone. There was a rabbit sitting nearby, a squirrel running up a tree, and a whiskey jack looking for handouts. Not only that, there are others and the land, water, sky, and everything in between. There is nothing to fear, Elders used to say, you have your role and everything else has its part. Just do what you have to do.

*My dad and others told legends of landmarks like Bear Rock or the Ramparts. I remember fondly the stories of Yamozha, the man who set the law for the Dene to live by and the story of Creation. But without a doubt my favorites were of how the raven got to be as black as he is or how he got to squawk like there is something stuck in his throat.*

Other teachings started to come back to me. Do not eat too much or eat food that is too cold or too hot. Drink only a little amount of water and only if the need is there. I remember Dene used to dip a finger into water and lick the water off the finger when they were thirsty. I wondered if I could do it. I like food too much and the non-Indigenous culture, which I am a part of, encourages drinking water regularly.

The daily meditation and offerings helped. Not only was I able to limit the amount of food and water I took in, I was able to do it for all of the days on the river.

*It was not always easy or fun. The only way to travel in those days was by dog team in the winter and hiking from camp to camp in the summer. So in rain, snow, wind, or sunshine, if the family needed to travel to another location, we simply packed up and moved, usually fifteen or twenty kilometers away.*

Another teaching: Those who are happy for the land, show it by singing to it. Someone had brought along a small travel guitar. I brought my drum. I always loved singing and more so when I am feeling good. I sang my grandfather's songs, Dene love songs, and looking back most of the songs I sang with the guitar were happier songs.  Pretty soon the whole gang was singing! I think we were beginning to realize just how lucky we were to be in this special place.

*I recall getting up in the middle of winter to make fire in the tent. Everything would be frozen. I recall the cold freezing fingers but there was a lot of pride in making fire for the family. There were times when we got hungry but it was never for a long period of time. The land always provided.*

For ten days, thirteen amazing mates were the only contact I had. Just like in my youth when we lived and travelled on the land. It was just us and the vast beautiful land. Nobody else. That's how it felt for ten days. My fellow paddlers became my friends, my confidantes, my counsellors. They are my teachers, my everything. That's what the land, and in this case the river, does.

*My fellow paddlers*

*I grew up on the land. It is where I was most comfortable. My father, uncles, and Elders always spoke of land, sky, water, environment, and animals. My mom and other women taught relationships, respect, and love of fellow man. They taught sewing, washing, and other camp work, in case I ended up alone. It was fun growing up on the land. Everyone seemed so happy, joyous, and free. Everyone took care of each other. The people were healthy, happy, independent, strong willed, and hard working.*

One incident stick out. We had a tip over. A reminder of the power of the river. No matter how experienced or cautious one is, nature gently reminds us who the boss is. Two people in the water, things were floating and a canoe was overturned. The response was calm, cool, and collected. One boat went after the canoe, another after anything that was retrievable, and another went after the paddlers. There was no panic. A smooth recovery!

*We were taught to pay our respects to a new area of land or water. We also learned songs to sing in the mornings. These are things I enjoyed and never found anywhere else. There is nothing like lying on your blanket and listening to the birds in the early spring mornings or watching a rabbit run a few steps, stop, listen, and sit there. The beauty of listening to the wolves howl in the evening or the pitter, patter of rain drops on the tent as you try to fall asleep deep in the Mackenzie Mountains.*

Sometimes I feel like I got more than I gave but I tell myself that is a sign of being open and teachable. I only wish my fellow paddlers could know how much they helped me. The younger ones taught me what it must be like to have a normal family. To grow up without abuse or separation from loved ones. They showed me how proud they are of who they are. They are open, funny, and they laughed and teased each other. They seem to know their place in the world already.

*The gift I cherish the most about growing up on the land is being with the Dene at their best. I am one of the lucky ones who has been with them and enjoyed their prayers, songs, dances, stories, and laughter. One cannot ask for more!*

The not-so-young ones reminded me of the need to set rules, to say NO, to be stern and strict when necessary but also to reward or award effort. To listen and comfort. To allow for mistakes. To find and enjoy one's place in life wherever and whenever that happens to be. They taught me that it is OK to ask for help.

*One of my fondest memories of being in the mountains was waking up and hearing people outside. I knew by the light and sun's rays it was early but the older people were singing for the land and the sunrise. They are giving thanks for one more day.*

On the last evening, we had a campfire and a drum dance. I sang my grandfather songs. The young men and women were dancing like there was no tomorrow. Singing old songs and being in a spiritual area, it wasn't long before I felt the intoxicating spirit and the power of the land and river. Then the presence of my parents and grandparents. I felt a tear trickling down my face. A tear of joy. I felt a deep pride in the people I come from. They did not have much but they were always happy.

*Paul Andrew on the Nahadeh*

*I must have been ten. Me and my dad went on a trip. Just of two of us. I drove a dog team of two. My dad making and breaking trail. We went far out in the bush, made fire, and a lean to. After we had eaten, my father talked about the area. After the stories we went outside and watched the stars in the sky and later, father and son enjoyed the northern lights as they danced across the teepee in the sky. I was with my dad. I felt loved, safe, and cherished. I felt a deep joy and a deeper satisfaction to be Shutao'tine, Dene, and Indigenous.*

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***Paul Andrew*** *is a Shutaot'ine, or Mountain Dene, from Tulita. He was born in the Mackenzie Mountains, grew up on the land, and spent seven years in residential school. Paul shares his knowledge as a former Chief, a Residential School Survivor, former politician and journalist, and as a Dene oral historian passing on knowledge from his Elders in Tulita. He lives in Yellowknife.*

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# Bushkids

**Chloe Dragon-Smith and Wendy Lahey**

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Bushkids is an on-the-Land learning initiative based in Yellowknife.

Learning outdoors or "in nature" is becoming a popular movement across Canadian society. For us in the north, the Land is the foundation for northern cultures, languages, and knowledge systems. It follows that learning on and from the Land has been integral to Indigenous societies since time began.

Bushkids works in an ethical space of engagement[1], where Indigenous worldviews and non-Indigenous worldviews co-exist in a mutually respectful and creative space. Mainstream Canadian (and northern) curriculum comes from a western model of learning, and so much of the work of Bushkids is to create healthy space for Indigenous ways of teaching and learning to come into balance with the way all kids are currently learning[2].

Colonial research and science has been confirming what Nations in the north - and all across Turtle Island - have always known. Spending time outdoors is good for children, good for learning, and benefits everyone long term[3].

The goal of Bushkids is to share an (ever evolving) model for accessing balanced learning for all children that is rooted in places, peoples, cultures and languages. There is no right way to learn, and learning must be determined ultimately by Land, people, and the relationships that bind them over time.

Our vision is for every community in the north to have their own version of this model, with its own name, its own values, and its own spirit. Bushkids is not a new way to learn - on the contrary, it is a belief in the knowledge that has always existed here: in ourselves, each other, and the Land.

This is all represented in the poster by Trey Madsen. To learn more, go to **www.bushkids.ca**.

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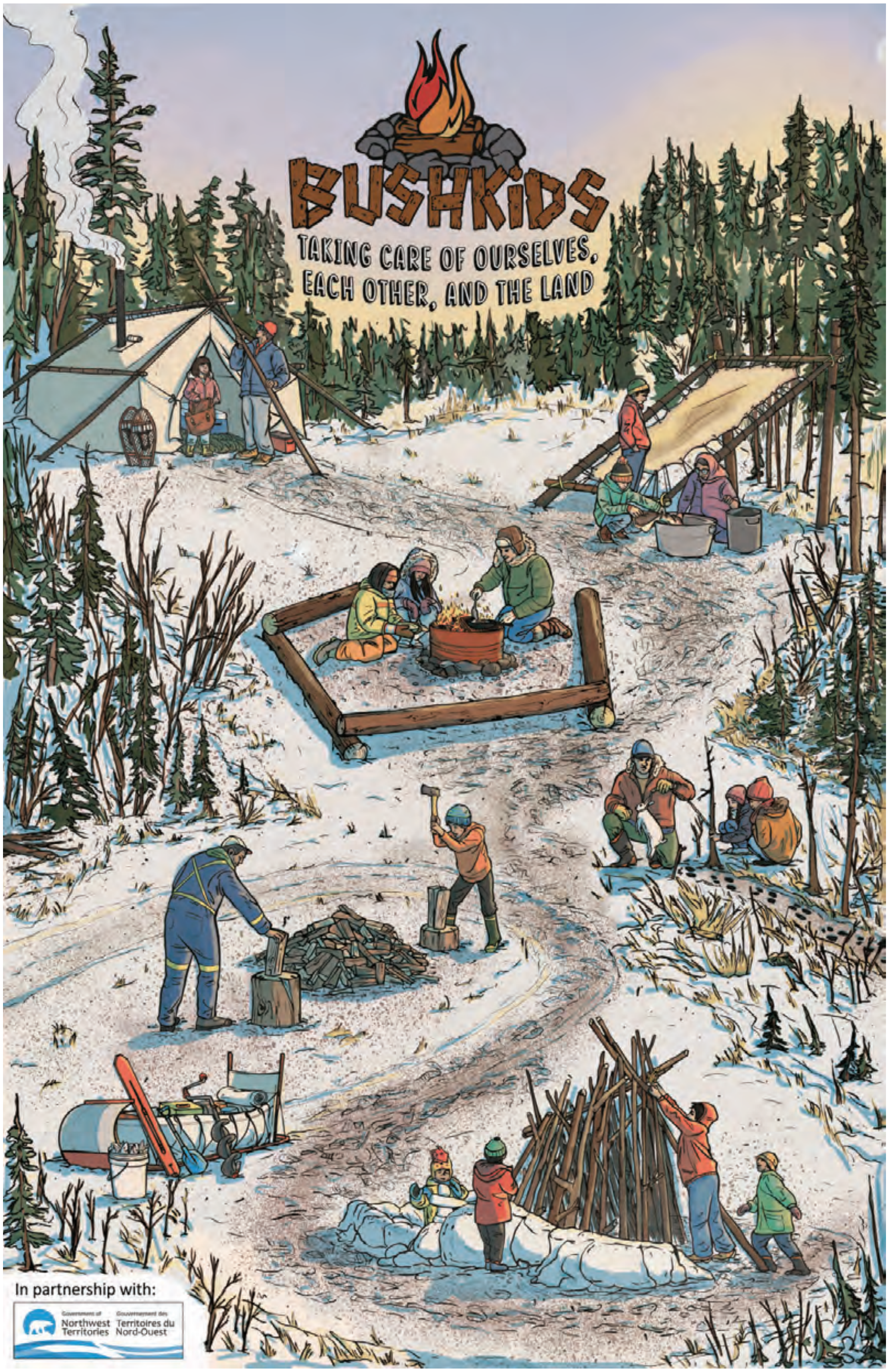
1 *Ermine, "Ethical Space."*
2 *Dragon Smith, "Creating Ethical Spaces."*
3 *Parks Canada, "Connecting Canadians with Nature."*


BUSHKIDS
TAKING CARE OF OURSELVES, EACH OTHER, AND THE LAND
In partnership with:
Government of Northwest Territories Gouvernement des Territoires du Nord-Ouest

***Chloe Dragon Smith*** *is a young woman born and raised in Somba K'é, Denendeh, of German, Dënesųłiné, Métis, and French heritage. She grew up close to her Indigenous cultural values and learned traditional skills for living on the land. Her mother is Brenda Dragon, and her father is Leonard Smith, and her grandmother is Jane Dragon. The women and men of her maternal lineage lived, harvested, ate, shared, struggled, loved, and died on the Land in the boreal forests of northern Canada. Chloe cares about revitalizing Indigenous systems – self-determined systems of living, learning, management, economies, and governance. As a mixed blood person, she feels a constant responsibility to bridge barriers and help create balance however she can.*

***Wendy Lahey*** *is from Burlington, Ontario, and was raised by her Polish mother Phyllis Bryk and Cape Breton father, Sandy Lahey. Raised simply with a strong value of gratitude, Wendy has a large family with traditions that centered on food from the garden, farm or the sea. She is fortunate to have lived in Somba K'e since 2004 on Yellowknives Dene Land, Chief Drygeese, Treaty 8 territory, home of the North Slave Métis Alliance and countless other Nations who live here or traveled here since time immemorial. She believes in an education system of Land-based learning where Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews are in strong relationship and are equally valued.*

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# Returning to the Lands of Our Ancestors: Northern Indigenous Women, Resurgence, and Diverse Academic Journeys

**Anita Lafferty, Crystal Gail Fraser, and Crystal Wood**

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## ABSTRACT

This is the edited conversation from a panel discussion that took place that took place in Sǫǫ̀mbak'è, Treaty 8 territory, in June 2022. Our panel was part of the in-person conference program for NAISA North: Regional gathering of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA), hosted by Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning, and held at the Yellowknife Ski Club.

"Returning to the Lands of Our Ancestors," brought us together as three Northern Indigenous scholars with diverse backgrounds and experiences in academia, who found common ground in our kinship ties that take us back to our ancestral Lands in the Northwest Territories. The conference was an opportunity to return to our homelands together, carrying the knowledge of our ancestors, looking to be grounded and guided after long absences from the North due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was also a chance to collaborate and discuss what resurgence means for us after two years of turning inward and being away. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, a Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar, discusses resurgence as "another way of describing [the] flourishment of Indigenous knowledges, laws, languages, and practice" (2017, p.17). This is what our panel intended to do. Together, we shared our experiences as Indigenous scholars, reflected on practices of northern resurgence in our academic lives, and explored ways to ensure our selves, our families, our communities, and our cultures continue to flourish.


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## WHO WE ARE

**Anita Lafferty:** nehgha dahgohndih Anita Lafferty sudze Łíídlı̨ı̨ Kų́ę́ First Nation. Hello everyone, it's really beautiful to be here today in Denendeh. This is my first panel as Dr. Lafferty, I still am coming to terms with that because it's been a very long journey to the PhD, and not a journey that has been my own. I take my ancestors with me on this journey, they have guided me. I also take each and every one of you sitting here along with me. The North has been central in my mind throughout this journey so each of you have been a part of it in your own way.

I am a ts'élî-iskwew, a mother, a daughter, a sister, an aunty, a great aunty. I have a daughter and I dedicated my work to her because I think about the young people and that's where my heart lies. I am married, my husband is from Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation west of what is now called Edmonton. I am also an educator, I am a teacher. I have a Bachelor of Education and that's where I started my journey in post-secondary western education. Throughout my school experiences including my PhD there have been many struggles that I had encountered, so it's been a long tumultuous yet advantageous journey.

Flying into Denendeh a couple days ago is always a feeling that overwhelms my entire physical and spiritual being, like a welcoming, a coming home of sorts.  I've been fortunate enough to travel back and forth every now and then, because my family is up here. Most of them reside in Hay River, that's where my mother, my semo resides. She's on her way here to visit me now, driving from Hay River.

*Denendeh Sedze : My heart in Denendeh (June 22, 2022). This photo was taken from the plane just before landing in Sǫǫ̀mbak'è. Photo by Anita Lafferty.*

I am looking forward to seeing her, my beautiful niece is here too so I am really happy to share this with her and this is her first time seeing her Aunty up here so shout out to you! I am thinking about her; she is also journeying in post-secondary and as I mentioned the reason, I do what I do is for the young people, leaving guiding steps so that I can lift up their voices because from experience often our voices feel silenced. It is time to unsilence and lift up their voices. So that's just a small piece of me and my journey. Oh yes. and I have 2 dogs. I've got to acknowledge my puppies, Willow and River. They are named after the place of my ancestral roots, where my grandmother and grandfather lived before relocating in Łíídlįį Kų́ę́. Mahsi.

**Crystal Gail Fraser:** Shoorzri' Crystal Gail Fraser vàazhii. Shiyughwan kat da' Juliet Mary Bullock shahanh t'iinch'uu ts'at Bruce Fraser shityè t'iinch'uu. Guuyeets'i' dechuu. Ts'at Marka Andre shitsuu t'iinch'uu ts'at Richard Bullock shitsii t'iinch'uu. Inuvik ts'at Dachan Choo Geh̨njik gwits'at Gwichya Gwich'in iłhii.

My name is Crystal Fraser, I am Gwichyà Gwich'in and of English and Scottish ancestry, originally from Inuvik. My parents are Juliet and Bruce and my grandparents were Marka Andre and Richard Bullock, my great grandparents on my maternal side was Julienne The'dahcha, the one who carries a feather, also known as Julienne Andre, and John Tsell of the Tsiigehtchic area. It is really nice to be here, I am so proud of Anita. I've only just met Crystal Wood but I am going to follow her work and her over the years. I live in the Edmonton area with my husband, who is a settler originally from Hay River, and my 6-year-old daughter. It's a pleasure to be here; we are among friends and family.

I am an assistant professor in History and Native Studies at the University of Alberta. I am hoping to advance some work in the North, and support relationships and communities. My professional training is as a historian and I study the history of Indian Residential Schools. I've been doing that work for over a decade now, but it is Survivors, former students, and Elders who are the experts. I am learning new things every day. I am an intergenerational residential school survivor. My grandmother was institutionalized at Immaculate Conception Indian Residential School in Aklavik and my mother at Grollier Hall in Inuvik. We are now in a month of anniversaries of unmarked graves; May 27 is the anniversary of the news out of Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc and the anniversary of the possible 751 unmarked graves at the Marieval Indian Residential Schools is tomorrow. If anyone needs support or outreach, please notify a conference organizer.

I wrote down the first question, "Who am I"? This is very difficult! I feel like I am a different person every day and that one day I may be strong and the next day I may be something else, flipping between working in the public to being in the background. One day I may be an activist and the next day I might need to turn inward. I think we can be many different things at many different times. Hàįį̀'

**Crystal Wood:** Hello, my name is Crystal Wood. I am a member of the Łíídlįį Kų́ę́ First Nation, same community as Anita Lafferty. I first want to begin with sharing how honored I am to be here with these ladies, and with all of you, and thank you Creator for another beautiful day. My late mother is Cecelia Antoine. She left her community a long time ago. I'm not really sure of the exact reasons but I have a few thoughts that come to mind, given that she went through a couple residential schools. I grew up in Treaty 6 and Treaty 7 territory my entire life. I was born in Whitecourt Alberta, and then I was adopted out at age five (as part of the Sixties Scoop) so I lived in Hinton, Fox Creek, and then down by the Blood reserve near Waterton, AB so I was fortunate to grow up working in Waterton in the summertime. Right after high school, I came to Calgary to pursue my education in Justice studies at Mount Royal College (my education journey continues but as I explain below). When I finished that, I did a 180 and didn't go into that field, and then I met my husband, and we had our son Tristan who's now 14. Later on, we moved up to Treaty 6 and so now I live on an acreage near Spruce Grove, Alberta. And we had our daughter there, her name is Saje and she is now 11. And then we have our 3 dogs. I am just honored to be here, and thank you.

## OUR EDUCATIONAL JOURNEYS SO FAR

**Crystal Gail Fraser:** I've been quite open about my experiences and story, especially in the North, and some people are familiar with my story. I started on this path when I was 5 years old, attending Sir Alexander Mackenzie School and I had a lot of questions about this Mackenzie person. Who was he? And why do I need to care? So, I had a lot of questions growing up in Inuvik. I wondered why our people struggle with addiction, why certain things are a certain way. And why we didn't talk about it? Why wasn't I learning my own language? It was very traumatic for me when my family and I left Inuvik when I was 14. We moved to Lethbridge, and that severed many different connections. I no longer had my grandparents close, I was no longer on my homeland, I didn't go to my fish camp every summer like I had for 14 years. That led me to a path of leaving high school in grade 10, being homeless and not living a good life. I am, however, grateful that I did not struggle with addiction at that time. I didn't have anyone in my life who was Indigenous or a role model. My life improved when I moved back to Yellowknife when I was 20. And even though these lands are not mine, there are Gwich'in histories and connections here. When I was 23 working at a local pub, I registered at Sir John Franklin High School to finish my grade 12. I don't know how or why they took me but I convinced them. And it was an English teacher there who saw my work and encouraged me to apply to university.

I was accepted at the University of Alberta (U of A). Being back in Alberta was intimidating because of what I had experienced in Lethbridge. But I was determined to help my people and I thought I could do that by becoming a lawyer, but in the end, law did not speak to my heart. History resonated with me and that's not surprising. My first history teacher was my great grandmother. I remember we had her set up at our fish camp in a makeshift bed: a pallet with all kinds of blankets, comforters, and pillows. At that time she was around 94 years old, laying there and smoking her pipe. My aunties joked, "Oh she's sleeping" but then you'd see this little puff of smoke come out of her pipe and you would know that she was awake and listening. She was my first story teller: She told me about our ancestors, driving a dog team, and other really incredible experiences in her long life (1889-1983).

During my studies toward a Bachelor of Arts (2004-2008), there were no Indigenous history courses at U of A. I remember sitting in Canadian history courses and being told "there are no Indigenous people in Alberta". I was encountering the system in a violent way, saying that our history, our words, our ancestors did not matter, but also that they did not exist. That was very, very difficult for me, and I had so many questions. That's why I needed to undertake a Master of Arts in History degree program. I went to the University of Victoria, which grew my mind in super cool ways.

And then after my master's, I still had so many questions and I needed to do a PhD. This brought me back to the U of A. My studies took nine years, a long process because I was working in community, centering Survivors, and working with oral histories. During that time, my daughter arrived. Working on residential school histories is politicized and I have been denied access to archival records on residential schools, I have been told that my research does not matter, and I have been told that we know everything there is to know already. Those things were very hard to hear. But I suppose I also underestimated my ability to deal with the actual contents of those records and the experiences of Survivors. In interviews, we talked about sexual violence, the removal of our people from our lands, all kinds of harmful things, and the elimination of our languages. During that time, I had to seek therapy. One exercise that really helped was envisioning present me sitting with future me - Elder Crystal - in a canoe at my fish camp on the river. Every time I would encounter something hard, I would say "What would Elder Crystal say?" That brought a lot of answers to me.

At the end of the day, I was able to get through the doctoral program but of course faced various institutional pressures throughout: "why aren't you finished the PhD, you needed to be done in this amount of time, we are going to cut your funding off." These programs try to be 'one-size-fits-all'. Additionally, I struggled to find my good people to work with in the discipline of History. Fortunately I had a very wide community of Indigenous friends, scholars, and academics, a couple of them are here today, who saw me through it. I finished and received my PhD in 2019 , and my work won a scholarly prize, but more important than that, it's really been a pleasure to work with community and work with survivors and actually have the words of our people, their stories, reflected in history now (Fraser 2019).


*Crystal Gail Fraser's journey, as illustrated by Melaw Nakehk'o, Dene Nahjo's Indigenous Women's Gathering, Délįnę 2019.*

**Anita Lafferty:** Where did my journey start in education? Oh my goodness there are so many stories that are present in that one question! My methodology is called narrative inquiry, it's the storying way, but more in depth as I inquire into and about experiences. One of the greatest teachings about experience I got was from Elder Bob Cardinal. If he put this water bottle in front of me, here, I see it from this angle, and this is what I am seeing so I have a perspective of how it looks to me and I'm experiencing it from this place I sit. Sara here will look at it from a different angle and she is experiencing it from a different place than me. Jennie sees it from another perspective and so forth and so forth as we go around the bottle. We all come with experiences. So I didn't look at a PhD as a way of looking at a question to answer it, it was also an identity journey, my personal and educational journey.

There were many challenges that also came along with understanding academia and my western education. And for me part of that was the identity journey that I had to take and that's what really for many of us Indigenous scholars have to go through. It comes with many challenges and we each have different experiences. Some of those stories were shared here over the past couple days. In the work that I do, I am thinking about the challenges we as Indigenous scholars are faced with. For me, the answer to those challenges are the women's voices, they were always present along my journey. For instance, I had to move down south when my daughter was three. There were not many programs available to study in the north, they had programs like office administrator and stuff like that. It wasn't what I wanted to do. Before that I worked across the street from here at the Legislative Assembly. I went for a walk yesterday and was thinking about that process and all of these amazing beautiful Dene that were in leadership. I had never experienced a job like that before so it was really inspiring, it touched my heart and it made me think bigger in terms of career. I didn't want to have an office admin job because I knew there was something bigger for me out there. And it was the grandmothers' voices that kept encouraging me. So as I moved south, I did my undergraduate degree in education and that was a journey in itself. I could be here for a couple of hours telling you about all that journey. One challenge that comes to mind was in my third year of my undergrad I felt stuck because of the work and constant challenges of being away from home thinking "What am I going to do? I don't feel good here in academia, why am I here?" I had hit a wall and I wanted to quit. But it was the grandmothers' voices that brought me back. Sometimes when we think about those grandmother messages, they're not direct messages, for instance my grandmother didn't say "You got this." The message comes in another form but you just have to listen for it and be present. It is a deep listening from within, learning how to listen. I have heard this as a teaching that we've forgotten how to listen. And so I am always cognizant of this teaching.

After I completed my undergrad, I taught at a high school in Edmonton. I was brought back to high school experiences and the challenges our young people are continuing to go through. As a teacher, I brought my students out onto the land. These experiences allowed me to rethink the curriculum in a deeper sense. Working in an urban high school made me think more about the political system and the administrative roles that manage curriculum so I decided to take my master's in Educational Leadership and Management. For me it was to really understand the system of funding and so forth. Because as a teacher I faced challenges in order to bring my students out onto the land. There are many policies and barriers that are in place for teachers, so I wanted to understand how that system worked. My master's degree helped me understand that in more depth.

The grandmother's voices were still present and one day I had an Elder's tea with my students. At this point, I was contemplating continuing my western education and doing a PhD as my peers were encouraging me to "keep going, keep going". I kept hearing that and so I remember writing my first paper in the master's program, literally crying at midnight and pushing send, feeling like "what is this?" I felt a negative energy telling me that I wasn't supposed to be there, and so it didn't feel good. All these tears came. But the next day I think everybody else in my course had that same feeling, so that was comforting in a sense but also daunting because I was the only Dene in that circle of master's students and so that was a challenge. But the grandmothers were still there and present in my mind and so when I had that Elder's tea, her message to the young people was "keep going." I took that message and I applied it to my PhD and I continue to listen for that voice as it has led me all the way.

In my work I talk about those stories and the stories of my grandmother, and mother. It's those grandmother theories that sit with us. For me I understand those teachings because I listen to my matriarchs and that's where my teachings sit. We have to walk in balance and so, for me that's where many of my land teachings had come from and settled. My seta, my mother, is from the North, my grandmother, my great grandmother, and so on. And so when I journeyed through this process of PhD work, my storied experience brought me to my kinship relations, the kinship curriculum. When I think about it now, I met lots of relatives even in the past couple of days! When I am on campus I am always looking for relatives. They always seem to find me in some way and that's how I met Crystal Fraser. I reached out to her during my PhD knowing she was a Northerner and so I connected with her. I had met Crystal Wood when I was doing community work and she was a parent going to teach beading to one of the classes I was working alongside. And she was telling me a little bit about herself and I said we are cousins, we're related. We have created our own supports and I feel it is because the grandmothers' voices are guiding us.

I am always listening and thinking about our women and our strong women stories and really finding that space for me was finding that Northern voice. Voices that we know we can recognize. It's been a long time since I've been back at home, I travel a lot. I think about my grandfather, he was a trapper. I feel like I am a cartographer of the landscape like in different landscapes all over, always shifting. This notion is always present in my mind and in the work that I do. So yeah, I have experienced many challenges in my educational journey. I could sit here all day talking about it but I'll let someone else talk now. Mahsi.

**Crystal Wood:** I just want to add and acknowledge that the last time I was in this territory I was a baby, so when I arrived here in this territory, it was really humbling and emotional for me because it feels like home. I was talking earlier (with colleagues) about 'blood memory' and how your spirit remembers, so it was interesting that I when I am around the mountains (rock), the water, trees it always feels like home, so when I am here the territory seems similar but different, but it feels like home, I just want to start with that.

So, how did I start on this path? In high school I was looking at my work and educational options and I felt education was the best route for me. However, I was hesitant about whether I would be good at education because I was told when I was younger that I was not a good writer. When you are told things like this at a young age, they stick with you. That stuck with me for a very long time, even when I was pursuing my post-secondary education. But I'll get into that and how I addressed that in a little bit.

Starting through my journey, I completed the Bachelor of Applied Justice Studies degree at Mount Royal College (now called Mount Royal University). I found that it wasn't my path and so from there I worked in the private industry for a long time, and then I moved up to Treaty 6 territory. I happened to be at a powwow where there was a display of pamphlets from Athabasca University and I was like "Ooh, this looks interesting, this looks cool." There was a program called Bachelor of Management for Indigenous Nations and Organizations. And that really started my education journey again. I started taking courses online. With a young family there were times it was difficult to navigate everything but I learned to develop time management skills to complete each course. Later on, I worked in public secondary education working as a workshop facilitator teaching Indigenous beading that included foundational education about Indigenous People(s) in Treaty 6, then I worked as an Educational Assistant, and then as an Indigenous Liaison at a high school. From there, I was hired at a Tribal College rooted in First Nations culture and traditions. I was there for nearly four years and I am incredibly grateful: I learned a lot about Indigenous cultures, governance, and ceremony. While I was there, I decided to pursue my Master of Education in Aboriginal Studies through Queen's University and completed it in 2020. During that time, I found it difficult once again to navigate the responsibilities of family combined with busy schedules, and the dedication needed for my studies. But, with my family support and dedication to my studies, and time management I was able to do it.

What pulled me into pursuing a PhD were the educational experiences of my children. When I thought about it, and reflected about it, it was very similar to mine. Indigenous knowledge, education and programming was very limited for my children. When I started digging into it and asking questions, the school division was offering some programming and services but the availability was inconsistent. When I started to become more involved it seemed like a very tokenistic approach, for example helping to plan for National Indigenous Peoples Day, so one day out of the entire year. This didn't sit very well with me, so with the help of another Indigenous parent we contacted the school division to help with meaningful change for education. Over time, a committee was built, however change is slow and I am reminded of baby steps, but now my son is fourteen years old." In reflection of this slow change, it really propelled me to apply for my PhD so I can help with creating meaningful and impactful change for our future generations.

When I applied for my PhD program, I was really excited about it. Having completed my master's program, I felt I knew how much work it would be, but I didn't realize how much more expectations and work it would be! They don't tell you that part, you get the encouragement which is awesome, but I thought I could balance being a full-time mom with family obligations, full-time job, and full-time PhD studies. It turns out I couldn't, so I had to give up on something so I decided to give up my full-time work to become more present and active with my family and as a student, and I am so glad I did, and that I am pursuing my PhD.

When I started my first year, and first semester, I think one of the challenges I really had was the transition from working in a First Nations College rooted in First Nations tradition and culture moving to this big white western institution. I asked myself "Do I belong here?" That was probably one of the biggest questions that I had. The language is different, the people were different, instructors were different, they were different from where I was at the education setting that I was at. I really struggled for the first three weeks, and thankfully Anita reached out to me and she said "How are you doing?" and I was like "...not so well." and so it was a saving grace to have a conversation with her about this and my hesitancy of being in higher education, she affirmed to me that I belonged, and said "Yes! You belong, your voice matters, you need to be here." And I was just very appreciated for her mentorship and support. And then also reaching out to the other support that I already had as well, people who I trusted. And smudging, lots of smudging! I am grateful that I was able to get through that hesitancy.

I think the last challenge that I have recently encountered is the patriarchal and colonial view of Indigenous women I experienced in the classroom. That was a difficult experience, but thankfully I was able to connect with my trusted friends, mentors and supervisors who were able to support me through it. But, with going through this experience, I was able to find the courage to speak my truth and the whole experience taught me that your voice matters, and I learned that mine does too.

## HOW WE CAN CONTINUE TO FLOURISH

**Crystal Gail Fraser:** There's a lot to say about flourishing and work. Simply existing in these spaces allows us to flourish. Holding people accountable, sharing important Indigenous Knowledge even if you're repeating yourself, standing against tokenism - these are examples of practices that help me flourish. Take up the space. I have lighter skin so I have a privilege that some other Indigenous Peoples do not. A part of that privilege means leading interventions and having uncomfortable conversations. That is hard work, but ultimately a responsibility that comes with privilege. I've finally come to accept that I'll never be fluent in my language. Dinjii Zhuh Ginjik is one of the hardest languages in the world to learn. And in order to do the work that my community has asked me to do, and to be a good parent, I've accepted that I can't live in a language nest for 2 years. That was a really hard thing to accept for me but I am still finding ways to use my language, even in academic ways. We can normalize our Indigenous languages in publications, as one example. I'm trying to be that steady and persistent voice that speaks to my core values, my culture and heritage, but also to our beautiful languages. That's really important to me. And also understanding that I am just one person and I choose to place my energy behind important and achievable goals.

A part of that is self-care. Earlier when I introduced myself, I mentioned that you can't be all the things, all the time. Somebody said to me once that our commitments need to model a flock of geese: it's not the same goose leading the pack the entire time. You can move to the back and let someone else lead depending on what is happening in your life. Sometimes when you see that lone goose flying, you're like "dude!" Sometimes I was that goose, for example, when I was a teenager, but you find your way back to the flock, right? And hopefully you don't have to struggle to find your way back. Hopefully, you look after yourself well enough and you nourish your body, your soul, and your bank account so that you're able to return on your own terms and schedule.

I get emails from residential school deniers every day in my work as a scholar of residential schools, and as a member of the Governing Circle for the National Center of Truth and Reconciliation. Many, many people will block those kinds of emails and whether this is a good or bad thing, I haven't figured it out yet. But I read all the emails. I read them because I need to be able to dissect these arguments and destroy that line of thinking. But this is a way that I flourish, I think, is in fully understanding these arguments that are calling into question genocide, that are calling into question the deaths of our ancestors and loved ones, that do not believe residential schools as a vast network of death and oppression and carceral spaces existed, people telling me that the stories of my grandmother and mother are false. A part of my flourishing is holding people accountable.

A part of my flourishing is holding people accountable because "I am sorry" isn't enough. I want the names of every person that worked at Indian Residential Schools, I want to know if they are alive and I want to know if they can be held criminally responsible. I wonder what it would look like for the settler state of Canada to be accountable to the International Criminal Court. Thank you.

**Anita Lafferty:** Mashi, thank you. I was thinking about this word flourish that came from Leanne Simpson's work (2017), she's talking about it in the context of resurgence where she shifted that concept from resurgence to flourish. I really like that concept of flourish as opposed to resurgence. I feel like the term resurging sounds as though I am coming out of the matrix or something. So, I like the concept of flourish. It better fits my worldview. My dissertation is titled "Where my edhéhke [moccasins] take me" (Lafferty 2022). Sitting here, I'm looking at Jennie's moccasins and the beautiful beadwork. The beadwork on our edhéhke is very prominent in our grandmother's stories, including my mother's stories. I would say my mother has a PhD in edhéhke [moccasin] making, and so when I think about the process of making edhéhke, it's not just the process of moccasin making, there is a longer process. For me, there's the ceremony of the hunter that's going out on the land, and then the hide tanner, and the edhéhke maker. There are many facets of the process, it's not just one part of it, and so when I think about flourishing, I am thinking about her and her journey of edhéhke making. That's a journey in itself and with it comes the images of beautiful beadwork of the many Dene flowers and images of the land. I think about all of our young people and the connections I've made. The many Dene flowers that I've come across or the flowers from across Turtle Island in my travels and I see that as an uplifting, especially for our young people who struggle.

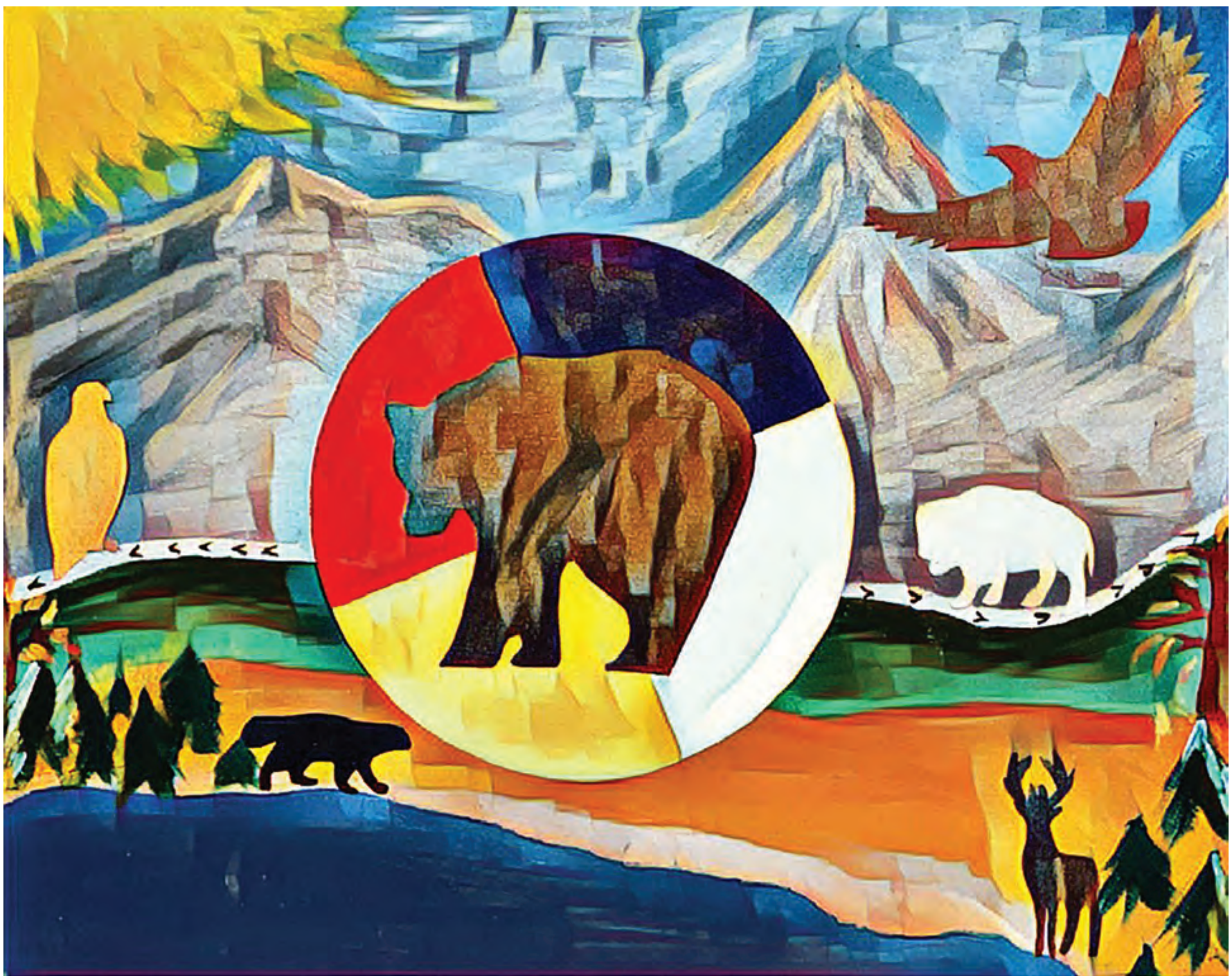
Now the sun is coming out and we can all gather here together in this beautiful space and have these conversations. I am looking out onto these beautiful faces and seeing all the Dene flowers here, and the beautiful kaleidoscope of flowers that we all encompass, that we each carry. So for me that term flourish is very central to my heart and my soul flame when I think about my grandmother, my granny theories, because that's where my work has led me. It has led me back here to the trails of my ancestors. I'm thinking of the image from the Dene Nation of our ancestral trails. This image sits very well in my heart, with trails like the veins that embody us. I think about all the stories that are yet to be shared that our young people need to hear, especially our women stories that were often absent because I, too, come from a place of intergenerational trauma. I don't tell those stories too much because that's my own healing journey and a part of my work and this work has also been about healing for me.

So, when I think about flourishing, I'm thinking about all those concepts of the journey that we've had to endure. Yes, I do have a western education but I come back home in that kindergarten mode still because I am always learning, watching, and observing with a new perspective. For me, that's flourishing. I've heard so many stories so far in the past couple days and I see and hear and feel, even taste the stories that are coming out of this beautiful space. For me that's important because our young people are sitting in the crowd and my daughter will be listening and our daughters, and granddaughters too.

Yesterday, I met my great grandniece for the first time. She was born on Christmas Day here in Yellowknife. I think about her and walking forward she will be able to hear those stories now. Our stories will no longer live in trauma. I think about the flower blooming and so that for me is the flourishing. That is what sits with me in my heart. Mahsi.

**Crystal Wood:** I had to think about this question. Coming here helps me flourish. Learning about this land, the people here, my relations and culture and then bringing that home and pouring that into the work that I do, in addition to the learning that I have, and will have (in Treaty 6 territory). And I also want to come full circle with the writing piece that I had brought up. It took me to the end of my master's program to finally see myself as an okay writer, a good writer, embracing the way that I write, the things that I learn, and being able to write the way that I do, that helps me flourish.

And I think that the last thing is my children. I think about my children, I think about my grandchildren (that I will have) and the importance of my passion and work I am doing and hope to do to make a positive change, for the seven generations forward. That really, really pulls me forward to flourish. Thank you. Mahsi cho.



*Crystal Wood's journey so far. She will update it as she continues on her path. Art by Crystal Wood, 2022. Painted during PhD Studies, IPE - EDPS 538, Instructor, Dr. Cora Weber-Pillwax*

***Dr. Anita Lafferty*** *received her PhD from the University of Alberta in the Faculty of Secondary Education. She is ts'élî- iskwew (Dene Cree) and a citizen of the Líídlįį Kų́ę́ First Nation in Northwest Territories. Her doctoral research examines approaches of Indigenous curriculum perspectives that are grounded in Dene k'ęę (philosophy) on the Land. She was awarded the 2022 Margaret "Presh" Kates Aboriginal Doctoral Award in Education for her doctoral dissertation. Her research includes learning from/with the Land, experiences of Indigenous youth, identity, healing, and matriarchal knowledge. She takes a multidisciplinary approach in her research drawing on the fields of multimedia, art, poetry, storytelling, and Indigenous methodologies.*

***Dr. Crystal Gail Fraser*** *(she/her) is Gwichyà Gwich'in, from Inuvik and Dachan Choo Gę̀hnjik in the NWT. She is an Assistant Professor at the University of Alberta in History and Native Studies. Crystal's doctoral dissertation T'aih k'ìighe' tth'aih zhit dìidìch'ùh or By Strength We Are Still Here studied the history of student experiences at Indian Residential Schools in the Inuvik Region between 1959 and 1996 and was awarded the 2020 John Bullen Prize by the Canadian Historical Association. Her work makes a strong contribution to how scholars engage with Indigenous research methodologies and theoretical concepts, our understanding of Indigenous histories during the second half of the twentieth century, and how northern Canada was unique in relation to the rest of the settler nation. Crystal is a member of the Governing Circle for the the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, the Gwich'in Council International, and the National Advisory Committee on Residential Schools Missing Children and Unmarked Graves. She is the co-author of 150 Acts of Reconciliation, an award-winning publication that has had more than 100,000 unique engagements.*

***Crystal Wood*** *is a member of the Łíídlįį Kų́ę́ First Nation from Fort Simpson, NWT and resides with her family in Treaty Six territory on Turtle Island. She currently is a PhD student in the Indigenous Peoples Education program at the University of Alberta. Her educational background, professional and lived experiences, and personal drive for meaningful change in education encouraged her to pursue her higher education.*

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# The Beauty of a Northern Landscape

**Julian Blow**

***Julian Blow*** *is an amateur photographer who resides in Igloolik, Nunavut. He is originally from the prairies of Saskatchewan. Focusing mainly on landscape and bird photography, Julian attempts to showcase the beauty of the north. You can find more of his work at www.midnightsunsets.com*

Xàgots'eèhk'ǫ̀
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# "Learning Like Before": Continuous Resistance in Land-Based Education

**Rachel Cluderay, Rena Mainville, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, and Kelsey Wrightson***

## ABSTRACT

Since time immemorial land-based learning has been, and continues to be, integral to Indigenous pedagogies, wellness, ways of life, and knowledge transmission. This paper looks at the role of Indigenous land-based education as an example of grounded normativity, or the generation of ethical relationship informed by the land. Arguing that land-based education must be considered in relation to Indigenous pedagogies, relationships, resistance and resurgence, we explore the differences in land-based and placed-based programming through the voices of individuals directly involved in land-based programming. We find that land-based education is an opportunity to practice decolonial ethics, and renew relationships to the land.

*Photo by Morgan Tsetta*

## LEARNING AS OUR ANCESTORS DID

“Indigenous education is not Indigenous or education from within our intellectual traditions unless it comes through the land, unless it occurs in an Indigenous context using Indigenous processes.” (Deloria, 2001, as cited in Simpson, 2017)

Since time immemorial land-based learning has been, and continues to be, integral to Indigenous pedagogies, wellness, ways of life, and knowledge transmission. The state disruptions of violent colonization has attempted to break Indigenous connection with land through purposeful and harmful policies and practices. We have resisted this violence since its arrival, and the implementation of land-based programs has been critical for resisting colonial powers by strengthening and reconnecting Indigenous peoples with their land, language, and culture. Land-based programming can be used to describe a wide range of formal and informal programming. Importantly, “land-based” programming precedes and exceeds the use of the term, seen in the everyday and stretching back to Indigenous individuals, families and nation through time.

With programming taking place across the Northwest Territories (NWT), and generations of land-based learners and teachers practicing Indigenous land-based programming, individuals and groups in the NWT have demonstrated innovation and leadership in land-based programming for decades. There are many examples where Indigenous knowledges and pedagogies, and a deep relationship to the land come from across the north. In Denendeh, this includes the Dene Mapping Project in the 1970s and 1980s (Nahanni, 1977). In Tłı̨chǫ N’de, since 1995, Trails of Our Ancestors have brought generations of Tłı̨chǫ onto the land to connect oral tradition, hands on experience, and language while traveling the land (Zoe, 2007). In the Gwich’in Settlement area, the Gwich’in Social and Cultural Institute ran an annual camp between 1995 and 2001. These are just a few examples of formal programming that is led by Indigenous communities and individuals, grounded and reflective of community needs, exemplifying the critical importance of land-based programming. These land-based programs are informed by a conception of land beyond materiality. As Yellowknives Dene First Nation scholar and faculty member at Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning, Glen Coulthard explains, “It is a profound misunderstanding to think of land or place as simply some material object of profound importance to Indigenous cultures (although it is this too); instead it ought to be understood as a field of ‘relationships of things to each other” (2007, p.79). Starting from the land as central to relationships creates a set of ethical and normative relationships informed by the land, or ‘grounded normativity’. Land-based programming as it is currently defined is embedded in this long history and contemporary network of formal and informal programming that connect and reconnect Indigenous nations to their lands.

The recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has increased interest and funding for land-based programs, this also creates opportunities for co-optation of the term ‘land-based’ or ‘on the land’ by initiatives that are not delivering programming that is meaningfully informed by relationships with land. We explain the definition of land-based and how it differs from place-based, outdoor education, and nature-based. We will share a vision of land-based education based on interviews with Dechinta staff members, and through the voices and experiences of land-based practitioners. Lastly, we analyze why co-opting the term ‘land-based’ is harmful to Indigenous communities and organizations.

## LAND-BASED VS PLACE-BASED

As the popularity of land-based education has grown, public schools, post-secondary institutions, Indigenous governments, and non-profit organizations have begun to explore the delivery of programming outside of the classroom. In Denendeh, the sheer number of land-based initiatives is significant. There is a demand for land-based programming that far exceeds the resources to support delivery. For instance, the NWT On The Land Collaborative has funded 270 projects over the past six years, representing only a small fraction of the number of programs that are happening across the NWT (2021). The Collaborative funds approximately 60% of applicants (2021). Despite communities demanding that their experts, languages, and knowledge systems be placed at the centre of these programs, there is often a gap between these demands and the delivery of programming. In this section, we will distinguish between various approaches to education with the goal of differentiating between land-based education rooted in Indigenous pedagogies and ethical commitments, and place-based education that is embedded in a western approach to learning.

Land-based education is sometimes referred to as an on the land program or land-based program; we will use these terms interchangeably throughout our paper. Juniper Redvers defines a land-based program as:

“A culturally defined program or service that takes place in an urban, nature-based, rural, or remote location, which involves cultural teachings and intergenerational knowledge transfer, combined with any number of other activities or goals. Programs are informed by an Indigenous pedagogy wherein the land is the main source of knowledge and healing” (2020. p.90).

Redvers’ definition demonstrates that land-based education must be rooted in Indigenous epistemologies and pedagogies where the central feature is relationship with land. This relationship to Land informs all Indigenous land-based initiatives. Land-based education can look like hide tanning, canoeing, harvesting and processing foods and medicines, snowshoeing, stewardship or guardian programs, or any other activity where Indigenous thought systems are the foundation for the time on the land. Land-based education is multifaceted and has implications for science, culture, politics, language, stewardship, land rights, and resurgence (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2021). While there are diverse definitions of what land-based education means to individuals, a common theme is that land-based education is rooted in Indigenous pedagogies. Alex Wilson from Opaskwayak Cree Nation who leads the Indigenous Land-Based Education graduate program at the University of Saskatchewan defines land-based education as:

“…its own paradigm based on Indigenous worldviews and beliefs and the passing on of knowledge to one another and to the next generation…It is also a form of understanding our place within, and our responsibility to, the wider universe.” (Canadian Commission for UNESCO, 2021).

Now that we have discussed what land-based education is, we should also illustrate what it is not. “If your mind went straight to ‘taking the classroom outside’ or ‘outdoor education’, bingo: that’s what it’s not.” (Canadian Commission for UNESCO, 2021). Outdoor education is not land-based education because it does not centre Indigenous epistemologies and pedagogies. Simply taking people outside for activities like canoeing, hiking, or skiing, does not make those activities ‘land-based.’ Swampy Cree hide tanner, land-based practitioner, and scholar Mandee McDonald states that recently western scholars have defined land-based programs as a type of place-based education, which also includes outdoor education, environmental education, and critical place-based pedagogy (2022). In agreement with McDonald, we argue that although they are closely related pedagogical models, they are very distinct.

Outdoor education aims to provide contextual experiences that complement and expand classroom instruction. Environmental education aims to develop a shared responsibility to live well in a place without destroying it (Woodhouse & Knapp, 2000). McDonald states:

“Place-based education is a term used to describe pedagogical models where curricular material is derived from a particular place and is informed by the learners’ lived experiences with their local ecological or community context” (2022).

Place-based education often includes outdoor education methodologies to support students to connect with the world around them (Woodhouse & Knapp, 2000). Like outdoor education, place-based education is mostly about location and Indigenous thought systems are not the foundation (Canadian Commission for UNESCO, 2021).

Place-based education and land-based education share some similarities in their approach. For instance, both models support students to ground their learning in their lived experiences, including their community, cultural, intrapersonal, and land contexts. Further, both approaches encourage participants to care for and give back to the community who they are learning from and/or the community that they belong to. This aims to foster similar outcomes of community engagement, reciprocity, relationality, and accountability (McDonald, 2022). Lastly, a critical pedagogy of place and land-based pedagogy both aim to challenge mainstream education models. Standardized, ‘placeless’ education models encourage students to exploit the Land and natural resources by disconnecting students from the land, community, and themselves, in order to support the capitalist economy (Gruenewald, 2003 & McDonald 2022). Place-based and land-based models encourage students to develop relationships with the Land, themselves, and their community, to create knowledge instead of uncritically reciting information that supports oppressive systems like corporate globalization and unrestricted capitalism (Smith, 2002 & McDonald, 2022).

It is important to discuss that land-based education and place-based education are still distinct. Noel-Leigh Cockney was formerly an outdoor educator and guide before joining Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning as a Regional Programmer for his home territory, the Inuvialuit Settlement Region. Cockney explains in an interview what he has experienced as the difference between outdoor education and land-based education:

“...What I went to school for was outdoor education. And with Dechinta [the difference is that] it’s more focused on the culture, whether that be the Inuvialuit back up at home, or the Dene down here” (2022).

Land-based education is an Indigenous method that centres the needs, values, teachings, and cultures of Indigenous community members and nation(s) whose land the program is operating on (Hansen, 2018). Indigenous peoples are at every level of decision-making for land-based programs from conceptualization to implementation. They are not simply an addition who is contracted to bring culture to or Indigenize the program.

A critical goal of land-based programs is to strengthen the resurgence, reclamation, and reconnection to Indigenous ways of being, learning, and teaching. Wildcat et al. agree that, “If colonization is fundamentally about dispossessing Indigenous peoples from land, decolonization must involve forms of education that reconnect

Indigenous peoples to land and the social relations, knowledges and languages that arise from the land" (2014, p. 1). Despite Indigenous communities experiencing land dispossession and violent genocide, land-based education and practices continue to exist within many Indigenous communities. At land-based programs, we continue to see Elders and knowledge holders generously and enthusiastically sharing their teachings with students and modeling the Dene laws on the land. We see students strengthening their connections with the land, their culture, and the community on the land. We see staff members learning with each other and with the land while taking care of each other and the students. We see all students and staff being autonomous and self-determining people. We see the embodiment of land-based education, Indigenous thought systems and ways of being.

Indigenous land-based education is therefore a necessary political and ethical project that challenges the underlying power structures of colonial systems. It works to undo the damage of dispossession, and genocide by providing participants with an immersive experience of Indigenous world making based on deep relationality with the land and living in community. By reconnecting to our Elders, languages, political practices and ethics in land-based learning communities, we generate the knowledge we need to remake Indigenous worlds.

To summarize, land-based education and place-based education share many similarities but are evidently distinct. Place-based education is used to reference models informed by Western education theory and scholarship while land-based education is used to reference programs rooted in an Indigenous pedagogy where the land is not merely a backdrop to a program, but an active participant, teacher, and healer. In land-based education, Indigenous peoples hold the decision-making power and are not merely additions to the program. Land-based programs actively resist colonialism and strengthen Indigenous peoples' connections to their land, cultures, and ways of life.

## WHAT DOES 'LAND-BASED' MEAN TO US?

There are many layers and foundations to land-based education, and each Indigenous person has a different understanding of what land-based education means to them. In the winter of 2022, Jill Gilday, Dechinta Evaluator, conducted interviews with Dechinta staff members to evaluate their experiences working for Dechinta. In this section, we will share various perspectives from the interviews to demonstrate what land-based education means to land-based practitioners. We acknowledge that there is a diversity of perspectives on land-based education. While not comprehensive, these provide important insights into land-based programming from practitioners. Recognizing the limits, we will discuss common themes that emerge from these reflections.

### Centering Indigenous Pedagogies

A theme that emerged from our conversations with Dechinta staff is that land-based education means that Indigenous pedagogies are centered. Indigenous people were not asked to consent to an assimilative colonial agenda and principles that do not acknowledge different knowledges such as academic, emotional, and spiritual. How can we rebuild a system that embodies lived experience through movement and connection to Dene people, and with the land? In Denendeh, it starts with nurturing a collective community that cares within Dene laws, values and principles that teach us to live life in a good way. For Yellowknives Dene, their knowledge system centres the Dene laws. When Charlene Liske, a member of the Yellowknives Dene First Nation and the Land and Culture Resource Director at Dechinta, is asked what land-based education means to her, she states:

“Following the Dene laws, it could be so many different things to different people, but really understanding what each Dene law means to you. When you live the Dene laws at work or home and have all the different skillful resource Elders on site, everything falls into place naturally. Just being happy and following Dene laws.” (2022).

Liske demonstrates how important it is to have Dene knowledge systems informing the way Dene land-based programs are developed and delivered. On the land, we see Dene Elders and knowledge holders living the Dene laws every day. They are sharing what they have by sharing stories around the fire. We see them helping by chopping and delivering firewood to the tents. We hear them treating each other with as much love as possible by being kind, happy, generous, and supportive. Elders pass on the teachings to everyone through stories, demonstrations, and living in a good way. We see them working all day by hauling water, visiting, waking up early to heat up tents, harvesting and fixing fish, and tanning hides then taking time to rest at night. By modeling Dene knowledge systems, Elders and knowledge holders pass on key teachings for learning with the land and living in community.

A critical component of land-based education is that the teachings, pedagogies, and ways of being are informed by the land. Kyla LeSage, a Dechinta alumni and now Land-Based & Outreach Coordinator at Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning describes what learning within an Indigenous pedagogy can look like:

“Learning from the land is also learning from Elders because they have been living and taking care of the land for a long time. When I think about learning from the land, I think of going for walks with Elders, watching them lay tobacco down when they harvest medicines or listening to them talk about the land. By doing this I am able to see their connection to the land and the respect that they have for the land. By watching and learning from elders I am able to see that everything they do is with the land, and everything they do is for the land. Elders are always modeling their respect and connection for the land so when I see them do things on the land I think to myself, ‘oh that is how we live and learn on the land” (2022).

LeSage demonstrates that the knowledge modeled is based on experience and rooted in place. The bush professors have lived, learned, and cared for the land their whole lives, they are the experts on teaching within the appropriate contexts and including all relevant teachings necessary to fulfill the task at hand. They carry knowledge and relationships with the land from across generations and are respected for their ability to share it.

Typically, the participants of a land-based camp are continually learning with the land, Elders, and knowledge holders. For example, at Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning, the staff are lifelong learners because of the perpetual cycle of observing, listening, doing, and sharing. Learning in this way is different than learning from western education systems. Most Elders do not gather students together and sit them down for classroom style learning, instead it is the responsibility of the students to build relationships with the land, Elders, and knowledge holders and learn with them. Learning on the land is fundamentally a relational process, which is a central part of many Indigenous pedagogies.

Centering Indigenous pedagogies in land-based education is important because these pedagogies are informed by Indigenous nations’ relationship with the land since time immemorial. Indigenous epistemologies are critical to the development and delivery of land-based programs because Indigenous pedagogies are embedded in how to be together in a good way with the land, Elders, knowledge holders and more-than-human entities.

Indigenous pedagogies expand our understanding of how to teach and learn by observing and practicing the Elders model of learning with the land in a relational process.

**Community Driven**

A critical component of land-based programming is that it is driven by and for the community. Being driven by community means that community members are not only involved in all stages of decision making, but also their decisions are heard, respected, and implemented. With community members making decisions about the program, these members will bring forward ideas that meet the needs of the community. This is an ethical and pedagogical commitment because Indigenous communities are the best placed to determine their educational priorities.

Land-based education must be community focused. Community values, thought systems, protocols, and ways of being should be embedded in the program. Indigenous communities, families, and individuals have certain ways of building and maintaining relationships. It’s important to follow the lead of the peoples who have been in relationship with that land for many decades. LeSage, who is Vuntut Gwich’in and Anishinaabe and grew up on Chief Drygeese Territory and has delivered a lot of programming in this territory, states “When you are living or learning on another nations land, it’s important to learn their teachings, learn from their Elders, learn their history, and find ways to support them in their movements such as land back or decolonization” (2022). LeSage demonstrates the importance of practicing respect for other people’s cultures and ways of being by learning with and from the people whose land you are on, as well as supporting their resurgent work. Cockney agrees and provides an example of what being community-focused can look like:

“By being able to like with the Dene Laws, being really focused on teaching those to the Dene People. And for us as Inuvialuit people, like there are no really written kind of things like that in our culture but being able to understand that as Indigenous People we are so connected to our land, no matter which culture or heritage that we have. And having a strong connection and knowing why our ancestors have done certain things in certain seasons and like being able to do that with so many programs now, we’re trying to rebuild so much of that Indigenous knowledge into the generations now” (2022).

Creating a reciprocal relationship with the community where you are learning with them and upholding their knowledge while also supporting their needs is a critical element of land-based programs.

Since it is important for land-based programs to follow the lead of people who have relationships with the land that the program is operating on, then it is also essential for community members to be decision makers from conceptualization of a program to its implementation to its evaluation. Yellowknives Dene Elder and bush professor, Charlie Sangris describes his work at Dechinta as both part of a collective, while also supporting his self-determination:

“This really, you work for the people at Dechinta. Like you’re the boss of your own. You don’t listen to those in town who tell you what to do. You know certain times you go anytime you want and learn. Everybody makes their own decisions. It’s good that way. Instead of one boss. We talk among us, and we decide what to do and how to do things. It’s good that way. Just like everybody, we have meetings, and we all help” (2022).

Being surrounded by the brilliance of Elders like Sangris is foundational for land-based education. It's not simply having Elders at a program that is important. Inclusion in decision-making, integration as leaders in a learning community, and supporting self-determination and autonomy throughout the program planning and delivery is integral to creating a program that reflects the grounded normativity as a field of relationships. Elders are not a token addition but necessary for learning within a land-based pedagogy. More than a pedagogical practice, the inclusion of Elders, and the centring of the radical self-determination of all participants in the program, demonstrates the importance of considering grounded normativity and land-based ethics in the outcomes of education, but in the very structures and design of the programming itself. Self-determination is not an end goal of education, but lived, embodied and practiced every day.

At Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning, we have observed that when Elders, knowledge holders, and community members are given the opportunity to conceptualize the programs that we deliver, not only are they more engaged in the program, but so are their community members. This is because community members are best positioned to identify what their community needs, and if a program is addressing a need then people will attend. Sangris shares what being a land-based teacher means to him:

"Dechinta believes in taking your land back and doing all your stuff, you're learning how to do things in the bush. Teaching the younger generation how to do things in the bush. Learning like before. Like us, we used to go trapping, that's what we do for a living. We learn how to, you know, we had no money, so we had to go trapping to make money for our own. Now we need to teach those kids how to do this too. Learn how to set traps, set net, teach them how to do all that" (2022).

Sangris is at the heart of creating meaningful programming for his community as he embodies the Dene laws, embeds his Dene worldview, and generously shares his Dene brilliance at camp. He passes down teachings and knowledge that have been carried from generation to generation, to help support future generations stay connected and grounded in Dene ways of being. This is important because Sangris is identifying that his community needs to learn how to do things in the bush and this guides what activities he wants to do at camp, which, in turn, creates a program that participants are engaged in and that helps meet the resurgent goals of the community. A program that responds to what an Indigenous community is requesting through ongoing dialogues and reciprocal relationships is the embodiment of land-based education.

When land-based programming is developed by and for the community, meaningful and impactful programs are created. To do this, community members must be involved in all levels of decision making. By implementing the ideas and approaches of community members, land-based programs will meet community needs, and thus, better support their resurgent work. Land-based education programs remove typical hierarchical structures where university degree holders are placed on pedestals above the abundance of knowledge that Elders and community members hold. This decolonial structure values the knowledge that is shared by Elders and community members to create a space of learning on the land that responds to what communities want.

**Reciprocal Relationships**

A foundational part of land-based education is strengthening reciprocal relationships with the land, each other, and ourselves, or a practice of grounded normativity (Coulthard, 2007). When we are learning with the land, we are going for medicine walks with Elders, checking fishnets with bush professors, and learning to make drymeat with knowledge holders. These relationships are inextricably intertwined with land. Learning, teaching, and becoming knowledgeable does not happen separately from being (Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning, 2022). Thus, strengthening our relationships with land, others, and ourselves is critical for effective land-based education.

Building reciprocal relationships with land, families and communities, creates intergenerational wellness. Embodied Dene ways of being and knowing re-story the westernized education and learning narrative. It is from this experience that Dene people are well-practiced researchers, theorists and thinkers with methodologies rooted in Indigenous epistemologies and beyond (Absolon & Willett, 2004). LeSage elaborates on how learning with the land a holistic, relational experience and is a necessary part of land-based education:

“You can learn about Indigenous histories and terms such as intergenerational trauma, decolonization, resurgence by reading a book but it is through actually living and learning on the land that you are able to experience not only these histories and terms but how they can be put into practice. When I was learning on the land, I realized these terms mean reconnection, respect, relearning and growth. By reconnecting on the land, you begin to heal from trauma while also learning about how being on the land and practicing culture and traditions are forms of decolonization and resurgence. Being on the land your body, mind and soul are actively living out our histories and traditions which cannot be experienced the same through reading. For me, I was able to see my whole life change while I was learning on the land, I felt grounded and embraced by the land and I was finally able to understand the Indigenous histories and topics that I had read during my university degree” (2022).

LeSage explains that learning with the Land cannot only happen from reading articles or attending lectures within academic institutions. It must involve actively engaging with the land, building relationships with Elders, and mirroring the way Elders relate with the land. It is embodied learning. It is a way of life.

In land-based education, individual and collective knowledge is applied to work towards communal goals (Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning, 2022). Strong relationships are integral for the appropriate and ethical application of this knowledge. For instance, if we are pulling fish nets, the community works together to take the fish out of the nets, bring them back to camp, cut the fish up for frying or drying, then cook the fish for everyone to eat. It isn’t often that one person is doing all these important parts by themselves. Often a few people check the net together and bring back the fish, next a skilled fish fixer cuts the fish for dry fish, filets, or cooking over the fire. Then, someone makes batter for fish fry and fries or roasts the fish on the fire to share with everyone. Throughout all these steps, people are teaching, learning, and embodying land as pedagogy. Cockney shares why creating community on the land is essential for land-based programs:

“…With the programming that I’ve been involved with, the values are being able to create that community and having those connections with people, like how our ancestors have always lived…Just those values themselves are what we’re trying to instill in people. Of really taking care of the land, and taking care of the communities, and our families and everyone else in the communities” (2022).

The emergent and created community is a fluid and relational process that’s necessary for land-based education. Students need to strengthen connections with Elders, knowledge holders, and each other to embody and live land-based practices. Building these relationships with each other on the land is a form of governance at camp that informs what and how we will learn, and how we will support and care for each other. When we are on the land together, we take care of each other. We make sure people are warm, they are fed, and they have coffee or tea. We see people chopping wood and bringing it to Elders tents. We harvest medicines and make tea for each other. We hear Elders sharing knowledge on topics that participants are interested in. Reciprocal relationships are vital to foster a sense of community on the land for meaningful connections that support well-being and learning while on the land.

Not only is it critical for land-based programs to strengthen relationships with the land and each other, but also it is equally important for nourishing our relationship with ourselves. Redvers interviewed eleven land-based practitioners in the North and drew out five factors of individual resilience that land-based programs support: Self-confidence, cultural identity, interpersonal relationships and support, feeling healthy and well, and physical activity and fitness (2016). One of the community members who Redvers interviewed stated:

"The land, it knows people, it knows us. The moment you go out there you feel more comfortable, everything comes alive in you just like it was sleeping, but when you get out there something magical happens and you feel like an animal, you feel alive again. It's interesting because you breathe more deeply, you go out on the land, you watch and see, you'll take that deep breath, and it's like 'oh boy', something's feeling good here" (2016, p.88).

This quote demonstrates how the land is innately healing, and gently nourishes our relationship with ourselves. LeSage reinforces that land-based education helps enhance self-confidence and sense of identity:

"I feel like the biggest thing would be that it [land-based education] gave me my voice as an Indigenous person and that, that pride of being an Indigenous woman is a big thing where I'm now breaking down those barriers for women that colonialism put in place on our communities. But I think, the biggest thing would be that I was able to finally have a voice and feel that what I had to say was important and that people could understand what I'm trying to say to them" (2022).

This is important because when we strengthen our relationship with ourselves, we are better able to share our strengths and voice with our communities, which supports a strong sense of identity for individuals and challenges colonial barriers to (re)create strong communities.

An entire paper could be dedicated to why having reciprocal relationships in on the land programs is important. Reciprocal relationships, grounded in an ethical and normative foundation, or grounded normativity, is foundational to Indigenous pedagogies and epistemologies, and therefore, is necessary for land-based education. The purpose of learning is the maintenance of respectful, sustainable relationships between all beings (Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning, 2022). Thus, it is critical for land-based programs to be rooted in reciprocal relationships with the land, each other, and ourselves.

**Resistance & Resurgence**

It is essential that land-based education actively resists colonial policies and practices, while also implementing and reinforcing resurgent practices. Coulthard explains:

"Colonialism and its violence is ultimately separating our people from the knowledge and power that is in the territories. Any education that is worth its name and is truly decolonizing has to include connecting people to those knowledges that are grounded literally in the ground and in the land." (National Centre for Collaboration in Indigenous Education, 2020).

In this section, we share the importance of land-based education supporting Indigenous leadership as part of resurgence, and the resistance that is built into simply having Indigenous people and families on the land.

Colonialism actively works to remove Indigenous peoples from the land to break our relationship with the land, so the Canadian state can violently extract resources from the earth for its capitalist benefit. Land dispossession is the fundamental goal of colonialism. Thus, a radical form of resistance is simply Indigenous peoples being out on the land. When Indigenous peoples are out on the land, there are constant moments of resistance and disruption of the “predominantly scientific, capitalistic, Judeo-Christian world governed by physical laws, economic imperatives, and spiritual precepts” (King, 2003, pg. 12). (Re)connecting to Elders, language, land-based practices, and each other is one mechanism for regenerating and repairing the damage these systems have caused our families and communities on an individual and communal level. Cockney elaborates on how delivering land-based programs challenges colonialism:

“…with my grandparents and my mum, they were the ones that always took me out on the land, so being able to take those experiences and start to teach the younger generation, my generation, all these skills and the history of our people too. Like not a lot of our people know where exactly we come from because we’re so removed from a lot of that history because of the residential schools” (2022).

Cockney’s reflection demonstrates how colonial practices attempted to disconnect us from the land, but land-based programs address this issue by re-establishing a connection to land and teaching this history to younger generations. Land-based learning is a direct response to the intimate and structural violence of intergenerational trauma experienced through residential schools, state run education systems and the child welfare system (Absolon & Willett, 2004; King, 2003).

Denenzie Basil, a member of Łútsël K’é Dene First Nation and a Land-Based Coordinator at Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning, explains why resurgent work is important to him:

“I hear elders tell stories about people being on the land all the time, how our people used to take care of the land and it’s not like that today. It’s less and less young people on the land practicing our culture and traditions such as doing fish camps and on the land programs. So just being a part of, you know, the resurgence of that it’s important to me, it’s important to all the people in the NWT. That’s our culture and tradition. We need to keep it alive and shared” (2022).

Basil shows us that creating land-based learning opportunities like fish camps is critical for creating an opportunity for young people to learn how to be in relationship with the land again, and to be able to pass down those teachings to future generations. Dechinta faculty member and Nishnaabe theorist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson writes in “Land as Pedagogy” that:

“A resurgence of Indigenous political cultures, governances, and nation-building requires generations of Indigenous peoples to grow up intimately and strongly connected to our homelands, immersed in our languages and spiritualities, and embodying our traditions of agency, leadership, decision-making and diplomacy. This requires a radical break from state education systems- systems that are primarily designed to produce communities of individuals willing to uphold settler colonialism” (2014, page 1).

For Simpson, land as pedagogy is more meaningful than just connecting students to their local natural environment. She writes that for Indigenous peoples, connecting to land is an embodied intellectual and political project with the goal of re-animating Indigenous political cultures, developing critical thinking skills and fostering an ability to collective dream and vision different futures than the ones we inherit from the colonial project (Simpson, 2017). Simpson confirms that land-based education is more than simply taking people outside, it is a radical form of resistance and a vital form of resurgence. As Simpson states about being at a Dechinta hide camp, “We were awash in Dene brilliance. Brilliance that Dene resistance made sure was passed down to the next generation. Brilliance that residential schools could not stamp out” (2021). At its best, land-based education should be explicit about resisting colonialism and supporting the resurgent work of communities. It is an ethical commitment.

## CO-OPTING OF ‘LAND-BASED’

With the increased recognition of the important role that land-based programming can have in effective decolonial education, there are more programming opportunities and substantive supports. While it is important to recognize the impacts of increased opportunities to be on the land, not all programs intentionally center the substantive transformative work of connecting Indigenous nations to their land and asserting and practicing Indigenous sovereignty. Coulthard identifies this dynamic as the colonial politics of recognition, where limited recognition for Indigenous peoples struggles against decolonization resulted in limited rather than substantive decolonial transformation (Coulthard, 2014). As demonstrated through both theoretical analysis, and engagement with reflections on specific programming, land-based education must centre Indigenous peoples, knowledges and authorities in order to realize the transformative decolonial potential. However, critical analysis of land-based programming indicates two risks. First, is the colonial drive to co-opt, control or appropriate. The second, is the more subtle colonial politics of recognition, risking the separation of land-based programming from the substantive transformative impacts.

Due to the advocacy work of Indigenous nations, the term ‘land-based’ has grown in popularity within the past few years. Indigenous nations, academics, and grassroots organizers have influenced philanthropic, government, and corporate funders to see the value of land-based education for our communities. Further, the 94 Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada reinforced the need for land-based programs to support resurgent work in communities (2015). Indigenous peoples are just in those beginning stages of reclaiming our cultures and relationship with land after both decades of colonial violence that continues to have impacts today, as well as contemporary colonial policy and practices. As soon as we begin to strengthen that relationship and colonial institutions start supporting it financially, then non-Indigenous people feel the need to ‘own it’ as well. They start their own land-based initiatives, yet they do not centre self-determining Indigenous knowledge holders. In these programs, Indigenous knowledge is merely an add-on or a checkbox. For example, it can be a canoe trip where Indigenous youth are brought out on the land with non-Indigenous facilitators/ guides, but a knowledge holder comes for one day of the trip. This separates land-based programming from the substantive transformative impacts and waters it down.

Ultimately, non-Indigenous land-based initiatives can perpetuate white supremacy and colonialism by taking up resources, including delivery capacity and funding intended for Indigenous land-based initiatives, and creating spaces that centre non-Indigenous peoples to learn at the expense of Indigenous learners. Métis artist and academic David Garneau explains this doubled violence of colonial attitudes as both consumption, and a replacement. He says:

"The colonial attitude is characterized not only by scopophilia, a drive to look, but also an urge to penetrate, to traverse, to know, to translate, to own and exploit. The attitude assumes that everything should be accessible to those with the means and will to access them; everything is ultimately comprehensible, a potential commodity, resource, or salvage. The academic branch of the enterprise collects and analyses the experiences and things of others; it transforms story into text and objects-in-relation into artifacts to be catalogued and stored or displayed" (2016, p. 23).

In land-based education, this colonial attitude can be seen when settlers come into land-based spaces and consume Indigenous pedagogies and knowledges, on Indigenous lands. Making these Indigenous pedagogies consumable, the colonial entitlement then distorts and twists these programs to make them accessible to whiteness. Moreover, with the increased interest in reconciliation, this distortion protects colonialism's white fragility by celebrating the "reconciled" at the expense of the hard work of decolonization.

Systems that uphold white privilege are so normalized that having anything that is not meant for whiteness destabilizes and calls out the assumed privilege and power of whiteness. In land-based education, this destabilization takes place across scales. As David Gillborn explains, "... the most dangerous form of 'white supremacy' is not the obvious and extreme fascistic posturing of small neo-Nazi groups, but rather the taken-for-granted routine privileging of white interests that goes unremarked in the political mainstream." (2005, p.2) In land-based education, making land-based programs accessible to whiteness means removing the parts of Indigenous pedagogies that undermines, or makes explicit the power and privilege, and violence that white supremacist systems uphold. By extracting the palatable, comfortable aspects and discarding the confronting and critical portions, whiteness removes land-based education from its radical decolonial centre. Many non-Indigenous organizations and institutions have started adopting the term 'land-based education', but the use of this term is not equivalent to the many years, deep relationships, and radical grounded normativity that informs Indigenous land-based pedagogies.

There is an inherent benefit to being on the Land. Any opportunity to be on the land is important. However, it is possible to effectively describe and conduct programs without causing harm to Indigenous knowledge systems, people and Nations. Non-Indigenous land-based programs can more effectively be described as nature-based, place-based, or outdoor education programs. It is important to be aware of the work being done to ensure that harm is not being perpetuated. Outdoor education, place-based education, and nature-based programs are beneficial for youth, but they are not on the land programs. It undermines the integrity of Indigenous knowledge when the term 'land-based' is co-opted for these programs.

## SHARE EVERYTHING YOU HAVE

To return to the reflections of Charlie Sangris, land-based programming means to work for people, to work in a way that brings together the best of self-determination and autonomy, embedded in a web of relationships oriented to community, family and the land. Reflective of grounded normativity as a set of ethical and normative obligations, land-based programming is both critical of the systems of colonialism that continue to displace Indigenous nations from their lands, laws and relationships, and generative of new ways of being in relation to each other and the land.

Land-based programs need to be created by and for Indigenous people from nations on whose territories that program takes place. Indigenous people need to hold positions of power and teaching so that other Indigenous people, especially youth and children, can see themselves as capable human beings full of potential, with rights and deserving of respect. Elders, knowledge holders, teachers, aunties, and uncles help us think differently – a direct act of disrupting colonialism. Land-based education needs to centre all aspects of Indigenous pedagogies, especially the aspects that reject colonial realities and reimagine Indigenous systems. Land-based learning is about more than the educational experience. Care and healing is necessary to recover from the intergenerational trauma and systemic racism that continues today. Returning to Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing is returning to what strengthened individuals, kinships, families, and communities to be so resilient and survive more than 500 years of colonization and genocide.

The architecture of Indigenous worlds was and is made intercommunally with all living beings towards continually regenerating life– first by mutually generating the knowledge and ethics to do this deep labour and second by living and being everyday transformed by the frequencies of that communally generated knowledge. We believe being attentive to body, mind and spirit in relation to the land, breathing in the midst of this network, is a mechanism of continually remaking Anishinaabeg, Dene, nêhiyaw, Inuit, and Métis worlds. We want to be everyday transformed by the ecologies of those living beings and the continual renewal they collectively generate.

Situated places of learning become pedagogies of land that affords us opportunities to rethink, refigure, and complicate what is considered the right environment for learning. Indigenous relationalities pay particular attention to the land, colonial displacements, and encounters with more-than-human entities (Nxumalo, 2019). Our connection to land invites us to be a certain way, to care in a particular way, and live in a good way. Even with disconnection and displacement, once we return to the land and begin re-learning Dene ways of knowing, doing and being, there are possibilities of feeling a connection through blood memory because this particular place is a part of who Dene people are. Western education theory and practices take-for-granted the nature of place while ‘place’ has potential to challenge and expand our understandings of how everyone individually relates to the world with humans and more-than-humans (Duhn, 2012). Possibilities for radical shift begin with acknowledging how we affect and are affected by the more-than-human relations intertwined with past and present histories.

Learning within this network of deep relations necessarily means our minds must be sharp and awake in order to refuse the forces of racial capitalism, heteropatriarchy and of course colonialism. These structures in various hidden and overt forms work to end Indigenous worlds. So we must think critically, like our ancestors did, to ensure the cycles of life are replenished. Land-based education cannot be a tool of the state designed to reproduce itself. It cannot be a program that exploits, extracts, disciplines, encloses, incarcerates, or educates. It cannot be a program based within a web of colonial gendered violence and world endings. It cannot be a degree or a career or an income generating stream in colleges and universities. In our way of thinking, land-based education cannot be any of these things, because what we’ve learned from the land, is that in order for us to ensure life continues, we need to radically reorganize the human component of our global community

Land-based education is a generative refusal that at once must interrogate the structures that currently regulate life and generate Indigenous alternatives. Land-based education is oriented across scales, from the intimate to the global– it is necessarily internationalist and anti-colonial in scope. Thinking about land-based education in our current circumstances requires skepticism and continual collective reflection to ensure our programs are doing the work we intend them to do.

This is a very long and complicated way of saying what the Dene often sum it up in its simplest and most profound form when they say in kindness and humility, “share everything you have”.

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** A note on authors:*
*The authors of this article are Rachel Cluderay, Rena Mainville, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, and Kelsey Wrightson. Each author carries their own unique perspectives and offers insights based on their positions and experiences. While the first-person plural is used throughout this article, it is not intended to be reductive of the unique positions the authors hold. Where insights and arguments are made that reflect the unique experiences of a single author, this has been identified by the individual author's name.*

***Rachel Cluderay*** *was born and raised in Sǫ̀mba K'è (Yellowknife), Denendeh where she still lives today. She is a nêhiyaw-English paddler and land-based learning advocate. In 2019, she completed a Bachelor of Commerce specializing in Entrepreneurship at the University of Victoria. Rachel is Dechinta alumni where she received a certificate in Community Land-Based Research. Currently, Rachel is working on a Masters of Indigenous Land-Based Education at the University of Saskatchewan where her work focuses on the resurgence of Indigenous canoe practices. Rachel is a Land-Based Programmer & Researcher at Dechinta. She is passionate about supporting Indigenous peoples to strengthen their connection to the land as she believes it is foundational for the resurgence of Indigenous cultures, languages, and ways of being.*

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***Leanne Betasamosake Simpson*** *is a Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar, writer, musician and member of Alderville First Nation. She is the author of seven previous books, including newly released, A Short History of the Blockade, and the novel Noopiming: A Cure for White Ladies which was released in the US in 2021 by the University of Minnesota Press. Leanne has released four albums including f(l)ight and Noopiming Sessions, and her new work Theory of Ice. Her latest book, co-authored with Robyn Maynard and entitled Rehearsals for Living: Conversations on Abolition and Anti-Colonialism, was published in 2022. Leanne works with the Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning as an instructor.*

***Kelsey Wrightson*** *is the Executive Director of Dechinta. She is based in Yellowknife, but works closely with all the regional programmers. Kelsey grew up in Edmonton Alberta, and completed her PhD at the University of British Columbia in 2015.*

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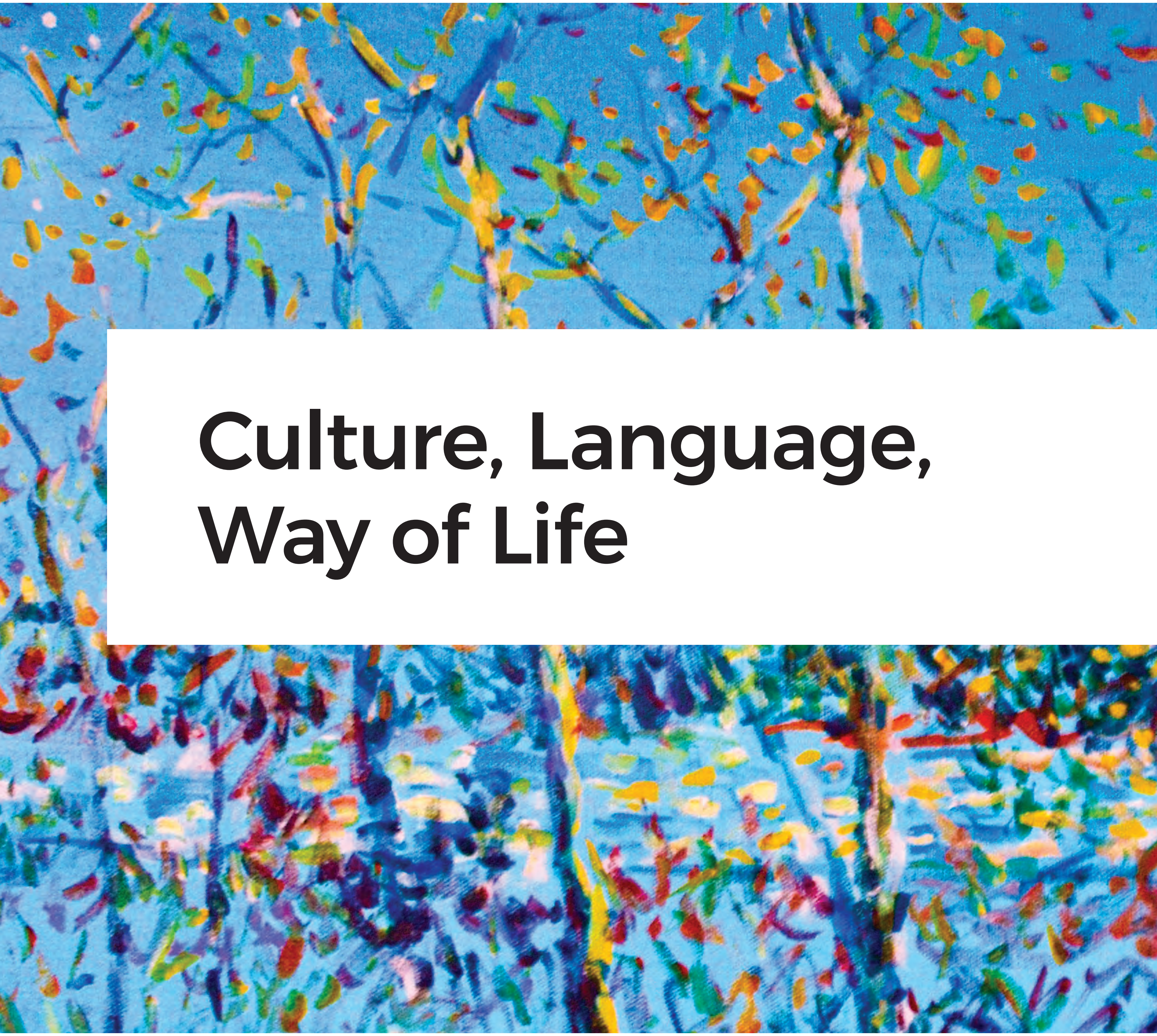

# Culture, Language, Way of Life

Xàgots'eèhk'ǫ̀ JOURNAL

Xàgots'eèhk'ǫ̀ Journal , Vol. 1, Issue 1, (Nov. 2022)
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# The Skinning

**Antoine Mountain**

This painting is of a memory of hunting in warmer weather. You don't have to wear a big parka; in this case I just wore a pair of overalls. After a while you get to know the process of taking apart any kind of animal. Especially when you're from further north, the darker it gets the more you have to be able to harvest by starlight. You must be careful because if you cut your hand when it's cold and dark you won't feel it or see it. This painting illustrates removing the hide of the caribou, removing the head and putting it in the snow; the hunter is getting ready to make an incision all the way down the middle of the animal to get the ribs. More caribou can be seen in the upper right hand corner of the painting. We used to see a lot of caribou – it would be hours and hours until you saw the end of the herd – but not these days. The herds have dwindled quite a bit.

***Antoine Mountain*** *is Dene from Radilih Koe (Fort Good Hope) in the Northwest Territories. His love for the land and its people is the root of his artwork, for which he uses acrylics on canvas, favouring the Impressionist style. He is driven by a deep-rooted spiritualism to depict landscapes, the Dene way of life, and portraits. Antoine has a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the Ontario College of Arts and Design at the University of Toronto, a Master's of Environmental Studies from York University, and is currently pursuing a PhD in Indigenous Studies at Trent University.*

Xàgots'eèhk'ǫ̀ JOURNAL

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# Creating a Home Kit for Teaching Tłı̨chǫ Language: Starting with Input from Parents and Educators

**Nazila Eisazadeh, Erica McDonald, Shannon Wedawin, Suchitra Yadav, Gloria Francis, and Shelley Stagg Peterson**

## ABSTRACT

Indigenous Early Childhood Educators (ECEs), who are interns in Aurora College's Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Diploma program, conducted collaborative action research with university researchers to learn about ways to support children's Indigenous language and culture learning and to gain research experience, skills and knowledge. This study was part of their professional learning within the program, and was part of the partnership that the ELCC program has with the University of Toronto's Northern Oral language and Writing through Play (NOW Play) Partnership Project. The research addresses a legacy of the Residential School system and other colonialist policies and practices - that many parents and caregivers of Indigenous children have not experienced intergenerational transmission of their ancestral language and are not fluent speakers. We present the findings of interviews with 18 Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers, parents and ECEs in Denendeh/Northwest Territories. Inductive analysis of interview transcripts revealed four types of language learning strategies that interview participants used with children or used themselves to learn a language: Singing that focuses on actions, rhythm and melody; accessing language through environmental print; accessing a language speaker; and hearing language in context in media and digital apps. From these themes, the ECEs developed experiential-based home kits for teaching and learning of Indigenous languages at home.

## INTRODUCTION

Language reflects ways of viewing the world and the culture of communities. In previous centuries, when all adults within Indigenous communities were fluent speakers of their Indigenous languages, children learned their community's language and culture through everyday social interactions with family and community members (McIvor, 2020). Through natural intergenerational language transmission, Indigenous languages remained strong across North America until assimilative policies and practices, such as the forcible removal of Indigenous children to attend residential schools, led to a drastic decrease in the number of fluent speakers of Indigenous languages (McIvor, 2020). In residential schools, Indigenous children were punished for using their Indigenous languages and separated from siblings and others that they knew well, resulting in having no opportunity to interact in their language, nor to experience and learn their community's worldviews and cultures (Baskin, 2016).

Three of the authors of this paper have experienced and observed the devastating impact that failures to support Indigenous languages and cultures have had on Indigenous children's identities and learning (Rameka & Peterson, 2021). These authors understand firsthand the socio-emotional barriers that prevent parents and other family members from using their ancestral language in order for intergenerational language transmission to occur (Rosborough & Rorick, 2017). Erica, the daughter of Tim and Alma McDonald and the granddaughter of Boniface and Adeline Trippe-de-Roche and Joseph and Ethel McDonald, was raised in Treaty 8 territory and is a member of the Athabascan Chipewyan First Nation, known as the K'ai Taile Dene. With the loss of her grandparents, along with her mother's forced attendance at residential school and the societal norms of the time, rarely was Dene spoken in Erica's home or to her. Erica did not have the opportunity to learn her Dene language, something she wishes she had. Shannon, the daughter of Barry Franklin and Doreen Wedawin, was raised in Treaty 11 territory and is a member of Tłı̨chǫ (Dogrib-Rae band) First Nation. Shannon was born and raised in a small rural community of Behchokǫ̀, Denendeh/Northwest territories. Shannon has little memory of hearing her mother speak their Indigenous language at home. She remembers being taught her Tłı̨chǫ culture/language in school, but this was never continued at home. Gloria was born and raised in Corner Brook, Newfoundland until she moved to Yellowknife, NWT in 2007. Her family descends from the Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation band in Newfoundland, but she was never exposed to the traditional language of Mi'kmaq.

They and the three non-Indigenous authors of this paper recognize that Indigenous children in northern communities of the area known as Denendeh/Northwest Territories, the communities featured in our paper, are more likely to have a strong sense of their Indigenous identities and a sense of belonging to their community when they can continue speaking and understanding their Indigenous communities' language(s) (Reedy, 2003). The official language status within Denendeh/Northwest Territories of nine Indigenous languages (Department of Education, Culture and Employment, 2018), provides evidence of the importance of Indigenous language revitalization within Denendeh/Northwest Territories. However, the three Indigenous authors can identify only a few early learning centres in some of the smaller Indigenous communities where Indigenous languages are beginning to be used in limited ways (e.g., writing labels on objects around the room and teaching children to count in the community's Indigenous language). Their observations mirror those of Rosborough and Rorick (2017), in identifying the following challenges that must be overcome: "few fluent speakers available to teach the languages, the passing of elder speakers who hold specialized cultural and grammatical knowledge, limited availability of language resources, and social-emotional barriers resulting from colonization and assimilation policies and practices" (p. 120).

With the research purpose of gaining a better understanding of how early childhood educators can support intergenerational passing-on of Indigenous languages, we collaborated on a research study guided by the following research questions:

1. How do participants describe their experiences learning their languages and the opportunities available in their communities to learn their languages?

2. What principles and practices can be derived from our analysis of the interview data?

Erica and the interns in the second-year (Diploma) class decided to create home kits for participants in order to show appreciation to participants, but also in order to apply and deepen their learning from the research they had conducted.

In the following sections, we provide background information about the overall partnership project and the Aurora College Early Learning and Child Care program within which this research project took place. We then review relevant literature, describe our research methods, and present the findings and their influence on development of language learning materials as part of the Aurora College Early Learning and Child Care program.

## BACKGROUND

### NOW Play Project and Collaborative Action Research

Our interview research is an initial collaborative action research project of the Northern Oral language and Writing through Play (NOW Play) Partnership Project. Early childhood educators and teachers (who are positioned as research practitioners) in northern Canadian partner institutions and school boards collaborate on small-scale research projects with university researchers. Research questions start with the issues identified by research practitioners and research methods are collaboratively designed by university researchers and research practitioners (Bradbury-Huong, 2010; Cain, 2011; Cowie et al., 2015). Shelley Stagg Peterson, University of Toronto professor and NOW Play project director, and her university-based research team (which includes Nazila Eisazadeh) contribute research experience, knowledge and skills, and provide resources, such as recording devices, as needed by research practitioners. Research practitioners' action research projects are geared towards the overall goal of the NOW Play project, which is to develop experiential-based ways to support Indigenous children's writing and Indigenous language and cultural learning, leading to development of a toolkit of teaching practices and tools that can be adapted for use in local contexts. Additionally, in alignment with research showing the relationship between conducting action research and developing research skills with professional learning (Bleicher, 2014; Jaipal & Figg, 2011; Peterson et al., 2017), an important goal of the overall NOW Play project is to support northern educators' development of research experience, skills and knowledge. The research we report in this paper, thus, contributes new knowledge about teaching and learning Indigenous languages, and at the same time, supports the research practitioners' professional learning within their Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) program at Aurora College.

### Early Learning and Child Care Program of Aurora College

For over thirty years, Aurora College has offered a part-time, distance education Certificate in Early Childhood Development to prepare students to become educators of young children from birth to 11 years of age. In the last five years, this program has grown. In-person programs leading to an ELCC Certificate (one-year program) and an ELCC Diploma (two-year program), are now offered at the Yellowknife campus. Students develop the knowledge and skills necessary to work with families, community stakeholders and other professionals to support children's learning and development. Emphasis is on the development of an inclusive play-based curriculum for children with a focus on adapting Indigenous languages, cultures and traditions.

The ELCC program is one of three northern Indigenous ECE Certification and Diploma programs that are partnering with the University of Toronto team. Because of the COVID 19 pandemic restrictions on face-to-face classroom activity within the three programs, and thus, on opportunities to gather data in classrooms, the only research conducted within the NOW Play over the past two years is the interview research reported in this paper. As part of the coursework of the ELCC program and as a means to achieve the overall NOW Play project goals, Shelley, the NOW Play project director, provided training sessions on interview development, ethical conduct of researchers, note taking while conducting interviews, and data analysis. Shelley and Nazila, the Postdoctoral Fellow of the project, mentored the Aurora College ELCC program-based authors of this paper (also including Suchitra, who was born and raised in a rural community in the Indian State of Bihar and has lived in Yellowknife since 2009), on the writing of research papers and interpreting the literature on Indigenous language revitalization (briefly summarized in the following section) as we collaborated on the writing of this paper.

**Language Learning and Indigenous Language Revitalization**

Revitalizing Indigenous languages is "part of a larger movement restoring the value that all citizens can see in Indigenous ways of knowing" (McIvor, 2020, p. 79). Language revitalization begins with acknowledgement, and deconstruction of generations of assimilative and oppressive colonial policies and practices that have led to marginalization of Indigenous languages and cultures and a decline in the number of fluent Indigenous language speakers (Battiste, 2013). The aim of Indigenous language revitalization is generational continuity of Indigenous languages and cultures, as both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people value and respect Indigenous knowledge and ways of being that are holistic, spiritual, relational, and always connected to and informed by the land (Battiste, 2013; Gaudry, 2015; Simpson, 2011).

Successful initiatives aim to develop children's receptive and expressive language (Peltier, 2017). A study by Peterson et al. (2018) underscored the need for ongoing and multiple opportunities to hear and use the language in context, in order to develop express language. In this study, Indigenous children in an Aboriginal Head Start classroom enacted cultural practices familiar to their Anishnaabe educator in dramatic play over a few weeks. The children did not use Anishnaabemowin to describe cultural materials and practices in their dramatic play, but they did show their understanding of some words in songs by picking up a stuffed animal when it was named.

Within Indigenous communities where there are few adults who are fluent in speaking the language(s), children are not provided the needed ongoing and long-term exposure to their ancestral language(s), nor do they have plentiful opportunities to use the language(s) at home or school (Hinton et al., 2018; McIvor, 2020; Rorick, 2019; Rosborough & Rorick, 2017). Initiatives to develop adult fluency are thus necessary in order to provide the fluent adult models that children need (Hermes et al., 2012; Hinton & Hale, 2001; Rorick, 2019). Intergenerational language teaching approaches, including initiatives that involve the whole school and/or the community, are recommended to strengthen Indigenous language (Department of Education, Culture and Employment, Government of Northwest Territories, 2020). The Master-Apprentice Language Learning Program is an example. Employed in a number of countries over the past 20 years (e.g., Canada, America, Mexico, Brazil, and Australia), this project matches a fluent speaker of the ancestral language (often an Elder) and a younger adult apprentice or, as has been done more recently, to multiple apprentices (Hinton et al., 2018). The Elder and apprentice(s) speak only in their Indigenous language whenever they get together.

The NWT offers a similar approach under the Mentor-Apprentice Program (Government of Northwest Territories, n.d.). In this program, northerners who reside in the NWT have the opportunity to work with a fluent Indigenous language speaker (approximately seven to ten hours weekly) in hopes of increasing new learners' ability to understand and speak the target language. The mentor and apprentice must agree to spend this amount of time together through an immersion model to "live life in the language" (Government of Northwest Territories, n.d., para. 2) and do everyday activities while using only their Indigenous language. In the current

2022-2023 year, the program will be available to a maximum of ten pairs for the following six languages: Inuvialuktun, Gwich'in, North Slavey (also known as Dene K'ede), Dene Zhatié, Tłı̨chǫ, and Dëne Sųłıné.

Indigenous language revitalization initiatives should follow a holistic teaching/learning model that honours relational learning (Department of Education, Culture and Employment, 2018). Several suggested teaching approaches include: the use of Indigenous oral language wherever possible (e.g., to reference pictures in storybooks using names for objects or places); storytelling; Story Circles; and inviting Elders into the classroom to demonstrate and talk about land-based and culture-based practices (Peltier, 2017). It is recommended that such strategies be used across all teaching subjects throughout the school day, not just in one subject area such as literacy or cultural class (Todal, 2018). There is also growing interest in the use of technology to support Indigenous language revitalization, as recordings of Elders' storytelling and cultural practices preserve Elders' specialized cultural and grammatical knowledge for the next generations (Galla, 2016). It is important to ensure that natural language use in authentic land-based contexts is recorded to mitigate some of the tension surrounding learning language(s) through technology (Todal, 2018).

## METHODS

The NOW Play project, an example of collaborative action research, draws on one widely-recognized mode of action research: the practical one, where teachers and university researchers co-design pedagogical practices that are always adapted by participating educators, or the like, to establish what works best in the local context (Peterson et al., 2016). When it comes to community involvement concerning action research, the research is conducted "with" and not "on" participating communities. Community members (usually teachers and early childhood educators) collaborate in, for instance, collecting and analysing data as well as providing cultural knowledge about the community in which they are a part. Additionally, community ethics is obtained alongside any university ethics protocols. In the case of the research reported in this paper, the community is the instructors and interns of the Early Learning and Child Care program of Aurora College, Yellowknife campus. The NOW Play project has received ethics approval from Aurora College's and the University of Toronto's Research Ethics Committees, as well as a license to carry out research from the Aurora Research Institute.

Upon obtaining ethics approval and following an online class where Shelley introduced interview development tips (e.g., be as explicit as possible about the overall research purpose, then create specific research questions related to the purpose, and then develop specific questions for gathering information that addresses each question). Gloria, Shannon, Suchitra and the other five interns who were in the first year of their ELCC program (officially called the "Certificate" year) in 2020-2021, then worked with their instructor to create interview questions related to classroom and home language and culture teaching. Gloria did a trial with four parents within her social network over the summer of 2021 using the initial protocol. When she brought her notes about what participants said in the interviews to class in the second year of the program (officially called the "Diploma" year), Erica and the rest of the class agreed that the interview protocol was not useful to gather the desired information.

After consultation with Shelley, the eight interns and Erica decided to narrow the research purpose to supporting Indigenous children's language learning in the home and developed a new interview protocol when they returned to the ELCC program in their second (Diploma) year in 2021-2022. All eight interns did mock interviews with Aurora College instructors to gain confidence in their interviewing skills and to determine how well the research purpose was fulfilled with the questions. As a group, the class made minor changes to the questions to create the final interview protocol (found in Appendix).

Participant recruitment involved social media. Gloria posted an initial short generic invitation on her Facebook page, which did not generate any interest two weeks after being posted. She and her peers then created a more specific, detailed invitation and posted it on the NWT Foster Family Coalition and Moms to Moms Facebook pages. Twelve women (one is a foster parent, six are parents of young children, and two are childcare providers in a day home) indicated an interest in participating. Additionally, five interns in the first-year (Certificate) program and one Aurora College instructor volunteered to participate after the second-year interns went to their class to invite them. Sixteen participants are from urban communities and two participants are from two different rural communities in Denendeh/Northwest Territories. Eight participants are Indigenous and ten are non-Indigenous.

Interviews ranged from 10 minutes to 1.5 hours. Each intern wrote notes about the 2-3 interviews that they conducted. As a class, Erica, Shelley and all of the interns identified key ideas related to our research purpose. We used inductive analysis (Patton, 2002), identifying key ideas related to the first research question, and then grouped the key ideas into larger themes (e.g., singing focusing on rhythm and melody; accessing language through environmental print and picture books; accessing a language speaker; hearing language used in context and accessing apps.) Environmental print includes labels and signs that are everywhere in children's lives (e.g., print associated with products, stores and other businesses or traffic signs). Environmental print is especially helpful to support young children's literacy because it has a lot of contextual information surrounding it (e.g., the LEGO label is on the box of LEGO blocks) and is everywhere in children's lives (Vukelich, Christie, & Enz, 2008). The interns and Erica then applied what they had learned through this analysis to develop materials for a home kit that they could give to participants as a gift to show appreciation for participating. We then brought Nazila on to the team to contribute her observations and content for the literature review. We met through Zoom to write the research report.

## FINDINGS: LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES

Participants said that although they had some limited knowledge of Indigenous languages, they and their children did not have enough opportunities to learn Indigenous languages in their communities. The children who had language classes in school did not have any follow-through at home because parents had not learned the language through intergenerational transmission. Interviewees wanted access to resources to teach and learn the Indigenous languages, and were happy to hear that the interns would be developing home kits, with materials for them to use with children to teach one of the official Indigenous languages of Denendeh/Northwest Territories.

Participants gave examples of language learning approaches that they had found to be useful for their own and their children's learning of the languages. We have grouped the specific approaches using four principles that can guide the development of teaching and learning strategies, as explained below.

### Singing that Focuses on Actions, Rhythm and Melody

Participating first-year (Certificate) interns gave examples of how they sing with children to teach Indigenous languages. Miranda Currie, an Indigenous author, musician, educator, and filmmaker, taught them songs in Indigenous languages that she had written for children (https://www.mirandacurrie.ca/). She recommended that interns teach a few words at a time and repeat the words many times. She gave an example of making a game by having children sing phrases in rounds. In this way, children would learn how to pronounce the words and phrases. She also advised that actions, rhythm and melody be used when teaching the language through song.

Participants who were learning English said that they listened to children's music in English many times in order to learn pronunciations and meanings of the words. They sing along with the music to practice saying the words. Limited access to recorded songs in an Indigenous language make this strategy challenging for learning an Indigenous language, especially in the Denendeh/Northwest Territories where there are nine Indigenous languages and many dialects of each language.

### Accessing Language through Environmental Print and Picture Books

Participating first-year (Certificate) interns and educators working in day homes talked about the importance of providing print-rich environments for the children. Specifically, they talked about environmental print, that is, providing children with visual access to the target language in print within their physical environment, such as on walls or on toy bins. Specifically, interns and educators talked about having labels and pictures and of adults pointing to the words and saying them in order for children to become familiar with the Indigenous words for everyday objects. This environmental print provides a context for children to associate the written words with the objects that they represent. For example, participants created posters with Tłı̨chǫ words for days of the week, colours, numbers, seasons, months of the year, and body parts, with illustrations to show what the words mean. Tłı̨chǫ was chosen because student interns were able to easily access materials to support their learning and understanding of the language (e.g., UVic linguistic department, n.d.). The posters are on the walls of the early learning centre. Routines and games can be played with small groups of children to introduce and practice the language that is printed on posters and labels. For example, the educator points to a picture and says the word, inviting children to say the word with her. They read the words many times and the children repeat after them, looking at the picture to learn the meaning, as well as the pronunciation of the word. Educators use the same process with flash cards. Additionally, Tłı̨chǫ labels for types of clothing are placed by children's cubbies and labels for objects in the classroom are also posted. During small-group or whole-group time, educators say a word in Tłı̨chǫ and the children are asked to find the word label, say it, and point to the object it represents.

Participating educators and parents gave examples of library books that are written in both Cree and English, and have an accompanying CD that they read with children to teach the language. One participating parent described books written in Dene K'ede online (Dene Godœ North Slavey, n.d.) that she reads with her children. Participants, including parents who were learning English, said that the print/audio/digital books helped them to learn the target language alongside their children.

**Accessing a Language Speaker**
Participating interns and parents talked about the importance of connecting with the land and with Elders, Knowledge Holders and other fluent speakers as the best ways to connect young people with the language. Participants said that they had learned their Indigenous language through listening to Elders' stories about their culture and the family and community history. Whether they took place in the kitchen, on the land or in any other setting, Elders' stories and conversation were invaluable for learning the language. Elders would give teachings to children (e.g., about parts of a gun or about fishing) and, when there were many Elders together, they would talk to each other in the language. Elders gave instructions to children in the language, so children were actively showing that they understood the language. The children heard the language being spoken in a natural conversational context (e.g., in culture camps on the land); learning in the moment.

One educator participant, who does not speak the language but whose husband is a fluent speaker of his Indigenous language, asked him to share stories and speak the language to the children in their day home. Children observed him cleaning and cutting moose after the hunt. He was showing children and giving teachings in English and in Inuvialuktun. All of the food provided in the day home came from the land.

**Hearing Language Used in Context in Media and Language Apps**
Participants identified YouTube videos on how to say words as being very useful to teach themselves and their children Indigenous languages. Especially during the pandemic lockdown, teachers posted YouTube videos that they recommended their students watch. Participants also talked about viewing media, such as watching movies with subtitles, and watching television shows with subtitles, to learn languages beyond their mother tongue. For example, one Indigenous participant identified Molly of Denali as an Indigenous television show that she and her children had watched about a Gwich'in / Koyukon / Dena'ina Athabascan girl living in Alaska (WGBH Educational Foundation, 2019). They also talked about using audiobooks to hear the sounds of the language while reading the words.

Language apps and dictionaries were also identified as helpful in learning pronunciation and meaning of words in Indigenous languages. The Tłı̨chǫ Intro app (Tłı̨chǫ Intro, 2015) is a tool to help families learn the Indigenous language through 23 categories on different topics such as clothing, body, actions, phrases and directions, etc. The app is a family friendly app that includes pictures and in both the English and Tłı̨chǫ language. The app includes a voice pronouncing the words properly. With the app there is an opportunity to learn the language. There is a place to play games and also challenge yourself with the quizzes they provided.

## APPLYING WHAT WAS LEARNED IN ACTION RESEARCH TO CREATE HOME KITS

Erica and the interns in the second-year (Diploma) class used the four principles described in the previous section to create home kits for families to use to learn Indigenous languages. The process of creating the home kits was a professional learning experience for the interns, as they applied what they had learned in their action research. The home kits were given to each participant as a token of appreciation for their participation.

Based on the finding that children can learn their community's Indigenous language(s) through singing songs that have lively rhythms and melodies as well as include actions, we created activities such as these two examples from our Home/gokǫ̀ Kit:

**Singing that Focuses on Actions, Rhythm and Melody and Hearing Language in Context**

With the goal of teaching children numbers in Tłı̨chǫ, we translated the words, with reference to the website (UVic Linguistics Department, n.d.) of the well-known English song for children, Five Little Ducks. We chose the topic of ducks because ducks are part of the land (Rorick, 2019) and, in turn, part of children's lives in the Denendeh/Northwest Territories. This song also includes mothers and their young, which is important in all children's lives, so we feel that the song is most especially relevant to children's experiences. We also suggested that parents and children create puppets by drawing ducks and gluing them to popsicle sticks, so they can actively move the puppets while singing the song.

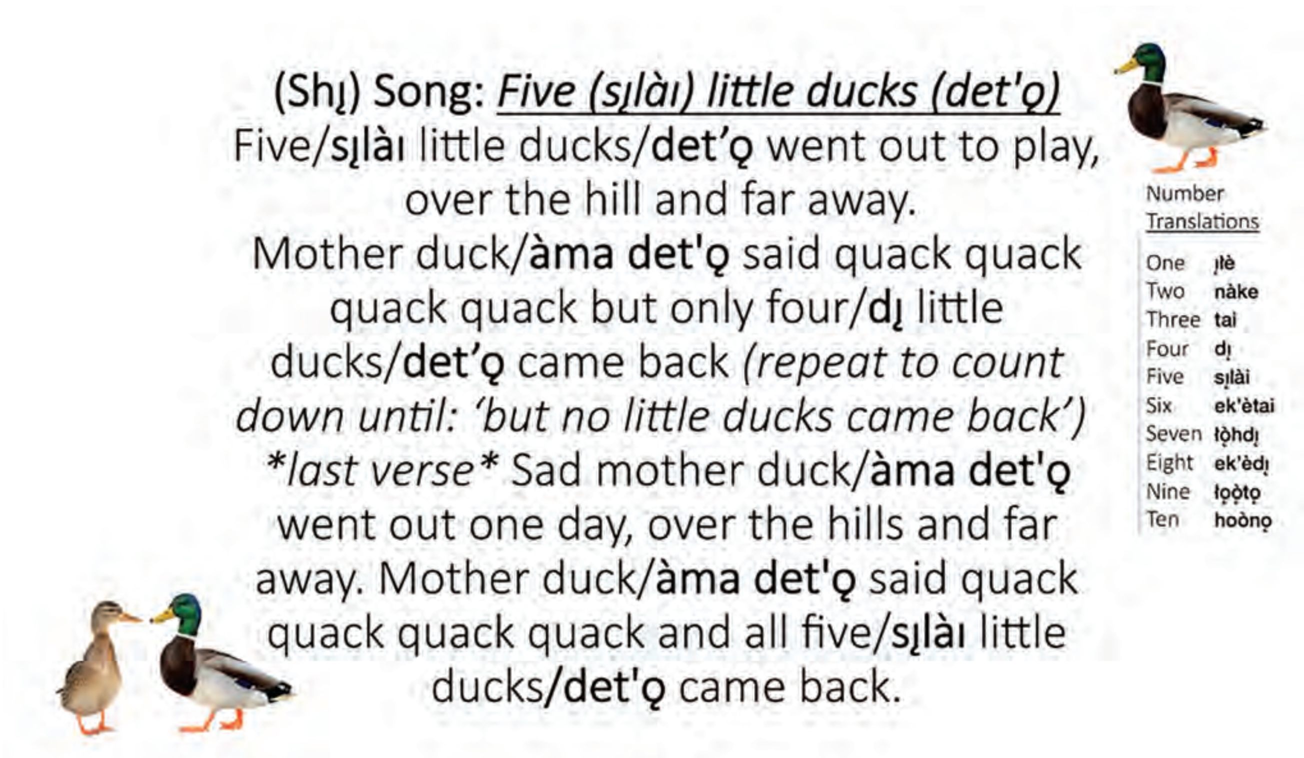


**Figure 1**

*Lyrics and translation for the song Five Little Ducks*

We also developed an activity using the well-known folk song, Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes. We chose this topic because knowledge of body parts is important in young children's development. The song is very familiar to children in the Denendeh/Northwest Territories, so they do not have to learn the melody, and can concentrate on connecting the Indigenous words for the body parts. Drawing on Shannon's knowledge of Tłı̨chǫ, we translated the words for the body parts into Tłı̨chǫ and provided a video clip of our singing for children and their families to sing along with. Children touch their head, shoulders, knees, and toes as they sing the song in Tłı̨chǫ. Recognizing the need to make the learning experience age-appropriate (McIvor, 2020), we recommend scaffolding children's learning of the word for one body part at a time, and then cumulatively adding a new word each day.

When singing we encourage children to touch their (head, shoulder, knees, toes, eyes, ears, mouth and nose) while singing the song and making sure we encourage children to say the Indigenous words in the song.

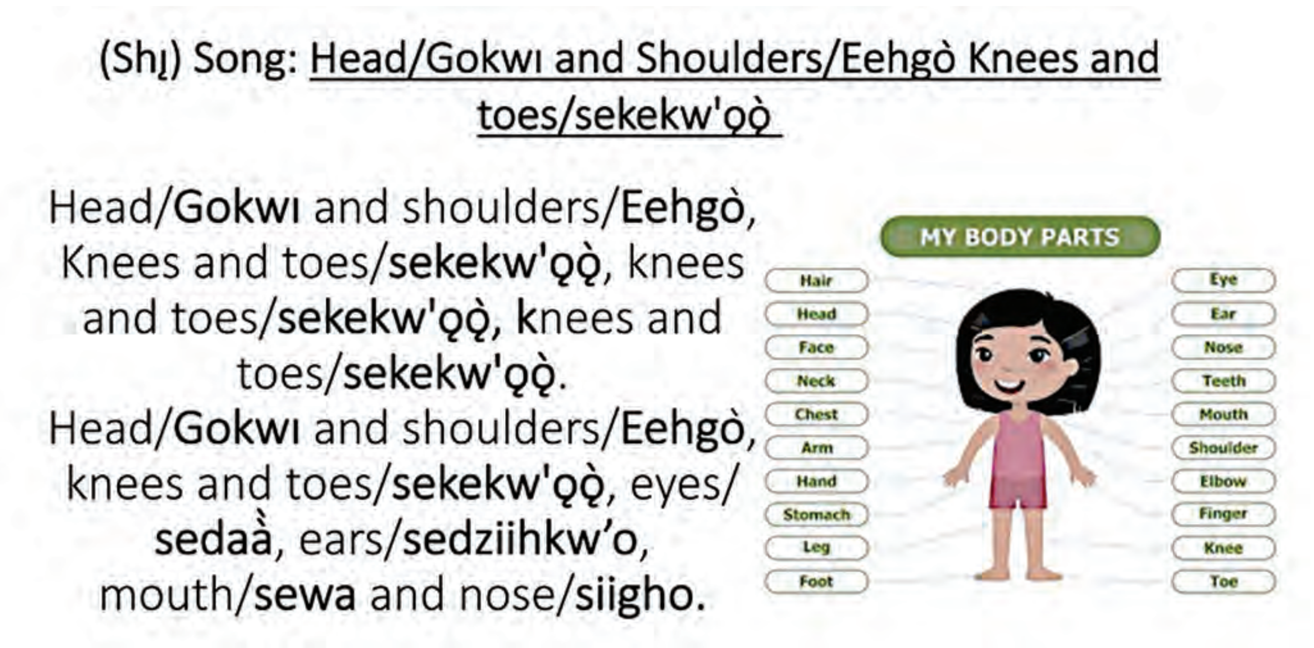


**Figure 2**

*Lyrics and translation for the song Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes.*

**Accessing Language through Environmental Print**

As an extension of the singing activity to learn Indigenous words for body parts, we created an activity that involves print. We suggest having individual printable images of body parts accompanied with the Tłįchǫ word for that particular part of the body. Each image of a body part should have sticky tack, tape or velcro strips on the backside for children to be able to either attach on a wall or match the images of each body part to themselves on their clothing in its respective place. If children are expected to place the images on the wall, we recommend having an image of the entire body on the wall for children to be able to match each body part in their respective place while simultaneously hearing and using the Tłįchǫ word for each body part in context. Based on their individual interests (McIvor, 2020), children are encouraged to take the lead in picking which body part to attach to themselves or the wall and in what sequence. As they handle each body part, parents are encouraged to use the Tłįchǫ word for the body parts all the while encouraging children to also use these words in context.

Also using the principle of having environmental print accessible and aiming to teach numbers 1-5" (įłe-sįlàı) so that children can use the words when they count, we created the following counting activity. Recognizing the importance of using materials in the home, this activity involves children/chekoa counting kitchen/mbò kàeht'èe objects, such as: spoons/echìįlįı, cups/lıbò, bowls/kw'àyįą, etc. Blocks, books/ełèts'eele, toys, clothing/gozhìì, socks/lıbà, buttons/mǫ̀ǫla on shirts/kw'įhʔeh. While counting/ts'ehtà aloud using Tłįchǫ words, parents point to the objects. Since repetition over extended periods of time is important for learning language (Johnson, 2017; McIvor, 2020), we recommend that parents make counting a natural part of interactions with their children (chekoa). As an example, when handing a child a spoon to eat with at the table, the parent(s) might say, "This is one spoon/echį̀įlį̀į." Another example is playing Hide and Seek. The parent(s) might cover their eyes and count/ts'ehtà to 5/sį̀làı in Tłįchǫ while children hide and then encourage individual children/chekoa to count in Tłįchǫ while others hide. The child opens their eyes and tries to find the hiders. The first one that is found is the next seeker and the last child found is the winner.

## CONCLUSION: FOLLOW-UP RESEARCH

The home kits will be given to interview participants with an invitation to participate in a second phase of our research. We will ask participants to use the home kits for six weeks, engaging in whatever activity they choose from their home kit. We are discussing incentives to encourage participants to use the kits on a daily basis and to keep a record of their experiences on tracking sheets. Follow-up interviews will focus on finding out what parts of the kits participants used, how they used the activities in the kits, and what they observed about their and their children's language learning when using these resources. We hope that action research projects such as ours will be catalysts for professional learning and development for the participating parents of this study, the Aurora College ECE interns and university researchers. Additionally, we hope that our research will contribute to greater understanding of effective and culturally responsive Indigenous language teaching, programming, and resources for children.

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***Nazila Eisazadeh,*** *the postdoctoral fellow of the Northern Oral language and Writing through Play project, was born in Tabriz, Iran and arrived in Canada as an Azeri-Iranian refugee. Her ancestral language is Azeri, however, Farsi is the dominant language spoken in Iran and the only language permitted to be taught at school. To prevent language loss, her family passed down their ancestral knowledge of Azeri at home through natural intergenerational language transmission. Despite their best efforts to preserve Azeri, language and cultural loss resulted. It is for this reason Nazila holds projects relevant to language revitalization close to her heart.*

***Erica McDonald,*** *the daughter of Tim and Alma McDonald and the granddaughter of Boniface and Adeline Trippe-de-Roche and Joseph and Ethel McDonald, was raised in Treaty 8 territory and is a member of the Athabascan Chipewyan First Nation, known as the K'ai Taile Dene. Erica was born and raised in the Denendeh/NWT. Currently she lives in Yellowknife and is an instructor at Aurora College in the Early Learning and Childcare Program. Erica did not have the opportunity to learn her Dene language, something she wishes she had. For this reason, she has personal ties to the importance of Indigenous language revitalization.*

***Shannon Wedawin,*** *the daughter of Barry Franklin and Doreen Wedawin, was raised in Treaty 11 territory and is a member of Tłįchǫ (Dogrib-Rae band) First Nation. Shannon was born and raised in a small rural community of Behchokǫ̀, Denendeh/NWT. Shannon has little memory of hearing her mother speak their Indigenous language at home. As part of her program at Aurora College, she has been advocating for the importance of Indigenous language revitalization and how crucial the early years of childhood are to learning Indigenous ancestral languages.*

***Gloria Francis*** *was raised in Corner Brook, Newfoundland, moved to Yellowknife, NWT in 2007. Her family descends from the Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation band in Newfoundland. Gloria was never exposed to the traditional language of Mi'kmaq people, but she wished she had. She has, however, had a number of opportunities to hear and learn the traditional languages of the Dene People of the Denendeh/NWT. Having a daughter who is now a member of the Dogrib-Rae band, Gloria hopes she can provide opportunities for her daughter to hear and learn her ancestral language in ways Gloria, herself, could not.*

***Suchitra Yadav*** *was born and raised in a rural Indian State community, Bihar, immigrated to Canada in 2006, and has been living in Yellowknife, NWT, since 2009. She believes that by participating in research projects such as this one, it will bring her closer to implementing the most optimal strategies for Indigenous language(s) and cultural learning in the classroom. Suchitra also believes that early childhood education is the most valuable space for this to occur because it has the potential to incite positive social change for a brighter and more equitable shared future.*

***Shelley Stagg Peterson,*** *the daughter and granddaughter of farmers of Dutch, Scottish, and Irish ancestry, was born in Treaty 4 territory. She moved to Treaty 6 territory where she spent her school years and later worked as a primary teacher in rural communities. Her grandparents, who emigrated from the northern province of Friesland, in the Netherlands, spoke English to their children after moving to Canada, so her family's European language has not been transmitted through the generations. She is now working as a literacy professor at the University of Toronto, living on the ancestral land of many nations.*

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## APPENDIX: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. *Have you or anyone in your family learned or do you practice a second language at home? If no, are there reasons you want to share as to why? (*)*

2. *I am interested to know about how you as a caregiver currently promote language and literacy in your home? Can you provide some examples on things you might be doing?*

3. *How do you feel about how traditional language(s) and literacy is taught and promoted in your child's classroom/ school and if you see this learning transferring to your home.*

    a. *Yes? - How has it transferred home?*

    b. *No? – What do you think could be improved on?*

4. *What do you feel is the most important way to teach children traditional language and literacy either at home or on the land?*

5. *Do you feel it's important for children to participate in any on the land play that helps support their learning of traditional language and culture? Can you tell some stories about how you have done this as a child or how children in your life play on the land?*

6. *Do you feel your community offers different opportunities (such as on the land programming, language workshops, family workshops) for the children to learn traditional languages and culture of the NWT? Has this knowledge transferred home?*

    a. *Yes – how has it transferred home?*

    b. *No – what do you think could be improved on?*

7. *How do you feel traditional oral storytelling plays a role in children's learning of an Indigenous language and culture? Are you interested in resources to support oral storytelling?*

8. *How do you use technology at home (computers, iPads/tablets etc.) to promote language, culture and literacy with your children?*

9. *Would you be willing to continue your participation in our research by engaging with a home language kit and completing another interview a few months after having the kit?*

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# "It's possible" – Joni Tsatchia's reflections on "Education in the North"

**Joni Tsatchia and Sara Komarnisky**


## ABSTRACT

In this interview, recorded in May 2021, Joni Tsatchia reflects on her educational journey, what led her to attend college and become a teacher, and on what education in the north means to her. In her reflections and recollections, Joni shares the importance of family, culture, and community in her experiences in education and shares ideas about how to ensure a vibrant, Indigenous culturally-centred, and uniquely Northern, mode of education into the future[1].



*Snare Lake School, Wekweètì, 1987. Joni Tsatchia is wearing a striped shirt near the middle of the photo. Photo by Tessa Macintosh, NWT Archives/©GNWT. Dept of Public Works and Services/G-1995-001: 4541.*

1 *Masì cho to Tom Andrews and Bryany Denning for their comments and feedback on this interview. Tom identified key themes in Joni's narrative that are reflected in the short introductory paragraph.*

**Joni Tsatchia:** Sì Joni Tsatchia sìyeh, Wekweètì gots'ǫ aht'e eyits'o masì dewho di nitle gha godah gha. My name is Joni Tsatchia, I'm from Wekweètì, and I'm thankful to be interviewed for this publication.

**Sara Komarnisky:** Can you tell me about your learning journey? All the way back to the beginning, where did you learn and who taught you?

**Joni Tsatchia:** I went to a school in Wekweètì that was entirely built out of logs. It was a really beautiful school and that's where I started kindergarten. I believe I went to school there right up until it burned down. It was a really good experience because it was in Wekweètì, which is a very small community. It always has been the smallest Tłı̨chǫ community. And so everyone that was working in the school was from the community. Most of the support assistants at the school were people that I normally would see on a daily basis or I knew their kids. The teachers did come from the south most of the time, but you were able to be at school and recognize the parents of your friends. They involved a lot of the Elders from the community, and even the janitor (my grandmother Rosa Fish) was from the community. And then they integrated a lot of land-based teachings. So I was able to see a wolverine being cut up in front of me at one point.

**Sara Komarnisky:** Wow.

**Joni Tsatchia:** Yeah, I had the chance to experience that and to observe how to cut it properly step by step, see how they skinned it, and a lot of the traditional knowledge came into it. Like for example, as a female we learned that we shouldn't pass over the animal's blood. The Tłı̨chǫ language at the time was really strong so an Elder could come in and speak Tłı̨chǫ fluently and we were able to understand the Elder. And so those are the kind of experiences I remember from a young age.

**Sara Komarnisky:** Are there any other notable experiences that stand out for you from your early days of learning?

**Joni Tsatchia:** The community was really involved in our teaching. Because it was such a small community we were able to learn from the community. It wasn't just the cutting of the wolverine. Sometimes we would have a day where we would go to an Elder's smokehouse and again we were able to see them work on hides in front of us and we were able to learn not just by observing but by doing too. They tell you stories alongside what you are doing. Like working on hides the Elder would tell us how they learned to work on hides from their great grandparents and the stories behind those experiences too. It was rich. And so I really enjoyed that, as well. The support assistants working in the school at the time, they were teaching us in Tłı̨chǫ. Even maybe without them noticing it. Most of the kids understood Tłı̨chǫ fluently back then. And we did a lot of hands-on stuff, even if it was learning about math. They didn't have a lot of resources so the teachers had to be really creative!

**Sara Komarnisky:** What made you decide to become a teacher?

**Joni Tsatchia:** Well, from an early age I was always around my extended family. I'm pretty sure a lot of people in Wekweètì will say the same. We grew up in a home where we didn't have rooms, the house was one open space. My mom had her bed on the left side, and granny and grandpa had their bed on the right side and there was usually a table by the window. We all ate at the same time and there was a stove right in the middle to keep the whole place warm. So I was always around my extended family, and not just myself but everybody who lived in Wekweètì at that time, because the community was just starting off. So, it wasn't like, fancy. A lot of times you were working to survive. I remember grandpa and my uncles going for wood and we would be stacking up the wood around the house. For the ladies, like my mom, my granny, they did laundry using their bare hands. They were hauling water just to do dishes or laundry. Everything was work, that's how we grew up. But education-wise I remember going to school and as soon as I would come home and my granny, my grandpa would tell my mom, don't speak English in this home, she learns that at school. She's gonna learn Tłı̨chǫ here. So, I'm gonna speak straight Tłı̨chǫ at home and then I'll learn English at school. I think from there, it was my first teaching. They were teaching me things at a very young age. I would be learning my counting in school and then when I would come home, and my granny would literally sit by the windowsill with me teaching me how to say my numbers in Tłı̨chǫ. I vividly remember that because I learned how to count in Tłı̨chǫ to 100 just by listening to her over and over. So, I think I had been taught by granny and grandpa and everything was a teaching lesson growing up so I feel it's always been there for me, being a teacher. And now I'm teaching Tłı̨chǫ immersion kindergarten.

**Sara Komarnisky:** I think it honours all of your teachers, your granny and your teachers at the school, for you to step into that role.

**Joni Tsatchia:** Yeah. As I got older, I decided to go back for a teaching degree. I was 36 or 35 years old, and I had just gotten a job with the government as a government service officer. In that role I was teaching again, in a way. I was teaching people who have lived out on the land their entire life and now they're being told they have to have bank accounts set up so they could have their income deposited. Or they were learning how to navigate applying for employment insurance. People who don't know how to use the computer, don't even know how to pay their bills online, but the system says that you have to have an online bank account. I remember sitting there helping them to navigate that, like, this is how to put in your bank account number, then your password. A lot of them, they weren't able to do it on their own. In those moments people would say, you should go back to school, you're teaching us even as adults. You'd be really good with kids or adults. But that's when it really was like, hey, I'm gonna go back to school.

**Sara Komarnisky:** Oh wow! And to hear that from people that you're working with, you're really good at this, you've taught me so much, you should keep it going. And so that's what sent you back to school to do the Bachelor of Education degree?

**Joni Tsatchia:** Yeah. And then translating things to Tłı̨chǫ. There's a lot of big words in English, so I had to break it down for them. Like, don't lose your password. There's not an easy way to explain that to them, but I would find ways. I was really teaching myself or asking my mom or other people, how can I translate this so that they understand it? Because they're not gonna understand fraud, or things like that. You have to find ways to break it down to them. In those moments I was teaching and translating for adults so that's when I decided to apply for school in Fort Smith.

**Sara Komarnisky:** That's really interesting to hear about your childhood experiences plus as an adult in this job teaching people how to do all these tasks they don't know how to do, plus the language translation, I can see it all kind of come together for you. I'd like to hear about your experiences in the B.Ed. (Bachelor of Education) program.

**Joni Tsatchia:** First and foremost I want this in the publication: I was really attracted to going into this program because it's offered in the North. It wasn't too far away, I wasn't going down south and losing all my support system. I was an 8 hour drive away from Yellowknife. If my family wanted to see me, I'd be able to connect with them. I was able to come home during the holidays. I love the North and Fort Smith is like a little urban community and the experience there was pretty awesome, I have to say. Because the B.Ed. program really offered a lot of integrated Indigenous knowledge. My major is Indigenous Studies, right? I found I started doing things that I had lost. I started beading there. It was for a project, and we were being graded on it, but I picked up the beads there, and my needle. I wouldn't have done that at home. I also learned how to make a drum. Um, it's not really in our culture that a woman makes a drum. I talked to the guy that was the head of the workshop, and I said, in the Tłı̨chǫ tradition women are not allowed to make drums. But he said it wasn't a regular drum, like a Tłı̨chǫ drum, it wasn't made out of caribou hide. It was actually a Cree drum, and it was made out of a deer hide. So, it was like, okay it's different. It's not really like how we make it, so it's not like I'm breaking my tradition. I'm learning a new tradition. So that's when I learned how to make a drum. I made a baby moss bag there, too. I made a diamond willow stick that could be used as a walking stick or a talking stick. These are things that I've seen in the Tłı̨chǫ region but I found them again there. There were so many workshops and I think that's really important to have those workshops done by local people because you're able to learn from them. All these things were integrated into our studies. Even just the community itself had everything set up for us. There were discounts at the grocery store for students, and free recreation, not just for myself but for all of my kids. So whenever we wanted to go swimming we would just show our student card. I got into yoga there and my partner and I went swimming and to the sauna. We did a lot of that, being healthy and having things open to us.

**Sara Komarnisky:** Sounds like it was about really connecting to the community too. You started off talking about the little school in Wekweètì and how the community was so much a part of that, I'm kinda hearing it again in Fort Smith. Like connecting to the local culture and people and participating in all kinds of activities.

**Joni Tsatchia:** And then the students I was able to finish the program with were from Inuvik, somebody from Łutselk'e, somebody from Fort Resolution, Délı̨nę, so there's a variety of students from different communities. When they created lesson plans, it was based on their culture, so I was learning from all these other northern students too.

**Sara Komarnisky:** Neat.

**Joni Tsatchia:** The instructors were really awesome too, they all had great background and a lot of experiences to share. Now that I'm teaching in my own class, I feel like everything they taught me at some point comes back.

**Sara Komarnisky:** So you completed your degree and you’re teaching now. Because the next question I had for you was, what have you been up to since graduation? I wonder if you can share a little bit about that now that you’ve got your own classroom.

**Joni Tsatchia:** Well, I was pretty lucky in a sense because I am Tłı̨chǫ and we do have a really good Tłı̨chǫ immersion program here in Behchokǫ and in the outlying communities. When I graduated I still needed to complete my final internship. I had done my first internship in Behchokǫ and I knew the principal. He reached out to me and said we need a Tłı̨chǫ Yatıì (Tłı̨chǫ language) teacher next year, are you willing to teach? I said, well I didn’t finish my final internship which is eight weeks without pay. So I said, if you are willing to work with me and get me a mentor, then I can do the internship. They really worked around that. They got me Rosa Mantla, who is Lianne Mantla’s mom. And so she became my mentor and teacher pretty much. She was going to help me for those eight weeks on how she’s taught Tłı̨chǫ over the years and all her skills. So I did that for eight weeks without pay then right from that I transitioned to working as a Tłı̨chǫ teacher. Even though after eight weeks Rosa was done as my mentor, she wasn’t going to be around me anymore day-to-day, she really helped me to be confident in teaching Tłı̨chǫ and just to really have a sense of humour and come out of that box. Even being silly, you know? At the time, I was teaching all grade levels from Kindergarten to grade 6 so with the smaller kids we were using a lot of physical movements, like if I’m teaching how to say “I’m walking” in Tłı̨chǫ, I would actually do it. Like, I would ask them, “What am I doing?” And the kids would be like, “You’re walking.” I’d say, “In Tłı̨chǫ we say k’eda.” There are a lot of different ways, approaches that Rosa taught me. For example with the older kids, they’re not going to get up and want to walk with me, because they’re at an age when they’re hitting their teens, so I had to have a different approach. We had 35-minute blocks of teaching, so literally we would walk in the class and we’re teaching just one thing. If I were teaching on family names, for example, with the smaller kids I would have a visual of the granny and grandpa, mom and a dad, and I’d be like, “who’s that?” And they would say it in English and I’m like, “no, it’s ehtsèe, grandpa. This is grandma, ehtsì.” I would go through that for a whole week until they pretty much memorized it. But with the older group, we would make booklets. Because I noticed a lot of them liked to draw or they could bring pictures that we can print out of their family members. They would get into creating their own family booklet, and they would even design the cover. They would draw their mom or their grandma if they wanted to. Or if their grandpa passed, with the permission from their parents, they would share the photo with me, and then I printed it off for them, and then they can make a collage or whatever around it. It was really about trying to navigate all these different ways of teaching in my first year. It was a good experience because I wasn’t teaching one class, I was teaching K to grade 6 at 35 minutes per block.

**Sara Komarnisky:** Wow, all ages, all grades! Kind of fun to try to figure it out, sounds like.

**Joni Tsatchia:** I did that for a year until the other two Tłı̨chǫ immersion teachers for kindergarten, grade 1, and grade 2 were up for retirement and done teaching. Their names are Josie and Therese. The principal asked me, “Joni can you take on the kindergarten immersion?” I said I didn’t mind teaching Tłı̨chǫ because it’s 35-minute blocks and I’m not speaking all day, like I’m just teaching them the main words for whatever the theme was. I remember telling the principal, I don’t think I can speak it fluently. Not only that, I’ve been away at school in Fort Smith for four years, where I didn’t speak it every day. My partner doesn’t speak Tłı̨chǫ fluently, my kids they understand some words, and so I really wasn’t speaking it. The only time was when I was visiting my mom and my granny. I was really hesitant in taking it on but they said it’s a learning experience and you don’t have to worry because a lot of fluent speakers are actually retired or retiring, so whatever you're doing is going to have to work. Just try to stay within the language. It's been a learning process for me this year, but my students are able to count in Tłı̨chǫ, they're able to say all their colours, we're working on animals now, so they know the main themes. They know their commands like, I want to drink water, I need to go to the washroom. Those are things we've worked on a lot.

**Sara Komarnisky:** That's wonderful. Sounds like a big challenge to step into that role but now that you're there you can see the kids speaking and it must be so rewarding.

**Joni Tsatchia:** Yeah and they're at a young age right, like kindergarten and grade 1 and 2 they're just, they're pretty impressionable and it's a good time to try to get them to speak it and to learn how to speak the language.

**Sara Komarnisky:** Amazing. Well, what does education in the north mean to you? This is shifting gears a little bit, to ask a more conceptual question. But the theme for this issue is education in the north, so I thought to ask – what does that mean to you?

**Joni Tsatchia:** I know what you mean, but can you break it down? Because education in the north is many things to me. Like is it like integrating land-based education, or are you just saying the location itself?

**Sara Komarnisky:** I guess I'm asking, what makes education in the north unique, I suppose. What does that mean? How can we talk about education in the north as different from elsewhere and what do you think about that?

**Joni Tsatchia:** I really think we need to look at it this way. When we look at schooling and the legacy of Residential Schools and the 60's scoop. It all comes back to that for me, because in the past our parents and our great grandparents didn't have a choice. Like they were in the north, but it was straight learning about English and learning about a religion that they didn't know about. Going forward I think that we have a lot of resources, especially with the Tłı̨chǫ Government. We have our own self-government. Which is why we're able to teach Tłı̨chǫ immersion and not remove these kids from their communities. I think we have to go back to that and not forget that legacy because it came with a lot of negative outcomes and impacts to somebody like me who's an intergenerational survivor. You know, I'm part of that. Because of that happening our parents, a lot of them didn't know how to parent us, and it led to many social issues. I think when we look at that, education in the north is what is needed for the northern Indigenous people. Even for the people that are not northern, they need to know where we come from. That the curriculum is based on the north, and includes that legacy too. It's a big part of why it's so important that education in the north continues and that it's integrated. It's pretty unique! Like I was able to do all of those things in Fort Smith and you're not going to see that if you're going down south. Or you might, but it's really up to the schools to integrate it. Whereas here in the north they're constantly doing that. I grew up in Wekweètì, and I see it here in Behchokǫ and Yellowknife, too. I did the social work program there too. I didn't complete that program, but it meant being able to be in Yellowknife and experiencing whatever the community is offering. You're able to go to Ndilo and see a drum dance or a hand game or the snow castle, like all these things are combined wherever you are and there's always history behind it. And every season brings something different. Like there's fishing season and you're able to see people make dry fish and you're seeing it around you all the time. And you're not going to be able to see that if you leave the north to go to school. And that’s why I think education in the north is really important. Even with my kids, my daughter is at Aurora College right now and she loves it because she’s close to us and she’s still able to come back and practice her traditional roots with us. We do a lot of cookouts, she’s able to sit with her family who speak Tłı̨chǫ and it’s not like she’s far away and I think that is a good experience for any northerner. Because not only are they leaving their isolated community, even Yellowknife for them is big. And then you see a lot of northern-based outdoor stuff, that’s so important to integrate too and you’re able to do that here because the land is just right here in front of you.

**Sara Komarnisky:** Yeah. You were talking about being connected to land, culture, way of life, and language wherever you are, having the opportunity to do that in the north in a way that’s not possible elsewhere is kinda what I’m hearing from you.

**Joni Tsatchia:** Yeah.

**Sara Komarnisky:** That’s a beautiful way to encompass what education in the north is like and what it can be, if we keep that vision going.

**Joni Tsatchia:** Yeah, and like I said, we can’t forget the history of it too because a lot of people live with that. Like I know for myself, I’ve had people who say well I went to residential school and sometimes it’s hard to send my kids to school because they still have those triggers of being taken away from their parents. To have somebody like me in the classroom who speaks fluently, and they know that I’m there to teach their kids the language, it’s a total shift away from that legacy.

**Sara Komarnisky:** Totally. For my family too, we moved here from the south and I’m always hopeful that my daughter learns local Indigenous history, language, and participates in cultural activities through her school so that she knows where she is too.

**Joni Tsatchia:** Oh yeah for sure. I think the north is able to bring that because it’s not something that’s hidden anymore, it’s out there. There’s books too. We talked about Residential Schools even with our kids here. Even in kindergarten, there was a book that we read about this little girl being taken and we really talked about it. It was about how our grandmas and grandpas were taken a long time ago. These little kids understood it and they were able to explain it in a way that it’s not like that now, but it has happened, right.

**Sara Komarnisky:** Yeah, absolutely. Is there anything else you might like to share to close, Joni?

**Joni Tsatchia:** I think the only thing I want to add is that I think it’s so important to integrate land-based education. Everything Aurora College does with the students, whether it’s taking them out to see Elders, making dry fish, even if it’s one or two times, being able to have the school practice the ceremonies. I think that’s really important because, for example if they have drum dances they should know why and how that is, why they have drum dances and to be able to bring drummers in and have a ceremonial drum dance or feeding of the fire. So that later the students can really integrate that into their school systems.

**Sara Komarnisky:** I love that, so you’re getting to that space where the students are learning the curriculum in the western sense but they're learning how to be in the culture of the place, too.

**Joni Tsatchia:** Yeah because then they can be strong like two people, like the great Chief Jimmy Bruneau had envisioned. Not just here in the Tłı̨chǫ at the school but anywhere. It's possible! Yeah. So that's how I want to close it off. Masì cho, Sara!

**Sara Komarnisky:** Masì cho to you, Joni! It's great to connect with you again. I love that, it's possible.

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***Joni Tsatchia*** *is Tłı̨chǫ, originally from Wekweètì. She is working as a Tłı̨chǫ immersion teacher at Elizabeth Mackenzie Elementary School in Behchokǫ̀. She graduated from Aurora College/University of Saskatchewan in the Bachelor of Education program in 2020.*

***Sara Komarnisky*** *is of Ukrainian settler ancestry and grew up in Alberta. Currently, Sara is Research Chair, Health and Community, at Aurora College and an Adjunct Professor of Anthropology at the University of Alberta. She lives with her husband and two children in Sǫǫ̀mbak'è (Yellowknife).*

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# Classroom on the Land

**Sandy Little, Heather Fikowski, and Pertice Moffitt**

**ABSTRACT**

Told through a day in the experience of being in camp with Elder Lawrence Casaway, former instructors in the Aurora College Social Work Program share the importance of learning in camp for students and faculty. The knowledge, experience, and joy that Lawrence and the land provided the students at camp was a key part of the learning experience for all involved, and impacted the participants beyond the week-long camp.


*Lawrence at his home, Dettah, 2022.*

Picture this: An agile Elder is piloting his boat up the Yellowknife River, his passengers dressed warmly for the cool May morning. The wind blows in from across the still frozen Great Slave Lake, and there are patches of snow blanketing the bush. Despite the cold, the river is open and there are fish nets and muskrat traps to check…

*Wiliideh Site, Yellowknife River ice break-up in May.*

That Elder is Lawrence Casaway. Lawrence was born in Rocher River, which at the time was a vibrant Dene community nestled in rich hunting and fishing territories. This was where he learned bush skills, traditional Dene values, and to speak and write his Chipewyan language. In 2005, Lawrence was invited to share his traditional knowledge with several Aurora College, Yellowknife Campus, classes seeking on-the-land learning experiences. In 2008, he took on the responsibility of lead Elder, setting up an annual seven-day Cultural Camp for the Social Work Diploma Program that had been relocated from Fort Smith to Yellowknife. For over eleven years, until the conclusion of the Social Work Diploma Program in 2018, Lawrence provided exceptional and unforgettable teaching to social work students and their instructors at the Wiliideh Site, a traditional gathering place of the Yellowknives Dene.

Lawrence's classroom is on the land. He is passionate about his Dene culture and about passing along history, traditional skills, Chipewyan language, and Dene values to students in many different professions. Social Work students particularly benefitted from the intensity of setting up and living in camp for seven days and nights. Lawrence's teaching skills were evident in setting up tents/tipis, setting nets, traps, snares, harvesting and processing animals and fish, navigating the bush and the water, leading talking circles, teaching the Chipewyan language, and in supporting the participants' understanding of the history and impacts of colonization, Treaties, and Residential Schools.  Every single activity and conversation with Lawrence contained a lesson.

A typical day with Lawrence at camp would begin with crackling fires in the tents from which students would slowly emerge. They would gather water from the river and chop wood for the kitchen fire so that coffee, porridge, and sizzling breakfast could be prepared by the camp cook. Lawrence would greet students with big smiles and an eagerness that was more effective motivation than the camp coffee. Some would join him on the boat to check the nets and traps while others would take on the tasks around camp or steal themselves away to work on various projects, like beading or making small birch bark canoes. Embedded in these activities was building an understanding of and respect for the land and water. Students learned to read the land, water, and ice conditions, and came to understand how Dene people have thrived in partnership with the land, water, and wildlife for generations.

*Smoking tipi with rabbits, ducks, caribou, and fish.*

Lunch would happen in the midst of the work of making dry fish or filleting the fish for supper that evening. Lawrence would spend afternoons with everyone, teaching them about the land and how to live respectfully with it. He would guide the participants with patience, skill, and gentle encouragement to prepare the fish, muskrat, beaver, and ducks that would be hauled up with pride from the boat launch a couple of times each day. In these hours, he was sharing an understanding of and respect for animals and fish, where they live, what they eat, and how to respectfully harvest them.

Sometimes in the afternoons, Lawrence could be found sharing photos from his past and the stories that went along with them. The importance of history emerged within these conversations. The story of Rocher River, understanding Treaties, the forced relocation of community, the impacts of colonization and residential schooling, and a deep empathy for Indigenous peoples who were dislocated from their land and brutalized by the psychosocial impacts of colonization. For example, Lawrence shared stories of those who are living on the streets of Yellowknife, some of whom are from Rocher River. In these stories, he demonstrated and encouraged empathy and respect. Other times, Lawrence would have a small gathering of students around him, sitting in the sun, and teaching his language. Language is important to Lawrence; speaking it, writing it, and keeping it alive.

*Teaching Chipewyan oral language and written syllabics.*

Evenings held quieter, but equally powerful moments. Lawrence shared his skills at facilitating circles or giggled his way through Scott McQueen's traditional storytelling. Scott's father was one of Lawrence's trapping partners, and Scott brought his family's cherished stories from Rocher River and wove them together with Lawrence's history of living off the land. Students were enthralled with the stories, and they deepened their understanding about the Dene.

Though he was the camp Elder and the one whom students admired for his knowledge and skill, Lawrence also demonstrated a keenness to learn from others. He enjoyed and was fascinated by the stories, experiences, and cultural diversity of students who joined with backgrounds from all parts of the world. He would encourage and try their cooking, ways of preparing animals, and come to understand different ways of knowing from students of diverse backgrounds. Lawrence taught and modelled ways to honour culture and diversity by celebrating every student and demonstrating interest in learning about their various cultures, countries, and belief systems.


*Hands-on teaching: How to skin a beaver.*

By the end of a day at camp, several students would have their names written on their work gloves in Chipewyan. As evening approached and with stomachs full from supper, Lawrence would continue to weave lessons in with a caring, engaging manner that never really felt like a lesson at all. Rather, it felt easy, natural, and respectful. It was a joyful experience that fit into an evolving way of understanding, and it left students eager to begin again the next day. Lawrence prided himself on having students set up and tear down the camp; there were important survival lessons within that. He also seamlessly shifted from teaching to encouraging students to take on the role of teacher. He was witness to the group's growth which was so evident in those last few days where he watched a camp function rhythmically, easily, efficiently, and peacefully.

*Students set up canvas tents and woodstoves and chopped the wood to heat their tents.*

There were many life-changing outcomes from Lawrence's cultural camp. Some Indigenous students were able to re-connect with their own traditional teachings and become leaders in the camp. Non-Indigenous students gained deeper respect for Dene expertise, values and skills which continue to support them on their journey towards enacting reconciliation. Lawrence encouraged students from outside Denendeh to share their cultural ways of preparing fish or ducks. Some of the most poignant learning moments were with Indigenous students who arrived at the bush classroom feeling shame about their lack of traditional knowledge. With Lawrence's gentle acceptance and teaching, they were able to revitalize their connections with the land, language, and ceremony. These students left camp with a renewed sense of purpose and a commitment to teach their children the skills gifted to them by Lawrence.

*Lawrence demonstrating how to stretch a beaver pelt.*

Over the years, many students shared positive comments about Lawrence through an evaluation process. The last culture camp concluded in 2018, as the social work program was about to be discontinued. Knowing that this eleven-year journey was coming to a close, the faculty wrote Lawrence a letter of appreciation incorporating the students' words. These two quotes from that letter exemplify the impact that Lawrence had on students' social work education:

- "Lawrence showed incredible patience and kindness towards me both during my culture camp week as well when I had the opportunity to visit a couple of years later. Lawrence gave me the confidence and the knowledge I needed to feel comfortable working in the social work field. Memories of him and his teachings is something I think of often and continues to keep me grounded when I have doubts about what I am doing. He is someone that I will always be grateful for, I can honestly say I would not be the same person I am today if it were not for him – and I only had one week with him!"

- "Alexander the Great once said, 'I am indebted to my father for living, but my teacher for living well.' Lawrence Casaway's classroom is on the land, and he has the heart of a great teacher. What distinguishes Lawrence is his hands-on teaching approach and that he himself is a student of all cultures, often asking others how their people fished or hunted. Lawrence brings an authentic richness of character and spirit to what he is teaching, and for this reason he is a teacher that has enabled me in living well."

Faculty also learned from their relationship with Lawrence and his camp. Lawrence's teachings impacted the entire Social Work program, which was evidenced in the classroom. For example, an anti-oppression course evolved from theoretical dialogue and readings in the classroom to community-based photo journaling of students' learning and understanding. The Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice course moved further away from instructor-led teaching to facilitated education with a variety of Elders and cultural knowledge-keepers who helped transform students' social work practice. Over the years, faculty offices and classrooms held hides, birch bark baskets and canoes, and photos from every year of camp. These were daily reminders that guided the instructors to reflect in the classroom what they had observed in Lawrence's teaching style and spirit when in the bush:

- To seek out and support the unique strengths of all students, honour their commitment to learning, and respect each person's personal journey towards their educational goals.

- To be encouraging, patient, kind, and humble; though instructors in a classroom, they are learning alongside the students within the questions asked and thoughtful reflections offered.

- To be proud of what is being taught and acknowledge that the profession of social work has a challenging history within Canada and the north. Remember that history and move forward humbly in our journey towards reconciliation as the graduates entered the field with hope, energy, knowledge, skill and an openness to lifelong learning.

As this article was being drafted, Lawrence provided additional comments from his perspective. He was extremely humble about his contributions to the success of the bush classroom and cultural camp. He gently insisted that this article highlight the teamwork, trust, and relationships co-created between Indigenous Elders, support staff, and social work instructors that provided the special ingredients for student learning at camp and beyond.

Mahsi cho, Lawrence! We continue to learn with you.


*Message from Lawrence (Chipewyan & English)*

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***Sandy LIttle**, MSW, RSW, is a settler who has lived in Treaty 8 territory, traditional land of the Yellowknives Dene, since 1995, raising her family and practicing social work in community mental health. Sandy was the Senior Instructor, Social Work, at Aurora College from 2007 - 2018 where she had the joy of participating in the annual cultural camp. She is currently the Manager, Mental Health and Community Wellness for the Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority. Sandy continues to value and learn from Lawrence's cultural wisdom.*

***Heather Fikowski**, MSW RSW, is a settler from Alberta who has lived on Treaty 8 territory, traditional lands of the Yellowknives Dene, since 2002, practicing in the field of social work as a clinician, educator and researcher. She taught in the Social Work program at Aurora College from 2007-2016 and enjoyed learning from Lawrence during that time, particularly valuing the life-long relationship with his family and hers that developed over those years. Currently, Heather is with Aurora College working to help rebuild a Bachelor of Social Work program and looks forward to the guidance that Lawrence will passionately and humbly offer.*

***Pertice Moffitt** worked as a nurse educator at Aurora College for many years. She had the wonderful opportunity to assist the social work team by spending a week with them at culture camp with Lawrence Casaway. She writes, "It is a memory I cherish."*

Xàgots'eèhk'ǫ JOURNAL

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# Family and Community

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# The Two of Us

**Aidan Cartwright**

The black spruce of the Northwest Territories (NWT) are gnarled, toughened trees with age and experience that's hard to determine at first glance. The younger trees are sturdy and fresh and full of potential. Growing up in the NWT I have developed a deep love for these trees and have often found myself anthropomorphizing them as I engage in outdoor activities such as hunting, exploring, camping, travelling, etc. The trees themselves have so much to teach us about living on the land, and like any good teachers, ultimately offer themselves to their environments and their students. Whether it's spruce gum for healing, boughs for tent floors or sitting, poles for building, or wood for fire and much more, the spruce tree has so much to offer. The Two of Us depicts a taller, more senior spruce tree bent over a shorter younger tree, as if to nurture, offer guidance, protection, or affection.

As an educator and father, whenever I see an old spruce tree bent over a young one, I can't help but relate it to my experience of caring for my students and my own children as they grow. As a visual artist, I wanted to capture the sentiment of youth and Elder, student and teacher, child and parent, in a painting where the focal point is the offerings made by one to the other. When in that moment, nothing else seems to matter besides the reciprocity of care and education. Whether teaching, parenting, offering wisdom, or receiving these gifts from another, the moments that matter most are those when it's just *The Two of Us*.

***Aidan Cartwright*** *is from Yellowknife, Northwest Territories and is a non-Indigenous resident of Treaty 8 territory. He was born in Yellowknife and currently resides in his home community with his wife, two kids, and two dogs. Aidan holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the Alberta Arts University and a Bachelor of Education from the University of British Columbia. He is working towards a professional Masters of Education from Queens University. Inspired in both his artistic and education practice by the lands he grew up on, Aidan enjoys sharing and exploring stories through his teaching and art that are shaped by the North.*

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# Believe It and You're Half Way There

**Paul Andrew**

There is a saying, "sometimes you will never know the value of a minute until it becomes a memory."

Two such moments stand out. Two babies playing, shoving mud into tiny boots without a care in the world. Deep down, they know they are loved, taken care of, and believe someone will always be there for them. They are in their moment! The other moment is young men and women happily doing what needs to be done: Splitting wood, fleshing the moose hide, or setting up tents with a smile! It seems they have found peace and serenity on the land. Fleeting as it was,, it was grand to observe.

I arrived on the banks of Begadé excited to help, in any way I can, to build a moose skin boat from scratch, just like our ancestors did. Unlike our ancestors, we had modern equipment but a shorter time span. There is always doubt, especially when it comes to the difficult task of sewing moose hides together. This time there were eight hides involved. Every time I had doubts, I paid the land and water and spent time with the "little ones" as they ran around laughing and giggling. I reminded myself that it was for them I am out here.

As long as I can remember our Elders have always been there for us. When we needed them, when we thought we did not need them, and every other time. And they were always there with tender loving care, tough love and unconditional love! I have sporadic memories of some of the earlier times in the mountains but a much sharper memory of the 1960s. I remember my grandfather yelling out "My grandson! My grandson!" when the boat I was in with my grandma and another old woman and we started drifting away. Uncle Yamadeh (Uncle John) ran into the water and pulled himself aboard to steer us to shore. I will never forget the fear in my grandfather's voice. He knew I was his future. Like Mountain people before him he desperately needed his stories, songs, dances and teachings to carry on with new generations.

I have been with them on the land. For Dene, being on the land is indescribable. They cut up meat and made dry meat. They fleshed and cut the hair off the hides. They drummed and sang traditional songs. They carried wood and water. They laid down spruce boughs. They helped with the cooking. They made sinew. They listened. They observed. They were there for probably the most difficult task: sewing the hides. Moose hide is thick and tough. The stiches must be close together to keep water from coming through but the young ones, with the aid of older people, were always up to the task. They sewed and did not complain.

Except for a brief period after residential school, I have always been proud of the people I come from. I am one of the lucky ones who was born at the right time. I was with the Shutao'tine out on the land. I danced with them. I heard their love songs as they carried water or wood. I sat with them as they told stories that were centuries old. I heard them as they fiercely defended their trees, water, and land. They cared for me as I cried when I lost my grandma and then short time later, my grandpa.

Now the student is the teacher. Once again I felt pride in being Shutao'tine, Dene, and Indigenous. It was so much more than the building of a traditional boat. It was a coming together of the old, the young, and the little ones. To practice the art of being who were meant to be. To practice the teachings, learning and being together. It was tradition!

Despite adversity and challenges, ours was a resounding success. Ours was of youth wanting to learn and older ones delivering. It was passing on traditions, songs, teachings, and stories. Despite the serious attempts to "kill the Indian in the child", we are still here. Still singing, dancing, and laughing. We are still telling Dene stories from Creation. We still look out for our fellow humans! We still love land, sky, and water!

If I am lucky enough to meet the two babies I watched playing when they are in their teenage years and they ask me what I did for their future, I would tell them I tried to keep language, traditions, and teachings alive. I would tell them I am very proud of who I am and where I come from. I would tell them "keep trying, never give up. Do what you want to do! If you have love and inspiration, you never go wrong."

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***Paul Andrew*** *is a Shutao'tine, or Mountain Dene, from Tulita. He was born in the Mackenzie Mountains, grew up on the land, and spent seven years in residential school. Paul shares his knowledge as a former Chief, a Residential School Survivor, former politician and journalist, and as a Dene oral historian passing on knowledge from his Elders in Tulita. He lives in Yellowknife.*

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# Wellness Elders Program

**Sarah Hyden and Carolyne Whenham**

The Tłı̨chǫ Region initiated a Wellness Elder program to implement the 'Strong Like Two People' approach which was developed by Chief Jimmy Bruneau. The Wellness Elder program uses this approach to combine both Western and Indigenous knowledges in our school mental health and wellness programming.

*Wellness Elder Frank Arrowmaker talking about Truth and Reconciliation to Gamètì students in school and during cultural camps. Photos by Carolyne Whenham*

The Wellness Elders program was implemented in the schools to help further integrate the Tłı̨chǫ culture and provide access to cultural programming for all students. The Wellness Elder program provides direct student care including listening and sharing of traditional knowledge, advising and collaboratively delivering language and cultural programming, and participating in school wide initiatives to create cultural safety. The Wellness Elders make themselves available by being in the halls and accessing classrooms.Students can approach them to talk about anything and, depending on the situation, the Elder can talk with them or refer them to a different resource such as a counsellor. The Elders are also in place to initiate craft and sharing circles for students to feel welcome, practice skills, and be with others. A sharing circle is a way to bring about conversation and discussion in an organic way that is culturally safe. The Elders can provide stories for the students to learn and explore their culture while practicing traditional beading, sewing, and other crafts and skills.

*Health and Wellness Elder Doreen Apples on the land with a group of girls from Chief Jimmy Bruneau School.*

The Wellness Elders are integrated within the school so that they have a good understanding of what is happening day to day. They meet with teachers and program support staff, learn about different perspectives and issues that are impacting the students and try to incorporate these into their approach. The Elders work closely with our Child and Youth Care Counselling team to refer students that may be impacted by traumas and who are requesting counselling. In turn, the counsellors will participate in some of the circles to learn more about Tłı̨chǫ culture, highlighting the concept of 'Strong Like Two People'. It is a program that is benefiting the students and building strength within our community.

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***Sarah Hyden*** *MSW, RSW is the Mental Health and Wellness Manager for Tłı̨chǫ Community Services Agency. She actively works towards building community capacity in the Tłı̨chǫ region.*

***Carolyne Whenham*** *is the Regional Coordinating Principal at the Tłı̨chǫ Community Services Agency. She is a long-time advocate for culturally responsive services to support teachers and students in the Tłı̨chǫ region.*

*Edith Wellin talks about the body parts of a rabbit with students at Elizabeth Mackenzie Elementary School.*

*Health and Wellness Elder Celine Whane lends her support with primary school children.*

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# On Living and Learning in Igloolik, Nunavut: A Conversation with Raigili Amaaq

**Colleen Chau and Raigili Arnaaq**

**ABSTRACT**
In this interview, Raigili Amaaq describes her experience attending the Igloolik Federal School in the 1970s and 1980s. She compares her past experiences as a student to her current experience working at that same school (now called Ataguttaaluk Elementary School) as a Guidance Counsellor and Community Liaison during the 2000s. In conversation with Colleen Chau, a second-year Qallunaat (Southern Canadian) teacher, Raigili ponders the nuances of working with Inuit and non-Inuit staff, prioritization of Inuit culture in the school system, and her hopes for the future of education in Nunavut. This interview took place in March 2022. It is an extension of a conversation between Colleen and Raigili about teachers using a trauma-informed approach within their classrooms. The interview was used as a talking point to orient new staff to work in Nunavut schools and provide context for certain practices or student behaviours they were encountering at AES.

*Igloolik, Nunavut, photo by Rene Hernandez Dias*

**Colleen Chau:** Can you tell me about yourself, Raigili? Where were you born and raised? Where did you go to school and how long have you worked at Atagutaaluk Elementary School (AES)?

**Raigili Amaaq:** I was born in Frobisher Bay in 1973. It is now called Iqaluit, Nunavut. I was raised here in Igloolik and in Taloyoak. Maybe two years later [from when I was born], we moved back here [Igloolik] and then I started school here up to Grade 8. I have been with Ataguttaaluk Elementary School since 2006. I have done this position, II, for around nine years. I have been doing other positions like substitute teacher, classroom teacher, and Inuktitut teacher since 2006. So, the students that I have taught have graduated and are starting to graduate. I have seen a lot of children growing up in Igloolik.

**Colleen Chau:** I know you are an integral part of the community, both inside and outside of the school. Could you explain how else are you involved in the community aside from AES?

**Raigili Arnaaq:** I am on the board of directors of Igloolik Coop. I am also the chairperson of the Igloolik Housing Association. I also have a taxi business, which has not been running right now due to circumstances. We are waiting for a particular tool to come in [to fix the car]. Our car has been parked since January.

**Colleen Chau:** What is your experience with the education systems in Nunavut as a student? Were you homeschooled or did you attend government school?

**Raigili Arnaaq:** I do not remember attending kindergarten, but maybe I was too young. I remember attending Grade 1 and beyond. It was not a day school; it was here (AES) before the renovation. It was federal government teachers before it became the Government of Nunavut. The territory is quite young. I remember Grade 1, 2, and 3 teachers were Inuit teachers. My first Qallunaat[1] teacher was in Grade 4.

**Colleen Chau:** This is like the current system we have at AES (where students are taught in Inuktitut in Grades 1 through 3 and have their first English immersion/Qallunaat teacher in Grade 4). How did you find the transition and were there a lot of differences?

**Raigili Arnaaq:** My parents were older so there was not any English at home, just when television came in the mid to late eighties. We had to learn English from our Grade 4 teacher. The first thing I remember needing to learn to say was “I need to go to the washroom.” I guess it was a big concern for me.

It wasn’t too different. The school didn’t have all Inuit staff. We knew that there were Qallunaat staff like the principal or whatever. And I had friends growing up who were in the same class, or I would visit, and their father was a Qallunaat.

**Colleen Chau:** What is your experience with a traditional education? Even though you were attending a federal school, did you still have time and were allowed to learn traditional skills?

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1 *Qallunaat is an Inuktitut word that translates to white person; however, the word is also used to refer to an outsider or non-Inuit person in Nunavut who is not always ethnically white.*

**Raigili Arnaaq:** I wasn't in a boarding school. My older sister was, but I was attending a regular elementary school like what we have today. [Traditional learning] was just an everyday thing at home. It wasn't like a thing you have to learn [with someone teaching you]. It was just the things that we saw.

I think that is how we Inuit learn though: through watching. Our father going hunting and bringing back his catch and our mother preparing skins and sewing skins for the winter.

**Colleen Chau:** It reminds me of last year when we opened the Cultural Center and had Elders coming in to run programming. I found it interesting how the Elders weren't standing at the front explicitly "teaching." Instead, we had Elders doing things and the students naturally coming to sit beside someone to observe them.

**Raigili Arnaaq:** As we got into higher grades (when I was a student), there was a portable school which is now the Head Start building. We would come here and do sewing with Elders. It was called the Tech Center and girls would learn to sew and boys would learn to make qamutiik, knives, and ulus. It was the same kind of thing then.

**Colleen Chau:** You mention that you did not attend a residential school, but that your sister did. As both a community member and as part of the school staff, what have you noticed are the impacts of residential schools in the community and on the children?

**Raigili Arnaaq:** I think there is a lot of trauma in the community because of things like Residential School, Day School, and the Catholic mission. And people find ways of coping with trauma in different ways positive and negative: alcohol, drugs, sex, sports, art, sewing, music… My late friend drank until the day she died, and she had attended Residential School. She was always travelling around for work doing translations… But she was living in the South not in the community anymore.

**Colleen Chau:** I guess when I think of the impact of Residential Schools, I am not talking about just being in Igloolik, but more like the impact on the people.

**Raigili Arnaaq:** I think that I see impacts in the children now more than the generation who went to the schools. The hurts that people had… are still living in the families today.

**Colleen Chau:** I agree. Intergenerational trauma from Residential Schools is such a real thing that can be traced in Inuit and Indigenous communities and a lot of the issues our students face stem in some way from Residential Schools like abuse, neglect, alcoholism, food insecurity, and poverty…

On my part, I can sense a distrust in the school system because of people's experiences in Residential School.

I can think of two specific incidents: Last year, I had an Elder (and Residential School Survivor) working as a Student Support Assistant (SSA) in my classroom. She was quiet and just observed how I acted with the students and incidents throughout the day. At the end of the day, she pointed at one of the boys in my class and told me that he was her grandson, and she was happy that I was a good teacher. She had asked to work in my class for that day at the beginning of the year because she just wanted to see how I was, and it was a poignant moment when she said she was happy her grandson was with me.

On the other end of the spectrum, I had a parent who very obviously had a lot of fear towards the school system. I had called this parent after their daughter had missed consecutive days of school to check-in with them. This parent cried on the phone with me about feeling safer keeping his daughter home rather than at school. I think that was a realization for me that although those schools are closed and it has been years, that a lot of the memories and traumas live on and have impacts on our students' day-to-day lives.

**Raigili Arnaaq:** Yes… Residential Schools are over, but a lot of the things continue today.

**Colleen Chau:** People are still looking for answers, I think. Even this summer, I know an elderly lady in the community had only just received confirmation of her daughter's death and burial in Chesterfield Inlet. She had posted on the community Facebook that her daughter was finally coming home and she had looked so happy. It was around the same time that they started uncovering bodies at Kamloops and other communities…

Let's look at you working in the school now, what are the differences you find working with Inuit and non-Inuit staff?

**Raigili Arnaaq:** I don't think we are all on the same page anyway because of such numbers of turnover of staff. Consistency was really good years ago and plans were made and met [. . .] without as many delays or complications. I think the administration and the turnover impacts the school a lot. We get a lot of different people; some are too easy going and some come and try to change everything.

**Colleen Chau:** I think it has a lot to do with relationships and trust though, no? It can be hard to constantly have new faces come in and make big upheavals of how the school is run.

**Raigili Arnaaq:** I think that the generation that makes up our staff today are able to stand up for themselves now whereas the ones before it was hard; there was Residential School, Day Schools, Catholic mission and all these other obstacles they had to go through. I think we can stand up for ourselves and maybe we Inuit have a hard time accepting all these new faces and changes whereas the Qallunaat staff can accept the pace and changes easier.

**Colleen Chau:** And I'm happy people have been willing to stand up for what they believe and to question changes or programming that is put in place. On that note, do you think there is also a difference in the way that Inuit and Qallunaat communicate?

**Raigili Arnaaq:** I think some of our people are not the kind to speak out. I learned to stand up and not be afraid anymore once I sat in this chair. I had to advocate for the students and the community. I am the liaison for the school and community, and it needs to be vocal. I think that some do not have the strength to sit on that chair yet.

It is just like how if someone came and wanted to make changes without understanding all the backend work that goes into it. The way it seemed was so… It is like if I decide to go fishing, it is not like I can just hop on my skidoo and grab my qamutiik and go fishing. I need to prepare for my trip: make sure the qamutiik is stable, the skidoo is running well, prepare the grub box and ice pick, and the fuel. It is not like we can just go and have fish. It is not that easy… We tried to do a lot of things to get the school fixed, we had a Health and Safety Committee and put in papers and… [shrugs]. Everything has to go through systems.

**Colleen Chau:** Talking about systems and Inuit culture, how do you find the way that Inuit culture and traditions are emphasized or not emphasized in the system? Do you feel that Inuit culture and traditional skills are prioritized enough?

**Raigili Arnaaq:** Going back three years ago, I think that communication went downhill. I was not informed that they were trying to convert the library into a cultural centre. All of a sudden, we had to move the library books out and it became a cultural centre.

For me, cultural activities are very important. Because we do not know if we are the only way for students to get their culture and traditional life. There are families with no means of transportation or camping gear. It is our job to teach the culture because it is important to keep the culture alive and so, it [the Cultural Centre] was created, but it is so poor. It is not fully running, only partially. It only runs half-days, and the wood workshop is not running. There is no funding. Or maybe there is, but there are deadlines and red tape. I don't like where there is . . . [red tape] for tradition and culture. It was taken away from us and now we need to beg for money to teach our children their culture and traditions. The weird thing too is that it [traditional skills and land-based education] is not written into our curriculum. It should not be like this.

Our students need to be doing things, not just cooped up all day in a classroom. They need to do the actual things on the land like ice picking and bringing ice to the Elders. That is showing respect: doing. They need to do it and it refreshes your mind and your soul.

**Colleen Chau:** To close off this interview, what is your vision of education in the North? What do we need:

more Inuit teachers and administration to combat the transience? More emphasis on culture and traditional skills?

**Raigili Arnaaq:** I think it is going to be that in the near future, when the Nunavut Teacher Education Program (NTEP) students graduate from their course, if they decide to stay [in Igloolik].

**Colleen Chau:** That is the hope and dream of having the NTEP program running in Igloolik, is that it produces more Inuit teachers who will hopefully stay, right? The hope is that a lot of these positions are not as filled with people like me.

**Raigili Arnaaq:** I think it doesn't really matter if they are Inuk or Qallunaat staff. Like communication is the most important . . . like what you and I do is communicate and look at the future. We are open to each other. It can be Inuk or Qallunaat who is not responsive; when there are issues and they are not communicating with you, that is the barrier. It doesn't matter if they are Inuit or Qallunaat.

**Colleen Chau:** That's true. But I don't mean like me in the sense of being Qallunaat. I think more about transience and staying in the community. Being a good teacher isn't about being Inuit or Qallunaat; I believe it is about being willing to communicate and the investment or commitment to the community and the job. We both know previous teachers who were here for only two years, but who were great teachers, and you can see the impact that they had on their class.

**Raigili Arnaaq:** Exactly. It is about being ready and having a plan to work with the students. It is about understanding that the children are children, and they may not behave in the way you expect or like.

**Colleen Chau:** That's true. For any new teacher coming to the North, it's important to understand the many things that impact our students inside and outside the classroom like trauma, poverty, food security, etc. And also, transience… This is such an issue in the North, but even this year, some of our classes have had up to two or three different teachers due to people leaving.

**Raigili Arnaaq:** Exactly. It doesn't matter if they are Inuk or Qallunaat. I commend our Qallunaat staff for coming up here to teach our children. I cannot imagine being away so long from my family especially with COVID. I go out for medical for three days and I get so homesick! I cannot imagine being away for the full year.

And about staying [in Igloolik]. We have all these Professional Learning Community (PLC) days. We could have someone like a Residential School Survivor come in and have them speak of how they were treated in the past. Or someone young coming in to give presentations on Inuit ways of life. We have people from down South coming and not knowing these things. It would be good if they had these presentations to the staff to introduce the culture. I think things like these could help us to keep our Qallunaat staff for much longer and to help the culture.

At the end of the day, we are all human. And we are all here for the children. The school is their safe place:

mentoring the children to do better and try better.

**Colleen Chau:** Thanks so much for speaking with me, Raigili.

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***Colleen Chau*** *is an educator currently based in Baker Lake, Nunavut. A 2019 graduate of the University of Winnipeg Education Program, Colleen was born and raised in Winnipeg, Manitoba. She has taught in Bangkok, Thailand; Igloolik, Nunavut, and now Baker Lake, Nunavut. Her passions include education equity, Indigenous/Inuit rights, and social justice community initiatives; she is currently pursuing a Social Justice Master of Education at Lakehead University.*

***Raigili Amaaq*** *is a Guidance Counsellor and Community Liaison currently working at Ataguttaaluk Elementary School (AES) in Igloolik, Nunavut. She was born in Frobisher Bay (now known as Iqaluit) and attended a federal school in the 1970s and 1980s. Outside of her work at AES, she is a passionate advocate for the community on issues such as housing, food insecurity, trauma-informed approaches, and Inuit cultural practices.*

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JOURNAL

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# Rayuka Season

**Antoine Mountain**

This painting shows a Tłı̨chǫ mother and her child observing the northern lights around the Yellowknife area. In our beliefs the lights represent people who have passed on due to an accident, especially those who are young. Their spirits are restless – they are not on this earth or wherever people might go. The word 'rayuka' literally means stabbing around, moving around really fast in a darting motion. So this is a painting of a mother and her child who have been left behind by their husband and father, or someone close.

*__Antoine Mountain__ is Dene from Radilih Koe (Fort Good Hope) in the Northwest Territories. His love for the land and its people is the root of his artwork, for which he uses acrylics on canvas, favouring the Impressionist style. He is driven by a deep-rooted spiritualism to depict landscapes, the Dene way of life, and portraits. Antoine has a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the Ontario College of Arts and Design at the University of Toronto, a Master's of Environmental Studies from York University, and is currently pursuing a PhD in Indigenous Studies at Trent University.*

Xàgots'eèhk'ǫ Journal

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# Institutions and Organizations

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# School

**Axel Patterson**

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The teachers aren't here to be your friend
they're here to teach you
if you fail you WILL be left behind
it's your fault if you feel unwell
you might have almost no sleep or none at all
that IS your fault
because you, a young child with problems, (I doubt they're that bad)
cannot get sleep because you miss your dad that you wish you had
and it's your fault you're sad
even if it's out of your control

we want to help you
but we both know we're not good at that
you have to be responsible
even if you are a child
a child with a single parent, anxiety, a third year of being depressed, and sometimes the only times you feel free,
is when you are glued to a screen
it's your fault you stay awake trying to be happy watching other people be who you want and could never be
and we know that's why you get no sleep
but that's YOUR fault
you are the reason you can't be happy
you are the reason you are anxious and scared and sad and angry
you're scared you might hurt someone because of it
And you have signs of OCD and ADHD,
but to be diagnosed you have to wait for a month or three
or four or five
we don't have time
to care and help for your rotting self
you have bad self-confidence, and gender dysphoria
and we know you never felt the joy of euphoria
but we don't have time
you don't have time
you know that you have almost no time
you are slow and worthless
and shy and we expect you to feel painless

you have to work non-stop
because you are slow and stupid and everyone looks perfectly fine
but at least one is trying not to die
you remember at least once a day
all the pain you felt
you feel
you don't want to feel
no one does, and we expect you not to
you are too scared to talk to anyone
your mom, siblings, friends, let alone the receptionist!
But how do you get help?
You have to be brave and some crap
You are small and pathetic
and of course a LIAR!
You want attention
you stupid kid
if you share emotions you won't feel safe
but if you don't,
you'll die in this awful place
all you want is to be seen
but your voice can't be heard even if you scream
and every day you feel like it's all a dream
or a nightmare you will soon wake up from
But please don't waste our time
even if you yourself are one
you don't have time to eat
your heart will skip a beat again and again
for someone who isn't real
because everyone else is scary
but it is your fault you feel that way
not your trauma's!
And compared to other people it's not that bad!
In fact, they're doing better than you!
But I must be on my way
let's hope you last another day
and if you pass away
maybe we will change
but I doubt it

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***Axel Patterson*** *is an Inuit Cree trans masculine high school student. He was born and raised in Yellowknife. He is a creative writer who also has a passion for singing, drawing, story writing, and animation; his work is often about the struggles of Indigenous and queer youth in the NWT with an emphasis on mental health.*

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# Action Towards Anti Racism, Indigenization, and Decolonization of Health Professions Education in Canada

**Shannon Mychael**

## ABSTRACT

It is well documented that anti-Indigenous, systemic racism is pervasive in Canada. Indigenous people are disproportionately affected by negative health outcomes, perpetuated by the colonial structures, policies and legislation within the healthcare and education systems. This article seeks to examine how the Canadian academy can enact transformative change to decolonize and Indigenize health professions education (HPE) from an organizational and leadership approach. Focusing heavily on the perspectives and work of Indigenous scholars and organizations, this paper will explore how concepts in instructional leadership for equity can be applied to the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

## INTRODUCTION

Within the context of Canadian society, the presence of anti-Indigenous racism can be directly attributed to the legacy of colonialism (Allan & Smylie, 2015; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Nixon, 2019). In fact, The World Health Organization's Commission on the Social Determinants of Health has identified colonization as having a critical impact on the health and wellness of Indigenous people globally (Mowbray, 2007). Allan & Smylie (2015) indicate that the social determinants of health have emphasized alarming disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples' health in Canada, made evident by the fact that Indigenous people are disproportionately affected by lower life expectancies, increased infant mortality rates, as well as increased rates of chronic disease, cancer, substance abuse, and suicide (Allan & Smylie, 2015; Beavis et al., 2015; ITK 2021; Lewis & Prunuske, 2017; Reading & Wien, 2013).

Since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) released its 94 *Calls to Action* in 2015, there has been an increased awareness in the Canadian collective consciousness of the inequities and injustices faced by Indigenous people (Allan & Smylie, 2015; TRC 2015). High-profile cases, such as those of Joyce Echaquan and Brian Sinclair, have brought the existence of systemic, anti-Indigenous racism to the forefront of discussion surrounding the treatment of Indigenous peoples in Canada (Brian Sinclair Working Group, 2017, Council of the Atikamekw of Manawan and the Council de la Nation Atikamekw, 2020). Evidence indicates that anti-Indigenous discrimination in the Canadian healthcare system is commonplace, as Indigenous patients are "noting abusive treatment, stereotyping, and a lack of quality in the care provided" (Wylie & McConkey, 2019, p.37, see also Allan & Smylie, 2015; McGuire-Adams, 2021; Nixon, 2019; Reading &

Wien, 2014). Furthermore, the perpetuation of systemic racism in the Canadian health care system can be significantly attributed to the presence of systemic racism in Canadian academic institutions, particularly those providing health professions education (HPE) (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Kuokkanen, 2008; McGuire-Adams, 2021). This, in part, can be observed through a notable under-representation of Indigenous staff, faculty and administrators in the health and education systems (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; ITK, 2021; Kuokkanen, 2008). However, many Indigenous scholars argue that the under-representation of Indigeneity in the Canadian academy extends far beyond inclusion. By taking more meaningful steps toward Indigenization of the Canadian academy through policy and praxis, academic institutions have the power to enact transformative change in Canadian HPE, in turn contributing to improved patient care and health outcomes for Indigenous peoples (Allan & Smylie, 2015; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; ITK, 2021; Jones et al., 2019; Kuokkanen, 2008; McGuire-Adams, 2021).

Therefore, in an effort to disrupt settler colonialism, and address racism within the field of Canadian HPE, this paper will review literature from Indigenous scholars and settler scholar-allies. Although systemic racism in Canada affects racialized individuals and communities from diverse backgrounds (Goode & Landefeld, 2018; Raphael et al., 2020; Williams & Mohammed, 2013), this paper addresses anti-Indigenous racism in HPE in Canada. Furthermore, the research synthesized here is delimited to the work of Indigenous scholars and settler-allies surrounding decolonization and Indigenization in these systems and institutions, and the relevant educational theories that apply to the research recommendations. The synthesis provides poignant insight into the presence of systemic racism in Canadian healthcare and HPE, its effects on Indigenous healthcare provision and health outcomes, as well as recommendations to decolonize and Indigenize these systems. These recommendations include: raising awareness of the magnitude of anti-Indigenous systemic racism in Canada, engaging in critical allyship and decolonizing solidarity with Indigenous communities, as well as taking action to decolonize and Indigenize the Canadian academy based on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's *Calls to Action* (2015). In the pages that follow, I will argue that health professions education can be Indigenized in transformative ways to enact systems-level change in Canada.

| **Key Elements of Decolonizing and Indigenizing Health Profession Education in Canada. Adapted from Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018** | |
|---|---|
| **1. Raising Awareness (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018):**<br>**I. Indigenous Inclusion**<br>• Indigenous Inclusion Policies<br>**II. Reconciliation Indigenization:**<br>• Instructional Leadership for Equity<br>• Transformative Learning Theory in Indigenous HPE<br>• Teacher Learning and Development in Equity<br>• Indigenous Course Content (ICR)<br>• Anti-Oppressive Pedagogy in HPE | **III. Decolonial Indigenization**<br>• Elder-in-Residence<br>• On-the-land Programs<br>**2. Engagement in Critical Allyship and Decolonizing Solidarity:**<br>I. Critical Self-Reflection<br>II. Interpersonal Relationships<br>III. Indigenization and Reconciliation Work |

**Figure 1**

*Key Elements*

## RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY

I am a non-Indigenous settler, a scholar, a nurse, an educator, and a mother. I have lived and worked in Denendeh for nearly 10 years, and grew up on the Treaty lands and territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit. However, it wasn't until coming to the North that I truly began to recognize the disparities between the immense privilege I had experienced as a white settler, and the systemic barriers faced by Indigenous Peoples. I now endeavour to work towards the decolonization and Indigenization of the healthcare and education systems through an ongoing process of decolonizing solidarity. One of the ways in which I have attempted to work towards that is through the process of writing this paper, which began as a component of my Master's of Education coursework, and has been revised for publication. In writing this paper, I am reflecting on the role that I play within the systems that have marginalized Indigenous peoples, and am looking for ways to work in solidarity towards deconstructing the systems that continue to oppress Indigenous peoples. With humility and vulnerability, I review, summarize, and synthesize the work of Indigenous scholars and organizations who have sought to bring decolonization and Indigenization to the forefront of the Canadian academy.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In Canada, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples face social and economic inequities resulting from systemic discrimination (Allen et al., 2020; ITK, 2021; Jaworsky, 2018; Jones et al., 2019;). The inequitable distribution of resources, as explained by the social determinants of health, is made possible through colonial policies, regulations, and laws, which have been identified as being fundamentally responsible for the racism embedded in Canadian society. As such, vast disparities in positive health outcomes exist between Indigenous people and that of the dominant (white) culture (Allen et al., 2020; CMA, 2021a; ITK, 2021; Jaworsky, 2018; Jones et al., 2019; Raphael et al., 2020; Wylie & McConkey, 2018). This is perpetuated further through the suppression of Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing in Canadian HPE institutions.

In response to the TRC's *Calls to Action*, post-secondary institutions across Canada have attempted to redress health inequities for Indigenous people through changes in education content and service delivery (Cook et al., 2019). However, many of these institutions are challenged with how to "ethically engage Indigenous communities and Indigenous knowledge systems" (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018, p.2). Rauna Kuokkanen (2008), defines Indigenizing the academy as process in which post-secondary institutions acknowledge their ignorance of Indigenous philosophies and epistemologies, and invite Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing into the "mainstream" of the academy. Based on this concept, Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) identify a spectrum of Indigenization: Indigenous inclusion, reconciliation Indigenization and decolonial Indigenization. It is through this model of Indigenization that I will seek to explore how Canadian HPE can be decolonized and Indigenized through educational leadership.

## THE SPECTRUM OF INDIGENIZATION

The spectrum of Indigenization is a progressive representation of the ways in which post-secondary educations can move towards transformative Indigenization by encompassing Indigenous perspectives, epistemologies, and pedagogies (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). Although some Canadian post-secondary institutions such as Aurora College (GNWT, 2020), Lakehead University (OIEC, 2022), Queen's University (OII,2021), the University of Manitoba (Indigenous Senior Leadership Advisory Committee, 2019), and The University of Winnipeg (2015) have begun to implement strategic plans to support truth, reconciliation and Indigenization consistent with decolonial Indigenization, as will be discussed, many post-secondary institutions in Canada are struggling with implementing strategic plans that will support true reconciliation through transformative, systems level change. Through raising awareness of this spectrum, and the difference between each concept, I will share recommendations for HPE institutions to implement meaningful changes that Indigenize and decolonize all facets of teaching, learning and leadership in HPE (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018).

## INDIGENOUS INCLUSION

Research indicates that the majority of Indigenous strategic plans being implemented at Canadian post-secondary institutions focus primarily on Indigenous inclusion policies (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Reading & Wien, 2014; University of Winnipeg, 2015). According to the Canadian Association of University Teachers, these are policies that attempt to increase the number of Indigenous faculty, staff and students in Canadian post-secondary institutions (CAUT, 2021). Allan and Smylie (2015) state that in HPE, strategic plans focused on increasing the number of Indigenous people in health professions in Canada have shown promise towards improving health care delivery for Indigenous peoples. Furthermore, in their research, Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) identify that many Indigenous scholars see inclusion policies as an important aspect of decolonization and Indigenization in Canadian postsecondary education. For example, research has shown that the implementation of inclusion policies has had a positive impact on program completion and retention rates for Indigenous students (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). More specifically, this can be attributed to policies aimed at creating an environment more "hospitable and relevant" for Indigenous students (Kuokkanen, 2008) through support programs such as Indigenous peer mentorship, academic advising and Indigenous support centres (Gallop & Bastien, 2016; Pidgeon et al., 2014; Ragoonaden & Mueller, 2017). Furthermore, inclusion policies that seek to increase the number of Indigenous faculty and students in HPE programs directly relates to the TRC's *Calls to Action* #7 and #23 (TRC, 2015).

However, although Indigenous scholars recognize that inclusion policies have merit, one of the main criticisms of this approach is that inclusion policies don't address the barriers that make access to HPE inequitable for Indigenous students to begin with (Allan & Smylie, 2015; Battiste et al., 2002; Episkenew, 2013; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Kuokkanen, 2008; McGuire-Adams, 2021; Saskamoose & Pete, 2015). Scholars argue that for Indigenization of the Canadian academy to be transformative, increasing the presence of Indigenous staff, students and faculty is not enough (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Saskamoose & Pete, 2015; Kuokkanen, 2008). The problem with Indigenous inclusion policies is that they require Indigenous people to adapt to the pre-existing, colonial structures of the institution. Therefore, in order for an institution to be transformative, a combination of administrative and leadership support, Indigenous pedagogy and epistemologies, as well as ideological shifts is needed in HPE in addition to Indigenous inclusion policies (Episkenew, 2013; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Kuokkanen, 2008).

## RECONCILIATION INDIGENIZATION

Reconciliation Indigenization is a transformation in the structure of academic institutions to include Indigenous students, faculty, and staff as well as Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Pete, 2016). Kuokkanen (2008) argues that the Canadian academy has sanctioned "epistemic ignorance" through the exclusion of Indigenous knowledge. As such, reconciliation Indigenization must also include "the establishment of physical and epistemic spaces that facilitate the ethical stewardship of a plurality of Indigenous knowledge and practices so thoroughly as to constitute an essential element of the university" (Pete, 2016, p.67). Therefore, it can be argued that an approach to reconciliation Indigenization in HPE is through practices like instructional leadership for equity, Indigenous course requirements (ICRs) (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Pete, 2016); and anti-oppressive pedagogy (Kumashiro, 2000; Siemens, 2017). Such strategies can position HPE institutions to respond to the TRC's *Calls to Action* #23 and #24 (TRC 2015). In what follows, I will explain and review each of these practices in detail.

Instructional leadership for equity (also referred to as transformative leadership) is an approach to education that recognizes that systemic injustices and inequities must be considered in education for it to be accessible and equitable for all students (Beavis, 2015; Brayboy et al., 2007; Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014). It can include the application of transformative learning theory (Kluttz et al., 2019; Shields, 2010) and teacher learning and development in equity (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2015; Leithwood et al., 2019; Reierson & Becker, 2021; Robinson et al., 2017; Stokes, 2022). In Canada, instructional leadership for equity is significant, as it recognizes that the inequities experienced by Indigenous peoples, as observed through the social determinants of health, are symptoms of anti-Indigenous systemic racism (Pauktuutit, 2021). As such, instructors are challenged – as part of the dominant structure – to recognize and reflect on their own complicity in perpetuating inequities in HPE (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014). Through a commitment to instructional leadership for equity, and the subsequent process of critical self-reflection, as discussed by Moffitt and Durnford (2021), instructional leaders have the capacity not only to foster the wellbeing, engagement, and retention of Indigenous students (Stokes, 2022) but also to create transformative change in decolonizing and Indigenizing HPE, in turn, leading to improved health equity and outcomes for Indigenous peoples in Canada (Beavis et al., 2015).

Transformative learning is defined as "a learner-centred process of learning that actively engages students through critical reflection and discourse" (Tsimane & Downing, 2019, p.91). This is significant to the Indigenization of HPE, as it directly relates to cultural safety, which is a "relational process that involves reflexive practices exploring one's personal way of being, knowing, and doing (Moffit & Durnford, 2021, p.1). As such, the application of transformative learning theory in HPE allows for the creation of culturally safe classrooms, which in turn, create physical and epistemic space for learning that focuses on Indigenous health, philosophies, and practices (Aboriginal Nurses Association of Canada, 2009; Tsimane & Downing, 2019;). Additionally, culturally safe classrooms provide opportunities for non-Indigenous students to understand the imbalance of power between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples (Moffitt & Durnford, 2021), as well as challenge and reflect on their own beliefs, privilege and complicity in systems of oppression. Though this may be uncomfortable, "there is potential for radical change by working through, and resting within pedagogical spaces of discomfort" (Kluttz, et al., 2020, p. 51).

Robinson et al. (2008) indicates that promoting and taking part in teacher learning has the highest statistical significance in impacting student learning in a positive way. Furthermore, as it pertains to equity in HPE specifically, Vassie et al. (2020) suggest that supporting individual teachers must occur for students to achieve the best possible outcomes. As such, leaders and administrators in HPE must respond to the TRC's *Call to Action* #57 by facilitating programming for instructors to become educated in the historical, contemporary and legal contexts of Indigenous peoples in Canada (TRC, 2015; See also, Allan & Smylie, 2015; Battiste, 2005; Cook et al., 2019; Indigenous Senior Leadership Advisory Committee, 2019). Additionally, faculty and staff "will require skills -based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights and anti-racism" (TRC, 2015, p. 7). In the Northwest Territories, training is available through programs such as the *Living Well Together* series of the effects of colonization of Indigenous people in Canada (GNWT, n.d.) as well as the film and toolkit *The Unforgotten* created by the Canadian Medical Association in conjunction with the GNWT (CMA, 2021a, 2021b). *Living Well Together* is a mandatory training requirements for all GNWT employees, including all post-secondary staff and healthcare providers in the territory.

Indigenous course requirements (ICRs) are a mandatory component of diploma or degree programs, which are focused on Indigenous peoples in Canada. Examples of ICRs include courses or content in the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), treaties and Indigenous rights, Indigenous law, as well as Indigenous Knowledge. (ANAC, 2019; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2019; TRC, 2015; United Nations, 2007). Since the release of the Calls to Action (TRC, 2015), post-secondary institutions across Canada have responded by implementing ICR's in their curricula to support Call to Action #24, especially nursing, education, and social work programs (ANAC, 2009, Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). However, there are differing perspectives, as identified by Gaudry and Lorenz (2019) about how to implement ICR's. One approach is to require whole courses that are mandatory for graduation. The other approach is through embedding ICR throughout existing courses. Yet, no matter which type is implemented by an institution, ICR's must come from Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing (Battiste, 2005; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). As with Indigenous inclusion policies, most Indigenous scholars and intellectuals see ICR's as the starting point in the larger process of dismantling systemic anti-Indigenous racism (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2019).

Anti-oppressive pedagogical practice is an approach to education that seeks to improve the education experience for those that are marginalized or oppressed due to their "otherness" (Kumashiro, 2000; Moffitt & Durnford, 2021). This approach is significant in HPE as it works to "transform power relations in the classroom, clear space, and recognize place-based histories as well as to amplify the ongoing resistance of local Indigenous peoples" (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2019, p. 166). For health professions education, some examples of anti-oppressive pedagogy include Indigenous peer mentorship, Indigenous health programs or specializations, practicum placements or experiences that partner with Elders and Indigenous healers; Indigenous health centres for teaching and learning; Indigenous support centres; and incorporation of the social determinants of health into course content (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2019; Pidgeon et al. 2014; Ragoonaden & Mueller, 2017; Raphael et al., 2021; University of Manitoba, 2019).

## DECOLONIAL INDIGENIZATION

Decolonial Indigenization recognizes that to truly Indigenize HPE in Canada, institutions must dismantle the colonial ideologies entrenched in all facets of the Canadian academy. This will involve a transformation of the entire system through praxis, policies, and engagement with Indigenous communities, governments, scholars and Knowledge Holders (CAUT, 2021; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Saskamoose & Pete, 2015). Recurrent approaches based on the vision for decolonial Indigenization are Elder-in-residence programs, Land-based education programs and the establishment of self-governing Indigenous senior leadership committees in post-secondary institutions (ANAC, 2019; Brett, 2019; Drouin-Gagné, 2021; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Indigenous Senior Leadership Advisory Committee, 2019; Moffitt & Durnford, 2021; OII, 2021; Redvers, 2016; Wildcat et al., 2014). Examples of self-governing Indigenous leadership committees include the Ogimaawin Indigenous Education Council at Lakehead University (OIEC, 2022), the Indigenous Directions Leadership Council at Concordia University (IDLC, 2021), the Office of Indigenous Initiatives at Queen's University (OII, 2021), and the Indigenous Senior Leadership Advisory Committee at the University of Manitoba (Indigenous Senior Leadership Advisory Committee, 2019). Although there is some variance among these committees, they share the common vision of working towards the decolonization and Indigenization of higher education in Canada by achieving equity for Indigenous Peoples, celebrating and embracing traditional knowledge, and Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing, as well as reclaiming Indigenous leadership and self-determination in the institutions of which they are a part of (; IDLC, 2021; Indigenous Senior Leadership Advisory Committee, 2019; OIEC, 2022; OII, 2021). Elders-in-residence programs, traditional ceremonies, and on-the-land programs "can also be robust sites of transformative intellectual development, where knowledge is disseminated to learners through traditional practices, through dialogue, and by analysis of personal experience (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018, p.225). How this would integrate into health professions education, such as nursing and social work, needs further research, guided by Indigenous knowledge holders to ensure self-determination, authenticity, and a decolonized resurgence of Indigenous traditions.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CRITICAL ALLYSHIP AND DECOLONIZING SOLIDARITY IN HPE

Critical allyship is the on-going process of reflection by those in positions of power and privilege in societal systems, and on how to act in solidarity with marginalized groups (McGuire-Adams, 2021; Kluttz et al., 2020; Nixon, 2019). Decolonizing solidarity is perhaps a more appropriate term, as the word 'ally' implies a role or identity – something that is achieved, without requiring further action (Kluttz et al., 2020). Decolonizing solidarity, however, requires that those who call themselves allies work towards dismantling ignorance and complicity in systems of oppression and erasure, acknowledge their own privilege in these systems, and make space for marginalized peoples (Nixon, 2019). Both critical allyship and decolonizing solidarity are processes that involve critical self -reflection, developing allied relationships with Indigenous Peoples, as well as Indigenization and reconciliation work (McGuire-Adams, 2021).

In health professions education, critical self-reflection refers to the fact that allies must reflect upon, and challenge, their own complicity in systems of oppression leading to health inequities for Indigenous students and patients (Nixon, 2019; McGuire-Adams, 2021). In doing so as students, future health care providers, such as nurses, social workers and personal support workers will enter the profession with a critical self-awareness of their own biases towards Indigenous people (McGuire-Adams, 2021). This will enable them to work towards decolonizing any of their own pre-existing discriminatory thoughts and behaviours.

Engagement in this process, in turn, leads to the creation of culturally safe spaces to foster interpersonal relationships (Allen et al., 2020; McGuire-Adams, 2021). This is significant to the Indigenization of HPE, as it supports decolonization through relationship building (Kluttz, et al., 2020). In HPE, having supportive and positive relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students has contributed significantly to the retention and success of Indigenous students (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2019; Pidgeon et al, 2014; Ragoonaden & Mueller, 2017). Furthermore, positive interpersonal relationships between healthcare providers and patients promotes a trusting, therapeutic relationship between patient and healthcare provider (HCP), promoting positive patient outcomes (CNA, 2018; ITK, 2021; Reading & Wien, 2013).

Indigenization and reconciliation work, when applied to post-secondary education, is action for change that is "to be led by Indigenous people, supported by non-Indigenous allies, with everyone sharing and learning from the exchange" (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2019, p. 164). To work towards solidarity in HPE, action must be consistent with Indigenous leadership, governance, as well as Indigenous epistemologies and pedagogies (ANAC, 2009; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Kluttz et al., 2020; McGuire-Adams, 2021; Nixon, 2019; OII, 2021)

## CONCLUSION

The decolonization and Indigenization of health professions education in Canada must occur for the systemic inequities faced by First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples to be dismantled, and for systems-level and transformative change to be created within healthcare and education. Through a literature review on decolonization, Indigenization, and the related theories in instructional leadership for equity, I have identified persistent recommendations for change. These include raising awareness of anti-Indigenous systemic racism in Canada, engaging in critical allyship and decolonizing solidarity with Indigenous communities, as well as taking action to decolonize and Indigenize the Canadian academy based on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's *Calls to Action* (2015). Until (and unless), the fundamental inequities facing Indigenous students, staff, and educators in HPE faculties in Canadian institutions can be decolonized and Indigenized in transformative ways, the health disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students will continue to grow, and the health and well-being of Indigenous peoples in Canada will continue to be severely impacted by systemic racism.

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# Spark the Fire: Building Research Interest and Skills Within Undergraduate Nursing Students in the Northwest Territories

**Teala Gonzalez, Erin Moore, Andréanne Robitaille, Kathleen Scarf, and Anne Walsh**

## INTRODUCTION

**Andréanne Robitaille and Anne Walsh**

My name is Andréanne Robitaille; I had the privilege of instructing the Nursing Research course in the last year of the four-year Baccalaureate of Science in Nursing (BSN), University of Victoria at Aurora College. The intent of this course is to increase students' understanding of nursing scholarship and enhance their ability to comprehend, critique, and use nursing research. In this course, students critically reflect on various scholarly works and research methodologies. They examine their practice in relation to nursing research and learn to pose research questions for evidence-informed practice.

Within that mandate, I organized a Scholarship Day at the end of the Fall semester. It was my first one, but Scholarship Day is a "tradition" at the School of Health and Human Services. This event is a way to show and celebrate students' success and honour students' work.

All fourth year students in the BSN program (n=18) presented their research projects at a virtual poster session. The goal of the assignment was to complete a literature review on a health and wellbeing-related topic that was relevant to northern nursing practice. The students followed the Evidence-informed Practice Process (Mazurek Melnyk & Fineout-Overholt, 2019) for the development of their projects. Through the process, they learned how to cultivate a spirit of inquiry, develop a research question, search and collect the literature and evidence, appraise the evidence, organize their findings, and then create recommendations for the clinical, research, education and/or policy level applicable to our northern context.

In a conversation with Dr. Pertice Moffitt while organizing the 2021 Northern Nursing Scholarship Day, she suggested submitting the three award winner students' posters to the first issue of the Xàgots'eèhk'ǫ̀ Journal. The award recipients would have the opportunity to learn from and about the peer review process inherent in the publication process for this journal. We are grateful to the Xàgots'eèhk'ǫ̀ Journal reviewers for reviewing and accepting our paper.

To put these student posters in context, I wrote this short commentary and shared a few thoughts and questions that came to mind as I lived through the process. I asked the Aurora College Yellowknife campus librarian Anne Walsh to join me in writing, as she assisted students with their literature review for their project. She generously agreed to write and reflect with me.

## 2021 NORTHERN NURSING SCHOLARSHIP DAY

The 2021 Northern Nursing Scholarship Day was organized as a reflexive practice day open to all the students and staff of the BSN, Practical Nursing, and Personal Support Worker programs of the Aurora College School of Health and Human Services. On December 1, 2021 we had the honour of welcoming Dr. John B Zoe (Chairperson Hotıì ts'eeda), Ms. Maggie Mercredi (Knowledge Holder), and Ms. Erica Abel (Alumni of Aurora College BSN program and Indigenous nurse clinician working at Stanton Territorial Hospital, Yellowknife, NT). This year over 100 Aurora College students and faculty at the School of Health and Human Services registered for the event.

The topics the students chose and the unique way they approached them underscore the importance of developing and applying research that is for the North, by the North, and with the North to improve the quality of care, as well as the necessity of decolonizing approaches to advance nursing knowledge. This first exercise as a new instructor and newcomer in a northern post-secondary institution prompted more questions than answers. How can we help ignite the spark in students so that they want to seek and improve their future northern clinical practice? How can we cultivate their spirit of inquiry? How can we help give them confidence in their ability to apply the evidence-informed practice process? How do we reconcile biomedical knowledge and Indigenous knowledge within this evidence-informed nursing practice process? What mechanisms should we put in place in our healthcare system and northern post-secondary institution to enable this dialogue?

On the following pages are the posters and abstracts of the recipients of the 2021 Northern Nursing Scholarship Day awards:

- **Kathleen Scarf** for People's Choice Award
- **Erin Moore** for Scientific Rigor Award
- **Teala Gonzalez** for Creativity Award

Two Awards committees for Rigor (Dr. Kerry Lynn Durnford, Carol Amirault, and Dr. Kathie Pender) and Creativity (Anne Walsh, Axelle Kearnan, Lea Barbosa Leclerc) evaluated the posters and presentations. There was also a People's Choice Award selected by an online survey by their peers after the presentations.

Congratulations to all the 4th-year BSN students for their presentations at the 2021 Northern Nursing Scholarship Day. We hope these initiatives continue to spark the fire of research and inquiry in the newly graduated nurses and one day, some nursing students themselves will become Northern nurse researchers!

***Andréanne Robitaille:*** *I live in Yellowknife and am from from St-Augustin de Desmaures, Quebec. I am a Mom, daughter, sister, partner, friend, registered nurse, researcher/manager (Aurora Research Institute), and instructor (School of Health and Human Services, Aurora College). I am a guest on the land of the Yellowknife Dene First Nations People, Chief Drygeese Territory. My family and I are grateful to feel at home here. If you have comments, questions, or want to connect, here is my email address: arobitaille@auroracollege.nt.ca*

***Anne Walsh:*** *I live in Yellowknife and I've lived in the North for almost 8 years. I am from Newfoundland but lived in a bunch of cities and towns in Ontario. I also raised my son in the West End of Vancouver for 20 years. As a librarian for over 30 years, I started to use research databases before the widespread use of the world wide web. In the early days, you had to "pay by the second" to search these proprietary databases. My research experience is in patents, chemical abstracts, engineering standards, nutraceuticals, silviculture, geology, computer security, and health. I enjoy sharing my knowledge with Aurora College students and collaborating with faculty on the nuances of finding information.*

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## PEOPLE'S CHOICE AWARD

### *To Administer or not to Administer? That is the Antipyretic/Analgesic Question with Childhood Vaccinations*

**Kathleen Scarf, 4th year BSN program University of Victoria at Aurora College**

**Introduction:** Antipyretic analgesics are often used to treat childhood vaccine-associated fever and pain, however, such use can blunt the appropriate immune response of vaccines. This literature review seeks to discover the effect that prophylactic or delayed administration of acetaminophen or ibuprofen may have on childhood vaccination immune responses. **Method:** A literature review was conducted using the CINAHL database. Criteria included peer-reviewed, published within the last 10 years (preferred), randomized controlled trials and external validity, and infant/child subjects. **Results:** Decreased immune response occurred with prophylactic acetaminophen use and pneumococcal conjugate vaccines and DTap-HBV-IPV-Hib vaccines in five Random Control Trials, while one revealed no effects to the MenB, DTap-HBV-IPV-Hib and PCV7 vaccines. Ibuprofen did not affect the immune response with pneumococcal conjugate vaccines and an inactivated influenza vaccine. Primary series and prophylactic use were common themes with decreased immune response, while booster series and delayed use primarily did not affect immunogenicity. However, when immune blunting occurred a majority of antibody levels remained clinically protective. **Discussion:** Caution is warranted with unnecessary antipyretic/analgesic prophylactic use during childhood vaccination until additional research can include greater vaccine coverage. Further investigation of the clinical significance of reduced immunogenicity on disease protection is needed.

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***Kathleen Scarf:*** *I live in Yellowknife, and I've called the Northwest Territories home for the last 8 years. I feel very fortunate to raise my children here while finishing my nursing degree. The idea for this project stemmed from past experiences during my own children's immunizations and the inconsistencies met regarding prophylactic antipyretics/analgesics. My literature review brought me greater understanding of the profound role research has in evidence-based practice and the need for continuity of practice throughout the entire Northwest Territories.*

# To Administer or not to Administer: That is the Antipyretic/Analgesic Question with Childhood Vaccinations

Kathleen Scarf, 4th Year BSN Student, University of Victoria at Aurora College, Dec. 2021

## Statement of the problem

The administration of acetaminophen is recommended by the Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority (NTHSSA) to treat vaccine-associated fever and pain in infants and children,[1] however, the routine use of acetaminophen or ibuprofen with vaccinations can blunt the body's necessary immune response (immunogenicity).[2] Currently, Public Health of the Northwest Territories (NWT) has not implemented its own immunization policies and instead follows the Canadian Immunization Guide,[3] which does not address these specific immunogenicity concerns.[4] Understanding which vaccines are affected, the extent of immune blunting, and the role that timing may play when administering acetaminophen or ibuprofen will help to guide NWT healthcare professional's best practice, especially within the context of the current influenza campaign and covid-19 vaccine eligibility for children ages 5 to 11.

## Research question

What is the effect of prophylactic or delayed administration of acetaminophen or ibuprofen on the immune response of vaccinations in infants and children compared to subjects who received no antipyretic/analgesic intervention?

## Methodology

The CINAHL database was used to search keywords "immune response or effect" and "antipyretic or analgesic or acetaminophen or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory" and "vaccin* or immunization" and "child* or infan*". Advanced criteria included peer reviewed, published within the last 10 years (preferred), randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and external validity.

## Results

### The effect of acetaminophen on immunogenicity

Prophylactic acetaminophen administration with the pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV) was shown to decrease immune responses, however, a high percentage still achieved protective antibody levels,[5-9] whereas its delayed used (between 4-8h) revealed little to no immunogenicity effects.[5 9] Decreased immunogenicity to the DTaP-HBV-IPV-Hib vaccine was also observed.[8] The blunted responses were more evident with primary vaccine dosing than with booster dosing,[5-7 9] except in one study where both doses were negatively affected.[8] However, no significance was found when acetaminophen was concomitantly given with PCV, DTap-HBV-IPV-Hib and MenB vaccines[6] and no immunogenicity concerns occurred with the inactivated influenza vaccine (IIV) and concomitant or delayed acetaminophen administration.[10]

### The effect of ibuprofen on immunogenicity

No significant immune blunting was found with the prophylactic or delayed use of ibuprofen and the IIV,[10] or the prophylactic use of ibuprofen on the PCV.[5 9] Ibuprofen prophylaxis did have a decreased immune effect on the DTaP-HBV-IPV-HiB primary series, specifically with the pertussis and tetanus pathogens, however, antibodies were able to reach clinical protection levels, especially after the booster series.[5 9]

### Evidence-based practice

An article in the Journal for Nurse Practitioners recommends best practice to be the prophylactic administration of antipyretic analgesics with parental concerns of mild vaccine-related effects.[11] This is regardless of the known blunting due to lack of verifying literature.[11] The Canadian Immunization Guide does not recommend prophylactic analgesic use for vaccine-related pain as there is no evidenced benefit, however, it does not address possible analgesic immune blunting.[4]


## Conclusion

Though limited, research revealed the prophylactic use of acetaminophen with primary vaccination was most commonly associated with decreased immune response, although the extent of blunting varied, antibody levels commonly reached protective levels.[5-10] Ibuprofen use, delayed administration (4-8h) and booster series most commonly revealed no immunogenicity concerns.[5-10] Caution should be warranted with unnecessary antipyretic/analgesic prophylactic use during childhood vaccination until additional, statistically powered research can include greater vaccine coverage and further investigate the clinical significance of reduced immunogenicity on disease protection.

## Recommendations for Northern Nursing Practice

- Educate caregivers to administer acetaminophen or ibuprofen as needed if pain or fever occur with childhood vaccination, while cautioning against prophylactic use due to limited research available on immune blunting.
- Ensure alternative and non-pharmacological pain management interventions are included with all client teaching.
- Remain up to date on vaccine literature to guide best evidence-based practice.
- NWT Public Health to implement in house vaccination policies guided by evidence-based literature to standardize and ensure continuity of best practice throughout the NWT.
- Advocate for further research, with a focus on the specific vaccine gaps found within the NWTs Immunization Schedule.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Pam Baert, Public Health Nurse with the Maternal Child Team at NTHSSA and Chris Bessey, Pharmacist with Stanton Territorial Hospital for their contributions to this project.

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**SCIENTIFIC RIGOUR AWARD**

*The ART of Infertility: Frozen-Thawed or Fresh Embryo Transfers*

**Erin Moore, Fourth year BSN program University of Victoria at Aurora College**

**Introduction:** In vitro fertilization (IVF) seeks to achieve conception and maternal and fetal safety, ultimately resulting in live births. However, concerns have arisen regarding the methodology of fresh and frozen-thawed embryo transfers and how their health outcomes compare. **Method:** A literature review using the CINAHL and MEDLINE databases to identify available data and compare the outcomes of frozen-thawed embryo transfers with fresh embryo transfers. Ten relevant peer-reviewed articles published between 2015 and 2021 were found. **Results:** Frozen-thawed embryo transfers appeared to have a decreased risk of ectopic pregnancy, miscarriage, ovarian hyper stimulation syndrome, and preterm birth, in comparison to fresh embryo transfer which also had a fivefold increase in venous thromboembolism (VTE) and pulmonary embolism (PE). Frozen-thawed transfers had an increased risk for hypertensive disorders, macrosomia, and large for gestational age (LGA), which increased the risk for a cesarean section. This research demonstrated conflicting results across the literature and several limitations to the studies. **Discussion:** The research literature indicated that frozen-thawed embryo transfers were becoming the preferred method of IVF, with a possible movement to a freeze-all policy, as it demonstrated an increase in conception and live birth rates. Further research is warranted to comprehend underlying causes of adverse health outcomes associated with IVF.

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***Erin Moore:*** *I live in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, and I was born and raised here. I recently graduated from Aurora College and currently serve my community as a registered nurse. As I raise my family in the North, I look forward to expanding my knowledge and furthering my education in the profession in the hope of one day becoming an educator to future nurses.*

# The ART of Infertility: Frozen-Thawed or Fresh Embryo Transfers

Erin Moore - 4th Year BSN Student, Yellowknife, NT, December 1, 2021

## Statement of the Problem

In vitro fertilization (IVF) is a complex dynamic of protocols, procedures, and treatments utilized to address infertility, which affects 1 in 6 couples in Canada.[1] While the goal is to achieve conception and maternal and fetal safety, resulting in a live birth, concerns have been raised about health outcomes, specifically in the comparison of fresh and frozen-thawed embryo transfers. Though there are currently no IVF clinics in the Northwest Territories (NT), nurses are still responsible for advancing their knowledge regarding Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ART), such as IVF, to facilitate patient understanding of the risks and benefits regarding the methods of transfer[2] and to guide best practice in supporting individuals through the IVF process and in pregnancy.

## Research Question

In women experiencing infertility and undergoing IVF, are frozen-thawed embryo transfers safer and more successful in achieving a live birth outcome, than fresh embryo transfers?

## Methodology

A literature search was conducted using CINAHL and MEDLINE databases resulting in 10 relevant peer-reviewed articles that were published between 2015 and 2021. Key words utilized included "fresh embryo transfer", "frozen-thawed embryo transfer", "perinatal outcomes", "obstetric outcomes", "pregnancy", "assisted reproductive technology", "freeze-all policy", "cryopreservation", and "in vitro fertilization".

## Literature Review

**Frozen-Thawed Embryo Transfers**

- Increased risk of hypertensive disorders of pregnancy (HDP)[3,4] and decreased occurrence of moderate to severe ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome (OHSS).[4,5]
- Significantly increased clinical pregnancy and live birth rates,[4] with a decreased risk of miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy, and preterm birth.[5-8]
- Decreased risk for low birth weight (LBW)[6,9] yet a significantly increased risk of macrosomia and large for gestational age (LGA), resulting in an increased risk of cesarean section.[7]

**Fresh Embryo Transfer**

- Associated with an increased risk for LBW, small for gestational age (SGA),[3,10] ectopic pregnancy,[8] ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome, and miscarriage.[4]
- Fivefold increased incidence of venous thromboembolism (VTE) and pulmonary embolism (PE) during the first trimester.[11]

**Limitations**

The majority of the literature supported the movement to a freeze-all policy for embryos, as it was hypothesized that routine controlled ovarian stimulation for egg retrieval had deleterious effects, creating a suboptimal uterine environment for fresh embryo transfers by potentially reducing endometrial receptivity.[10,12] However, a few researchers cautioned this approach as the underlying mechanisms of the adverse outcomes are still unknown,[3] even with an increase in literature over the past decade, some of which have conflicting findings. Additionally, researchers conducting meta-analysis' identified several limitations in the studies, including methodological errors[4] and uncontrolled confounding variables,[3] which resulted in a few articles being retracted from publication.

(Canva, 2021)

## Recommendations for Northern Nursing Practice

- Further stringent quantitative research is recommended to substantiate and improve the safety of cryopreservation by identifying the underlying causes of adverse health outcomes to inform practice and develop healthy policies.[4,7]
- Conduct longitudinal research to determine any long-term adverse health effects of children conceived through IVF utilizing cryopreservation.[12]
- Utilize newly conducted research to develop comprehensive pregnancy care plans and interventions[3] for individuals who have undergone frozen-thawed or fresh embryo transfers to educate and guide the practice of health care providers across the NT.
- Provide up-to-date learning opportunities focused on patient care in pregnancies conceived through IVF, specifically the risks and benefits of frozen-thawed and fresh embryo transfers.

## Conclusion

The IVF methods of frozen-thawed and fresh embryo transfers possess various fetal and maternal health risks. A significant amount of the literature proposes the supriority of frozen-thawed transfers, however, conflicting results remain among some studies. Further research on the total safety and long-term effects of cryopreservation, will guide the development of care plans and interventions used to best support individuals returning to the NT from undergoing IVF procedures.

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## CREATIVITY AWARD

*PAW-lsy On Approach to Cerebral Palsy: The Effects of Animal Assisted Therapy in Children with Cerebral Palsy*

**Teala Gonzalez, Fourth year BSN program University of Victoria at Aurora College**

**Introduction**: Cerebral Palsy (CP) is the most common motor disability in childhood. Although there is no cure for CP, therapies used for the treatment and rehabilitation of children diagnosed with CP are physiotherapies and occupational therapy. **Method:** This literature review aimed to evaluate the effects of another complementary therapy called Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) for children with CP and the effects it has on rehabilitation and overall care. Although the main interest pertains to children with CP, the search results of AAT and their effects on children with disabilities in general were used as well. CINAHL was the main database used as it allowed for a more in-depth search result and only peer-reviewed articles from reputable sources were selected (n=9). Keywords were: cerebral palsy, children, pet therapy, animal assisted therapy, disability, service animals, and dog therapy. **Results**: There were many positives impacts to AAT found in the literature on cognitive, physical, and psychosocial dimensions of children with CP. **Discussion**: Although the findings suggest many positive increases to the overall quality of life for children with CP, due to limitations like small sample sizes and lack of quality data, there is a strong need for further research.

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***Teala Gonzalez:*** *I live in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories. Being born and raised in Yellowknife has given me a great deal of love for the northern lifestyle and all it has to offer. I am a proud graduate of the Bachelors of Science in Nursing program from the University of Victoria at Aurora College. Currently, I work at Stanton Territorial Hospital in Yellowknife, NT where I had the privilege of doing many nursing placements during my education. I hope to continue to pursue my nursing career in the north and explore remote northern communities.*

# PAW-LSY ON APPROACH TO CEREBRAL PALSY: THE EFFECTS OF ANIMAL ASSISTED THERAPY IN CHILDREN WITH CEREBRAL PALSY

Teala Gonzalez
University of Victoria at Aurora College 2021

## Research Question

In children with Cerebral Palsy, what are the effects of Animal Assisted Therapies and service animals on rehabilitation and overall care?

## Statement of the Problem

Cerebral Palsy (CP) is the most common motor disability in childhood and can be difficult to diagnose at a young age[1]. With rates of disabilities increasing to 14% for the population of the NWT, there is a drastic need to evaluate and incorporate complementary therapies for this population[2]. There are many different manifestations and co-morbidities that can come from a diagnosis of CP. Motor, cognitive, and psychosocial developmental delays, high prevalence of seizure disorders, and sensory deprivation, are all manifestations that can occur with CP[1]. Generally, physiotherapy, assistive devices, and some medications are commonly used to treat and rehabilitate those with CP, however, there are many complementary therapies to consider as nurses when using a holistic approach to health[3]. The use of service animals and Animal Assisted Therapies (AAT) in conjunction with rehabilitation have been researched for children with this condition. As children with CP have many varying forms of underlying conditions and disabilities that can impact their everyday life, what effect does AAT have on the success of rehabilitation and overall care of these children and how can this influence the north?

## Methodology

It is difficult to estimate exactly how many people have CP. Many people with mild CP are never diagnosed, while others may have multiple disabilities which overshadow their CP[3]. Due to this, and although the main question pertains to children with cerebral palsy, the search results of AAT and their effects on children with disabilities related to cerebral palsy were used as well. EBSCO was the main database used as it allowed for a more in-depth search result and only peer-reviewed articles from reputable sources were used. The keywords used to facilitate this search were Cerebral Palsy, children, Pet Therapy, Animal Assisted Therapy, disability, service animals, and dog therapy.

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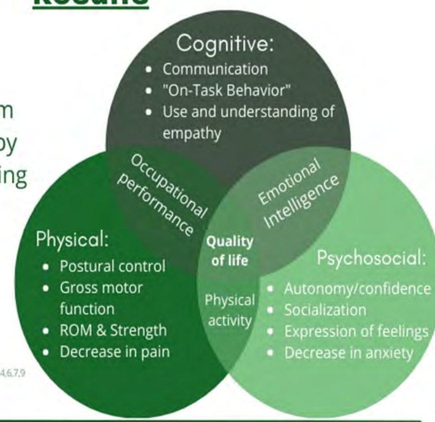
7. Tepfer et al. (2017)
8. Elmaci & Cevizci (2015)
9. Lightsey et al. (2021)
10. Joseph et al. (2016)
11. Goddard & Gilmer (2015)
12. Butterly et al. (2013)

## Results

### Benefits:

Significant impacts from Animal Assisted Therapy seen in three overlapping common themes:

- Increase in cognitive aspects[1,2,3,5,7]
- Increase in physical aspects[2,3,4,5,6,7,9]
- Increase in psychosocial aspects[1,2,4,6,7,9]




### Concerns:

A few common themes of concerns were seen throughout the literature for pet therapy:

- Not enough research[1,8,9]
- Allergies/asthma[1,7,8,9]
- Financial Constraints[7]
- Individual needs of children varies[1,3,4,6]
- Access to services[7]
- Facilities policies on animals[9]

### Limitations:

Within the literature, there were three common limitations to the research:

1. Small sample size[1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9]
2. Lack of research & quality data[1,3,8]
3. Varying disabilities[2,3,5,6]

## Acknowledgements

This research project is dedicated to Wyatt James Dwyer, one of the most resilient people I have ever come to know. I also wish to extend a special thank you to Andréanne Robitaille for providing the support needed to complete this project and for sparking a new found passion for research within nursing.

## Recommendations for Northern Nursing Practice

There are many recommendations for northern nursing that can be made from reviewing the literature. Rates of disabilities are increasing rapidly within the NWT (14.2% in 2017) and are projected to continue to increase . From these statistics and the literature discussed, there is a need to address the possibilities for complementary therapies for this population within the north. Three recommendations for northern nursing practice are advocating for AAT use, increasing nursing education on complementary therapies, and the need for further research on this topic.

### AAT Use within Nursing Practice:

- Collaborating with inter-professional team (Rec therapy, OT/PT, government organizations)
  - Discuss use of complementary therapies for clients
  - Advocate for use of potential future AAT outpatient programs (SPCA & North Country Stables)

### Increasing Education:

- Increase of curriculum content on complementary therapies within nursing programs
- Advocate for professional development focused on complementary therapies
- Collaborate with Inter-professional team to learn roles and uses of therapies for clients

### Further Research:

From reviewing the literature, there was one main common theme of recommendations for further research needed. The addition of further research with larger sample sizes and follow-up studies on long-term effects of AAT are needed to prove the positive impacts from AAT that are being witnessed are valid results.

## Conclusion

Although throughout the literature there were many positives to utilizing AAT for this client population, unfortunately, the common theme of limitations has created a lack of research and evidence to make concrete recommendations. However, from this research, it is clear to see there is a place within northern nursing to advocate for further research for implementing and using AAT for children with CP or related disabilities.

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# Reaching Out: The Aurora Research Institute Outreach Program brings STEM learning to Northern Youth

**Myrah Graham**

## ABSTRACT

This short article introduces the Aurora Research Institute Outreach program, which aims to increase accessibility of learning science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). Free programing for youth and educators is shared to engage and uplift students, so that local capacity can meet the growing northern job market in these fields.

*Daycare kids viewing a solar eclipse in Inuvik, NT. Photo Credit ARI.*

The school bell at East Three Elementary rings, and hundreds of students scatter. Even so, learning is still happening. School-age children constantly learn from their surroundings: At home, from knowledge holders, through play, at camp, online, and across their communities. There is a lot to learn for a young mind, so early support for students is essential. In turn, educators want to "[encourage] and [engage] students' natural ability to wonder, question, and experiment, in order to improve their understanding of how the world works" (Barlow, 2015). The Inuuqatigiit and Dene Kede curricula support this mission, adding that "*an education should teach them about the best of both worlds that the north has to offer*" (Government of the Northwest Territories, 1996). At the Aurora Research Institute (ARI), outreach coordinator Annika Trimble is working with educators to reach these goals.

Starting in 2016, the ARI outreach program was launched collaboratively between Let's Talk Science (a charitable organization focused on STEM education for youth), the Beaufort Delta Education Council (BDEC), and run by staff at ARI. As an outreach coordinator, Trimble serves educators and students across the Beaufort Delta, from Junior Kindergarten (JK) to grade 12. Since 2018, her counterpart Hilary Turko has been providing educational outreach in the South Slave region. An important component of the JK-12 education system is STEM, an acronym denoting science, technology, engineering and mathematics. From botany to robotics, there is no shortage of interesting topics for educators to explore with their students in these fields. However, learning about the latest advances in STEM can sometimes be limited due to the logistical challenges of being so remote. Equipment like drones, 3D printers and introductory tools for coding are often too expensive for teachers to order, especially in smaller communities. What's more, teachers have less time and opportunities for professional development the farther they are from Yellowknife (Actua, 2020). Notwithstanding the costs of travel or shipping, learning about new scientific equipment and technology can seem daunting without any support.

This is where the ARI Outreach Program comes in. Through a free STEM kit loaning program and lesson consultations, teachers can receive training as well as equipment to bring hands-on science learning into the classroom. For example, grade five students across the Beaufort Delta learn about renewable energy. To add to this module, a teacher might ask Trimble for lesson plan ideas; Snap Circuits Green Energy kits would be suggested so that students can safely build their own electrical windmill. An activity guide and training session would also be provided for the teacher to feel confident in delivering this lesson. Alternative hands-on activities using common household materials might be recommended. Additionally, a visit from a role model in the field of renewable energy could be organized. Through these collaborations with local and visiting STEM professionals, memorable learning experiences are delivered for students to play and build on concepts learned in the classroom. On the Outreach program's mission, Trimble says: "We want to connect with our youth early and often, and give them as many opportunities for hands-on scientific learning as possible through their education." (Personal communication, September 20, 2021). By having a good time and learning something, confidence in STEM can help students make informed choices about what they want to strive to be.

*Career fair students in Tuktoyaktuk trying their hand at environmental monitoring activities. Increasing awareness of northern STEM careers helps students recognize the value of STEM education in their own communities. The hands-on experience fosters confidence and lets students envision themselves in those STEM professions. Photo Credit: ARI.*

We know students in the North to be brilliant, curious and industrious. Despite these qualities, we see lower graduation rates in the North compared to the rest of Canada. A 2016 report from the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) showed that an average of 52% of Northwest Territories (NWT) students graduate, as opposed to the national average of 78% (NWT Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Subsequently, northern youth strive less for careers in STEM than their southern counterparts (GNWT, 2019). According to Trimble and Turko, this gap can be bridged. As more jobs in the North become centered in STEM fields, empowering youth to take on these skills will grow in importance. By 2030, over half of the 22,807 forecasted job openings will require a post-secondary education at a minimum (GNWT, 2019). Markedly, pursuing higher education in STEM fields can translate into jobs where northerners are the leaders and decision-makers in the expanding workforce and in their communities, even if they don't work directly in science. For instance, sustainability and resource management led the way in 2021 job postings (Fig 1). These specializations directly translate into taking care of communities and their surroundings. This past year alone saw the NWT leading Canada in the amount of STEM-related job postings (Fig. 2), with projections for more growth in the next decade (ECO Canada, 2021).


*Figure 1: Job postings in 2021 broken down into specializations within environmental science. ECO Canada, 2021*

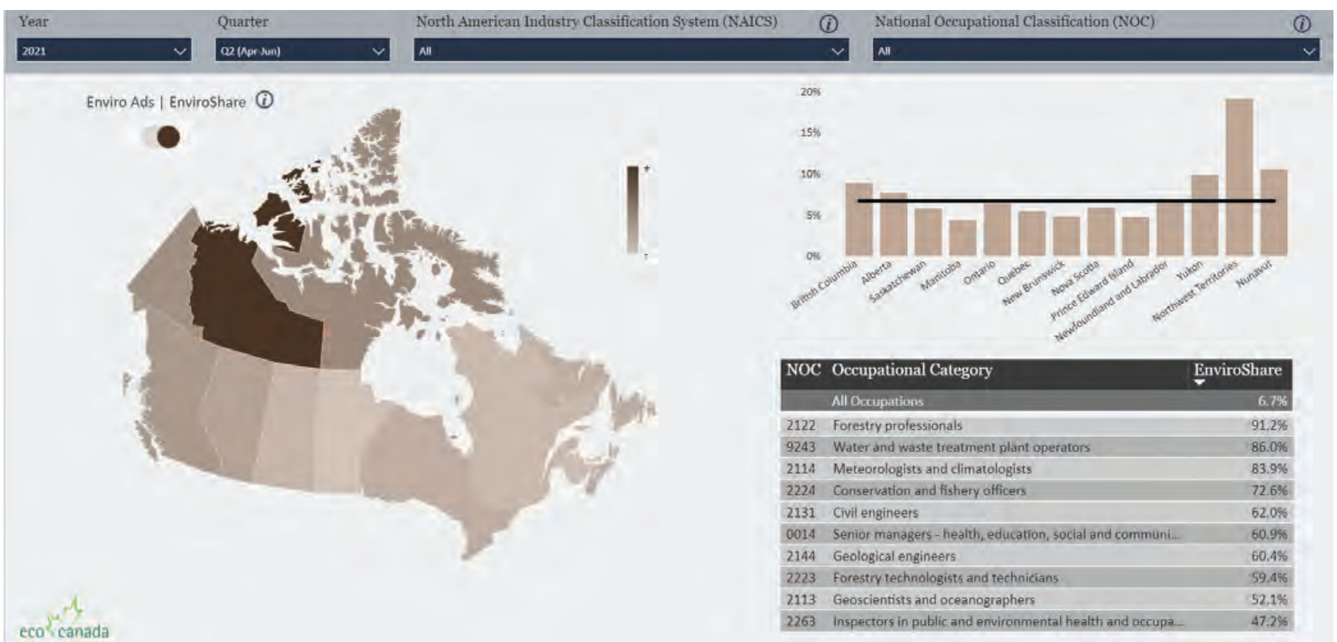


*Figure 2: Share of environmental job postings relative to the rest of Canada, with a table specifying occupational category percentages and a chart showing percent of environmental job posting percentages at the provincial and territorial level. ECO Canada, 2021.*

Concurrently, research into student attitudes on STEM revealed that "Canada's teens want to make a difference, help people, make a contribution, solve problems, and build their own ventures. Yet students don't always understand how STEM learning supports the roles and careers they value" (Let's Talk Science, 2014). Echoing these findings, Trimble asserts:

"If they see how research is useful in our region they might feel confident in pursuing STEM education out of high school. Scientists fly up here to study fish and water and climate change all the time- who better to take on that research and land stewardship role than local youth?" (Personal communication, September 20, 2021).

*Fort McPherson students gather on the land to learn about the local impacts of climate change from Elders and researchers. Students conduct snow surveys and learn about the use of drones and remote sensing in collecting data and detecting changes in the land. Photo Credit: ARI.*

The Land is all around us, where learning is limitless. As a part of this Land, students already have inherent and learned knowledge from growing up on it. Within the communities, a wealth of information exists in our living treasures, Elders and knowledge holders. Knowledge holders are essential in passing on these lived lessons and hold a place of honor in the communities. What is known elsewhere as Traditional Ecological Knowledge, (TEK) is the gift of understanding the world from previous generations to the next. Whenever possible, inviting knowledge holders to share with the students enriches their learning beyond measure. Rather than looking at science and traditional knowledge as separate, ARI tends to see them as collaborative. Design, research and technology are all a part of what makes the iglu brilliant engineering, or a sunburst ruff the ideal feature on a parka (Cotel et. al, 2004). It is knowledge refined and passed down through time.

Through observations about the Land, be it wildlife, water, or weather, northerners are the best placed to notice changes and trends, because they live here and have generations of lived knowledge. Learning the TEK way can also happen alongside the science way, so that the best of both worlds can help youth know how to protect their surroundings and make decisions about the region. As much as STEM is part of the overall ecosystem of learning, local knowledge is part of the ecosystem of living in the North. Both can be given to students so that they may have all the tools at their disposal to succeed.

*Tsiigehtchic students make cyanotypes (sun prints) while at their land camp, learning about the seasons and the return of the sun. Photo credit: Let's Talk Science.*

As school lets out for the day, Trimble heads out the door towards the Children First Centre or the Youth Centre in Inuvik, to offer exploratory hands-on science activities in more relaxed settings for the children. In the South Slave, Turko is engaging youth in Fort Smith at the library and daycare. Looking towards the future, the ARI Outreach program is hoping to reach students in outlying communities on a more regular basis. A step in the right direction, Yellowknife Outreach Coordinator Chris Black has joined the team, effectively stretching their reach across the Tlicho Region. Thinking about the students, Trimble shares: “My heart is hopeful. Our students are awesome. I just want to see them come back to the North with the tools they need to flourish. We have the capacity in the North, we just need to foster it” (Personal communication, September 20, 2021).

*Exploring skulls and bones of NWT wildlife, and other spooky science activities during Halloween at the daycare. Photo credit: ARI*

Are you an educator in the Beaufort Delta or South Slave region of the NWT? Visit nwtstemkits.ca to bring hands-on STEM learning into your classroom or youth-friendly space or contact ARI for hands-on activities that can be done with everyday materials.

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***Myrah Graham** is a queer person of Caribbean descent existing in Inuvik, NT. She is grateful to the Inuvialuit and Gwich’in people whose land she lives on. The author previously held the temporary position of Outreach Assistant at ARI, specifically at the Western Arctic Research Center (WARC). Through that role, Myrah came to learn about the importance of sharing STEM programming and hands-on activities with youth.*

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# Hope

**Sebastian Bernabe**

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This artwork, entitled *Hope*, depicts an Indigenous woman who survived Residential School wearing an orange parka for Orange Shirt Day. She is shown against a background of green symbolizing Nature and Mother Earth. Also included are the flags of Canada and NWT, where many families grow up and survive. Over her head is a drawing of a tipi, a structure in which many Indigenous people were raised and called home. The nose is a symbol of river and water and white clouds and a raven flying! Here is a red hand for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and a poppy to remember them. On the woman's head, the feather is her prayer of hope that women and girls will live happily together with their families. The dream catcher will protect her from bad dreams and will make sure she rests well. The mittens, moccasins, bear print, fire, Inukshuk, and tattoos symbolize Northern life. The artist interspersed drawing with playing the piano in creating this artwork.

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*Born in Fairbanks, Alaska, 8 year old* ***Sebastian Bernabe*** *has had a keen interest in reading and drawing since he was 4 years old. Sebastian loves reading novels and history books and has written and illustrated "The Alaskan Boy Who Explored Bush Kids" and "The Rainbow Fish," an e-book published by the British Columbia Public Library. His art was awarded a national award by Imagine A Canada in June 2022. Besides reading and writing, he is an active participant in sports and music, loves playing piano, and uses drawing and writing to express his feelings. Currently, Sebastian is starting a children's book club for the Yellowknife community. His third book, "I Wish I Lived in the Library" was published in English and French in October 2022. Sebastian and his family live in Yellowknife.*

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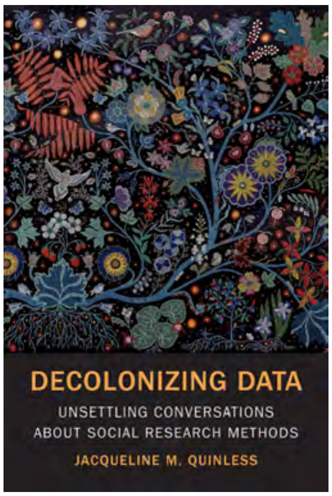
# Book Reviews




## QUINLESS, J. (2022) *DECOLONIZING DATA: UNSETTLING CONVERSATIONS ABOUT SOCIAL RESEARCH METHODS.* UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO PRESS.

**Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox**

The eminent scholar Vine Deloria Jr.'s infamous August 1969 *Playboy* essay "Anthropologists and Other Friends", later published as a chapter in *Custer Died for Your Sins* (1969), described exploitative practices of "anthros" researching American Indian Reservations each summer. Deloria re-framed the authority-endowing anthropological fieldwork rite of passage as an exploitation ritual required by the discipline. Newly minted anthropologists went on to achieve status and careers on the backs of data mined from Indigenous Peoples, and often deployed data to Indigenous disadvantage. This critique launched awareness among first anthropologists and then social scientists generally that maybe Indigenous Peoples should be doing their own research, for their own benefit, according to their own values, in their own ways. In the late 1990s when I began graduate studies, debates over the content and legitimacy of traditional knowledge (as it was then called) hotly raged, as though the debate was about something other than white academics seeking to maintain their grip on institutional power at the expense of Indigenous research methods. Back then, participatory action research was a revolutionary paradigm, mainly owing to its novel challenge to white academic domination and power. This was followed by a period where Indigenous participation in academia gave rise to what Shawn Wilson characterizes as a shift from "Indigenous perspective(s) in research" to "researching from an Indigenous paradigm" (Wilson,2001,p.175). One such Indigenous research paradigm is Two-Eyed Seeing, a paradigm distinguished by its transcendence of transactional and interpersonal relations, through an ecological-relational positionality contextualized by engaging within a colonial research context, and issuing from Indigenous conceptions of ecologically grounded inter-relational sustainability (Marshall, 2020), an aspect of the paradigm which has been more recently labeled and theorized as grounded normativity (Coulthard, 2014).

This book examines ways that sociological research practices, including relating to the analysis of quantitative, statistical, and qualitative information works to colonize and re-affirm colonial understandings of Indigenous Peoples' social dimensions of health. The Two-Eyed-Seeing paradigm both informs and is rejected by Quinless in her contribution to unsettling mainstream sociological research methods. Based primarily on evidence drawn from the author's research and experiences in British Columbia, *Decolonizing Data's* target audience is non-Indigenous social science researchers, challenging them to contest "deeply ingrained structures of inequality" (p.xvi) in their research practice. The author engages in relational accountability partly through identifying herself as a person of mixed European and Central India descent. Quinless argues that ongoing colonization by the state imposes western notions of wellness on Indigenous Peoples over Indigenous ones, consequently contributing to perpetuating health inequities. Therefore, social science research must combat this persistent injustice by decolonial allyship demonstrated through settler research methods shaped primarily by Indigenous values and practices (p.xiii).

For the author, such decolonial praxis is enacted by weaving western and Indigenous theory and research paradigms to illustrate the potential for “braiding” an Indigenous research paradigm with western theory and standard statistical methods, to illuminate strengths-based categories of Indigenous well-being. Bourdieu’s theory of social capital (Bourdieu, 1975), built out through a secondary literature applying social capital’s theoretical concepts within Indigenous communities, plays a central role in the author’s approach. Connecting social capital with a perspective developed by the First Nations Health Authority in British Columbia known as First Nations Perspective on Wellness (FNPOW), is Quinless’ contribution to “Two-Eyed Seeing” and decolonized research.

While the first three chapters contextualize the health status of Indigenous Peoples and their colonial impact antecedents, chapter four sketches Bourdieu’s notion of social capital, important to foregrounding and legitimating its use as an analytical framework to conceptualize and understand what does – and what should – go on in First Nation communities to promote well-being. The utility of this theory is substantiated through a thoughtful analysis of colonial health system impacts on Indigenous Peoples, and a description of the First Nations Health Authority in British Columbia as a form of Indigenous health governance, which the author identifies as an important element of Indigenous strengths-based wellness. Social capital as a theoretical underpinning of both research method (such as defining measurable categories) and results interpretation index, stands in contrast to standard well-being indexes that over-emphasize and thereby entrench narratives of Indigenous deficit, without measuring Indigenous strengths. Findings in this and the subsequent chapter analyzing quantitative measures show how standard well-being indexes elide the role of the state in creating health inequities. This point is highlighted through the fifth chapter’s discussion of the Transgenerational Trauma Index Score, a measure generated from results of the 2012 Aboriginal Peoples’ Survey. With a focus on quantitative information extracted from the 2012 Aboriginal Peoples’ Survey and 2011 National Household Survey, chapter five offers quantitative analysis through categories defined within the FNPOW, which are argued to be more culturally relevant and aligned with Indigenous world views than standard quantitative survey categories.

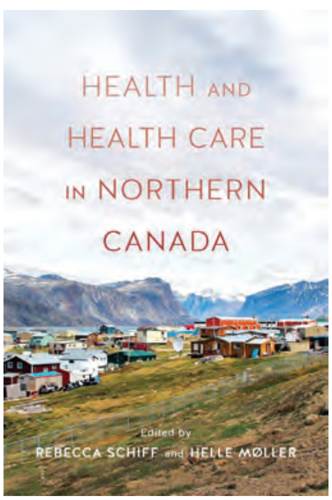
One difficulty in the book is its use and treatment of the Two-Eyed Seeing paradigm. A twenty-five-year-old Indigenous research method popular particularly within health and wellness research, it often garners rather less explanation in most academic work than it merits. That is certainly the case here. Less than one page is devoted to its description, in contrast to eighteen pages devoted to social capital theory, and six pages dedicated to the First Nations Perspective of Wellness (FNPOW). The reader is given to believe that Two Eyed Seeing merely advocates for using both Indigenous and western knowledge together when doing research.

In fact, its originator Miqmaq Elder Albert Marshall (Marshall, 2020) explains the Two Eyed Seeing paradigm in his language as “Etuaptmumk” (pronounced Eh’-tah-wup’-te-mumk). Etuapmumk holds that each individual must interrogate their own ways of knowing, to fine tune so that collaboration can occur through co-learning, and transcultural/transdisciplinary collaboration. Essential to this paradigm is netukulimk or “sustaining ourselves”, in a way that constantly upholds balance not only in relation to each other, but within the natural world. This element establishes it as a classic Indigenous research paradigm owing to its rootedness in an ecological/all of creation and seven-generation relational and time horizon. This temporally and relationally expansive orientation is shaped by principles of practice including respect, relationship, reverence, ritual, repetition, responsibility and reciprocity in an ecological sense, where all of creation is deserving of the seven "R" principles that are essential elements of co-existence. The principles are brought to life through "co-learning": a transcultural, collaborative relational project. According to Marshall, while we only have two eyes, this paradigm is about seeing through and with multiple perspectives where "one is not above the others", and instead the challenge is to "weave back and forth" between and with different perspectives. As a result of employing this approach, "promising practices for engaging in a co-learning journey", Indigenous control and perspectives are centered, mindful of power relations in collaborations to avoid dominance of western paradigms, and instead promote reciprocity, and actions resulting in systemic transformation. (Marshall, 2020)

Throughout *Decolonizing Data*, Quinless states her work is informed by Two-Eyed Seeing, yet ultimately questions its usefulness as both a method and explanatory tool owing to her assessment that it:

> "…is more of a principle than a method per se. It is not trauma-informed, which renders it problematic…[and]…does not braid Indigenous and western epistemologies together at specific stages in the research process (e.g. research scoping, data collection, data processing, interpretation, and writing), which poses difficulty with praxis" (page 111).

These failings are explained with brevity: All of three sentences in the conclusion chapter of the book, without providing the reader with an account of Two-Eyed Seeing as a complex, ecologically rooted paradigm explicitly acknowledging the colonial context within which research occurs. However, this brief analysis offers an interesting starting point, and perhaps a cautionary tale for researchers employing Two Eyed Seeing in their work, as impetus to treat this Indigenous research paradigm as the nuanced and complex analytical method that it is, rather than a limited research principle.




## BOOK REVIEW: SCHIFF, R., & MOLLER, H., (EDS.). (2022). *HEALTH AND HEALTH CARE IN NORTHERN CANADA.* UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO PRESS.

**Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox**

With a focus on Indigenous peoples and Indigenous social determinants of health, this volume offers twenty chapters of thoughtful, well-researched, and diverse perspectives of important acute and long-term institutional and practice-based challenges for provincial and territorial Northern, and provincial rural and remote community health care in Canada. This rich and important collection of mostly applied research studies contributes to a growing consensus supporting the necessity and urgency of a culturally safe, flexible, and innovative health system evolution. An overarching theme is recognition of and respect for Indigenous peoples' rights, contextualized through ongoing colonization, its attendant social suffering, and the importance of Indigenous consent and cultural strengths-based interventions for effective health services and research. The editors' analytical introductory and concluding essays orient the reader to important discrete issues and thematic connections throughout each section, and identify promising areas of research and practice.

A significant methodological issue of note is the definition of "North". Based on a notion of North guiding the Northern Development Minister's Forum and adopted by the Conference Board of Canada Centre for the North, and subsequently by Statistics Canada, this definition of North includes most of Canada. According to Statistics Canada:

> "The North refers to the northern parts of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, and Newfoundland and Labrador—collectively, the 'Provincial North'—as well as the three territories (Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut), per geographical boundaries adopted by the Conference Board of Canada's Centre for the North (Map 1). Although the North accounts for the majority of Canada's landmass, about 6% of the Canadian population resided in the North in 2017." (Statistics Canada, 2019)

Contrast this with the definition of the North offered by Natural Resources Canada:

> "The northern regions of the provinces, which are north of the limit of isolated permafrost, also include the seven provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador. Combined the territories and the northern portions of these provinces represent, just less than two-thirds of Canada's landmass. The presence of permafrost is just one of many ways of demarcating the northern region of Canada, as it provides a natural boundary between northern and southern Canada." (Natural Resources Canada, 2017)

The definition adopted by the volume editors sees a geographical southern limit pushed near to the border with the United States, rationalized by conflating the concepts of "North" with "rural" and "remote" (pp.5-8). The definition encompasses for example, most of the province of Ontario, including up to and most of its border with the United States. By this definition, only the populous area of southern Ontario is considered "south".

Such a definition may make sense to readers in Toronto. It does not make much sense to those in the territorial norths, or even those residing in the most northerly areas (those with discontinuous permafrost) of the provinces. Call it "rural" or "remote: Defining southern areas as Northern owing to some, but not all, North-South commonalities has the effect of minimizing significant and unique factors pertaining to combined climate, ecology, socio-economic, and infrastructure realities that do not as a complex manifest in much of the geographic area covered by this volume. Perhaps more troubling is that including the majority of Canada's landmass in a definition of "North" has implications for how the funding and policies of the federal government in particular is applied with respect to badly needed research and infrastructure resources earmarked for "the North". As such definition creep escalates, alarm bells should be ringing for policymakers in the territorial norths participating in forums and initiatives focusing on Northern issues. Indeed, contributors Lavoie et.al. (391) note in their chapter on health policy, that health service inadequacy often issues from policies created by and for southern systems which cannot accommodate Northern realities. By defining "North" as the vast majority of Canada's geography, and rendering it a catchphrase for multiple and diverse institutional, climactic, and socio-economic realities, it becomes a less meaningful demarcation of difference for those developing health policy.

As a result, both the insights and innovations in various chapters, while falling within a category defined as Northern, divide starkly between contexts in the territorial Norths and the provinces. For example, three of the excellent chapters in section three (Matheson et al., Mushquash et al., and Spadoni et al.) focus on northern and remote Ontario communities' innovative approaches to treatment interventions. These interventions are only possible in contexts with access to significant institutional supports and services, such as those available in more populous Canadian provinces.

It is important to note that innovations created within well-resourced provincial health systems (as compared to those health systems in the territorial north) may minimize glaring disparities between provincial and territorial institutional and research resources that enable innovative solutions. Or conversely, categorizing rural innovations as “northern” implies innovation in the territorial north is possible, despite a context where not only do most communities lack basic health care, but also lack access to specialized institutions, research, and data capacity within much less developed territorial health systems, as compared to larger provincial systems such as Ontario’s.

The editors are to be congratulated on expertly assembling a broad-based survey of research into critical social and Indigenous determinants of health, including through chapters offering detailed accounts of Indigenous conceptions of well-being. In addition, individual chapters particularly in part one of the volume assess how specific health determinants impact Indigenous well-being, which has implications for health programs and services. Colonization, inequity, and attention to the Calls to Action and Justice of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) and Missing and Murdered Women and Girls Inquiry (2019) respectively, are identified as important future frameworks for research and innovation. The editors have skillfully assembled a high quality and insightful volume reflecting the normalization of culturally safe health research being undertaken in Northern, remote, and Indigenous communities. This volume should be considered essential reading for health and governance researchers, policy makers, and practitioners seeking examples of inspiring research and responsive health service provision in Canada, and examples of flexible policy making responsive to unique contexts and needs of Indigenous populations in both Northern and southern Canada.

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***Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox*** *attended primary and high school in Inuvik, then went on to earn a BA and MA in Political Science at the University of Alberta, and received a PhD from Cambridge University during 2005. For the past twenty-five years, Stephanie has worked for Indigenous peoples’ organizations across the NWT on Treaty and self government negotiations and implementation. She is currently Scientific Director of Hotıì ts’eeda, a Canadian Institutes of Health Research-funded research support unit hosted by the Tłı̨chǫ Government. Stephanie lives in Yellowknife with her spouse Andrew and their two teenage boys.*

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# In Memoriam: Elder Morris Neyelle, Délı̨nę

**Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox**

*Elder Morris Neyelle, attending Hotıì ts'eeda Ełèts'ehdèe, in 2019. Photo: Amos Scott.*

Born near Tulita in 1951, fluent in his Délı̨nę Got'ine dialect, Elder Morris Neyelle was a hunter and fisher as well as a talented photographer, artist and drum maker, a published author, and an esteemed cultural knowledge holder. He survived residential school. He attended the Hotıì ts'eeda Ełèts'ehdèe each year, sharing his cultural knowledge and kindness with participants from across Canada, continuing his longstanding generosity to researchers. Morris and his wife Bernice frequently welcomed researchers and students into their home. Morris would often take the newly arrived, often new-to-the-North, under his wing and orient them to the culture and beauty of his home community.

Morris had an insatiable curiosity and a wealth of knowledge of the land and the history of his family and community. As the keeper, translator, and transcriber of his father Johnny Neyelle's journals, he realized a long-held determination to publish these as the book, *The Man Who Lived With a Giant (Fletcher and Neyelle, 2019)*. The book's chronicles reflect grounding insights and understandings valuable to future generations of Délı̨nę Got'ine and researchers. Morris would often draw on his father's journals in our conversations over the years, whether about tanning hides or the self government agreement negotiations. The last time I spoke with him in person was at an author signing event at the Book Cellar in Yellowknife in late 2019, a few months before the Covid-19 pandemic. It was wonderful to congratulate him on his latest achievement, and ask after Bernice and his family. Before parting, he reached into his pocket and pulled out a bone pipe he had carved. "This is for you" he said, the gift bestowing us with a shared quiet moment of joy and contemplative appreciation, followed by a discussion of the craft of its making.

At each year's Ełèts'ehdèe, Hotıì ts'eeda brings together researchers and cultural knowledge holders from across Canada to share best practices and provide direction to Hotıì ts'eeda for the coming year. Held on the land near Yellowknife (and virtually during the pandemic) the gathering includes tipi sessions, which provide health researchers and cultural knowledge holders the opportunity to share space, research results, and cultural knowledge with participants, creating a rich intercultural knowledge exchange and relationship building experience. Morris participated each year, and during the last two years included videos made on the land near Délı̨nę to demonstrate land-based knowledge and teachings to augment live virtual knowledge sharing sessions.

Knowledgeable and generous, Morris' contributions helped to build a community of health researchers, practitioners, and Indigenous knowledge holders dedicated to thinking about the land and environment, language, Indigenous health, and health education in ways rooted in Indigenous strengths, land, language, and culture. He had a gift for bringing non-Indigenous researchers and policy makers into relationship with his community, opening up pathways for creating dialogue and understanding to help further Indigenous self-determination, and orient health research and decision makers to the realities of Indigenous peoples in Délı̨nę, as a basis for thinking about issues and barriers facing Indigenous peoples across the NWT and Canada. He traveled across Canada contributing to a wide variety of research projects and representing his community in a variety of forums, sought after by researchers for his ability to articulate concepts from his own culture and link them to academic concerns in ways that expanded researchers' understandings of the importance of Indigenous knowledge and epistemology to enhance their own research methods and findings.

Ultimately, Morris was failed by the very institutions and people he had worked to educate and welcome. In Délı̨nę, health care is provided through a health centre plagued by staffing that is inconsistent and often overworked and under-resourced, within a system that struggles to provide culturally safe care and continuity of care. After several years seeking treatment for ongoing stomach pain, Morris flew himself to Yellowknife in early March 2022, where he sought treatment at the Stanton Hospital emergency room, and was immediately diagnosed with late stage colon cancer, undergoing surgery the next day. He passed away within weeks.

Refusing painful cancer treatments in the south, Morris chose to return to Délı̨nę soon after his surgery, to spend the time left to him with his wife Bernice, their children, extended family, and community. In an interview with CBC North radio about his situation, Morris sought to raise awareness about the importance of early cancer detection, and struggled to make sense of how his advanced case was undetected: "Why have I been treated this way? Is it because I'm an Aboriginal person? That's the question I ask myself." (CBC News, 2022)

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***Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox**, PhD, is the Scientific Director for Hotıì ts'eeda. Getting to know Morris was one of the highlights during the two decades she worked with the community of Délı̨nę's self government negotiating team, and then as the implementation director who led the technical team that established the Délı̨nę Got'ine Government.*

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# In Memoriam: Alfred Moses

**Norman Snowshoe**

Alfred Ronnie John Moses was born in Fort McPherson on July 4, 1977 to Martha and Winston Moses. Martha and Winston's only son Alfred was raised in Fort McPherson for the first four years of his life, and then they

all moved to Inuvik at the age of five to start his educational journey in kindergarten at the Sir Alexander Mackenzie School. He graduated from Samuel Hearne Secondary School in 1995. After graduating high school, he continued his postsecondary education; first with Red Deer College and then at the University of Alberta where he completed his Bachelors of Kinesiology and Sport Studies.

Alfred had a particular love of sports and gained a lot of mentors through his many coaches and teammates. Alfred was an advocate for sports and recreation and, as a young man living a very healthy lifestyle, he participated in multiple sports such as basketball, track and field, and wrestling. Being involved in sports was the start of his traveling, and he attended tournaments all over Canada and even the United States. He was always proud when he or his friends would win championships and they were always excited to get pictures taken together. This was where most of his true friendships were made.

Alfred came back home to work as a Community Wellness Coordinator for the Inuvik Health Authority with the Department of Health and Social Services. One of his goals for the community was to start a Beaufort Delta-wide non-smoking campaign: "Don't Be A Butt Head." Through this campaign he helped a lot of people and they supported him by giving up smoking, especially his parents when he made his mother break a cigarette in half and she never smoked again. This campaign helped to pass a bylaw that restricted smoking in some of the public areas of Inuvik while Alfred was a Town Councillor with the Town of Inuvik. He then continued working in the wellness field and took a position at the Diavik Diamond Mine as a Hygienist and Wellness Coordinator and passed on his gained skills to those he worked with for many years.

Alfred decided he wanted to put his name forward for the Legislative Assembly in the 2011 NWT election and he won his seat as the MLA for Inuvik Boot Lake by just five votes. In 2015 he was appointed to Cabinet and served as the Minister for Education, Culture, and Employment, the Minister for Youth, and the Minister for Housing

and Municipal and Community Affairs. During this time, he advocated for many things and had a hand in many great initiatives such as the junior kindergarten program, the anti-bullying legislation, the implementation of 9-1-1 emergency services for across the Northwest Territories, affordable housing, as well as ensuring our Elders were well taken care of. He loved being able to help people all across the north, especially our community. He always welcomed anyone who needed help on items such as housing, addictions, and medical support. Alfred made time for one-on-one meetings for coffee and chats as he believed in an open-door policy and was always so approachable and often had people reach out to him from other communities that weren't in his constituency.

After his role in the Territorial Legislature, Alfred took on a role with the Inuvik Warming Shelter because he wanted so very much to help the vulnerable people of Inuvik – to make sure people had a safe space and make sure it was known and addressed as an important issue for the people in his community. He was the type of person, that if it was a hot summer day, he would make time to hand out some cold water to everyone, one time making it an afternoon goal with his dad Winston.

Alfred had a lot of love from his biggest supporters, his parents Martha and Winston along with his sisters Agnes, Laura, Stephanie, and Heather. Although Alfred was devoted to his work in all of his careers, he was most importantly a family man. He made sure to always put his family first. His nieces and nephews were his favorite past time, as well as making his parents brunch on special occasions. He enjoyed attending community events and to jig and jive at any old-time dance, one time as the King of the Muskrat Jamboree with his Queen Greta Sittichinli. He was an enthusiast for exercise and running marathons and even completed in the Canadian Death Race in Grande Cache, Alberta. He loved to canoe and be on the land hiking and always taking the scenic route, he travelled both by canoe through the Northwest Territories on the Mackenzie River and drove all across the country and to Alaska at one time. Alfred loved to read and write and that shined through as inherited from his dad Winston, a great public speaker, a man of many words, with guidance and prayers for everyone.

Alfred had an infectious and joyous laugh, he was always smiling and encouraging people to be and do their best. He joked a lot but was also wise, he made a difference. He always put everyone before himself, as a leader and role model. Alfred helped a lot of people and touched so many lives during his short time here. Through his parents he was a man of prayer and believed in God and his savior Jesus Christ. With his family in heaven, we know he will continue to watch over his loved ones and keep everyone he knew in his prayers.

Alfred was very passionate about supporting and contributing to local organizations in need. He recently sold a lot of his traditional arts and crafts to support the East Three Elementary School by donating the amount he made to the students for their breakfast program. Alfred believed that the students needed to start their day with a good first meal. The family welcomes the continuation of his generous legacy by inviting contributions to organizations he loved supporting which included: the Inuvik Food Bank, the Inuvik Homeless Shelter, the Terry Fox Run, and the East Three School and its students, as he knew they would be the next leaders of his beloved community.

Alfred, you were the voice for our people, community, and region and you will be greatly missed!

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***Norman Snowshoe*** *is the godfather of Alfred Moses. He provided this eulogy for Alfred's Celebration of Life on August 2, 2022 in Inuvik.*

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# In Memoriam: Deborah Simmons (1962-2022)

**Jess Dunkin, Jean Polfus, and Tee Wern Lim**

*Deb Simmons in Tulít'a, NT, 2013 (Photo: Jean Polfus).*

Our dear friend and colleague Deborah Simmons passed away on October 28, 2022. Deb was a brilliant and generous thinker who worked tirelessly to centre Indigenous voices, knowledges, languages, and governance in research and land and wildlife management. We could not think of a more fitting journal in which to honour Deb's memory than the inaugural issue of Xàgots'eèhk'ǫ. In so many ways, this journal embodies the research ethics and practices that Deb modelled and supported in the Sahtú and beyond.

If you ever had the chance to travel with Deb, you would have observed the immense network she developed over the course of her life. No matter where she was, Deb would run into people she knew, sharing hugs and laughs with friends in airports from Toronto to Inuvik. Deb grew up in Fort Smith and Yellowknife, with formative trips into Shúhtagot'ı̨nę Nę́nę́ (Mackenzie Mountains) accompanying her father on Dall sheep research trips with Dene families. Many elders in the Sahtú remembered her as a girl and would invite her for tea or tease her with old stories of mosquitos and rivers. During her post-secondary schooling Deb cultivated life-long friendships with revolutionary thinkers who inspired her activism and passion for interdisciplinary and applied research, and with whom she continued to collaborate throughout her career.

After completing her PhD dissertation on the political economy of Indigenous resistance at York University and teaching at the University of Manitoba, Deb returned to the NWT to work with the Sahtú Land Use Planning Board, Dene Náowérә́ Chets'elә (Délı̨nę Uranium Team), and the Délı̨nę Knowledge Project. Starting in 2012, she served as executive director of the ʔehdzo Got'ı̨nę Gots'ę́ Nákedı (Sahtú Renewable Resources Board - SRRB), a post she held until her death. Across these organizations and roles, Deb developed and supported countless projects, which shared a commitment to: Indigenous self-determination and governance, particularly related to nę (the land); Dene kədə (language) and Dene ts'ı̨lı̨ (way of life); and ethical, community-led research. The full extent of

Deb's achievements is too substantial to list here, and so we offer a few examples of contributions we observed in our work with her and which speak to the theme of this inaugural issue and her dedication to łeghágots'enetę (learning together).

Under Deb's leadership, the SRRB, a co-management board with a mandate to maintain Dene and Métis harvesting traditions and keep nę and tı̨ch'ádíı (animals) healthy for future generations, developed a focus on programming for youth. As in research, it was important to Deb that this programming be responsive, so the SRRB asked youth what they needed. Youth explained that they needed opportunities on nę to learn and practice Dene kədə and Dene ts'ı̨lı̨, including hunting, trapping, hide tanning, and spirituality. The SRRB has hosted and supported a number of on the land camps for youth over the last decade, including Dene Ts'ı̨lı̨ Schools and Nę K'ə́dıkə́ - Keepers of the Land trainings, with each session learning from and building on the previous program. Deb also supported the formation of the Sahtú Youth Network, which continues to play an important advocacy and programming role in the region. With the goal of supporting young people to be capable, confident, and connected, these programs have brought youth together with knowledge holders and centred Dene and Métis ts'ı̨lı̨. They have also given youth opportunities to complete other land-based certifications and further develop skills in research and monitoring. In the emergence and evolution of the SRRB's youth programming, which has also included hiring Dene and Métis youth as interns, we see Deb's foundational commitment to supporting young people in the Sahtú. In particular, she worked tirelessly to create opportunities for youth to feel at home on nę and in leadership roles, recognizing the value of their contributions to social and environmental governance now and in the future.

Deb had a way of materializing people to realize ambitious projects and goals. What appeared to be sleight of hand was in fact a combination of her sprawling network and her ability to bring people together and inspire collaboration across disciplines. Deb understood that interdisciplinary teams were the key to moving projects forward at the pace she envisioned. She worked with researchers from linguistics, sociology, anthropology, climate science, health, education, limnology, contaminants, food security, and caribou ecology – to name just a few. Deb had an astounding ability to see thin threads of connection between ideas (in an academic sense) and the on-the-ground needs of communities, and would skillfully mobilize researchers and funding to ensure communities could answer questions of importance to them. Many colleagues and students brought into projects through Deb's network-building had the opportunity to live and work in the Sahtú, where they gained valuable experience in community-led research methodologies and had the chance to share warm meals, coffee, and complex academic discussions with Deb. The work wasn't always easy, but it was rewarding, and Deb was a tireless champion and cheerleader, freely sharing opportunities, encouragement, and praise.

During the initial COVID-19 lockdown in 2020, Deb organized a series of virtual study circles about Dene and Métis history to keep people across the Sahtú connected, using an approach she and the SRRB had previously piloted in a project on Dene kədə and ts'ı̨lı̨ revitalization efforts. What began as an antidote to isolation was the genesis of a multi-year project with multiple funders and collaborators across the country to help Sahtú communities document the impacts of the Norman Wells oilfields on nę and Dene ts'ı̨lı̨, and to support community involvement in closure and reclamation planning. Study circles remain a critical component of this ongoing project. They provide an opportunity for community members to collaboratively interpret archival materials, to tell stories about Dene and Métis experiences of and engagements with the Norman Wells oilfields, and to provide ongoing direction to the research team, which includes community experts and academics. More than an opportunity to learn together, this innovative approach to gathering, synthesizing, and analyzing information reflects Deb's commitment to research that is community-led, reciprocal, accountable, and respectful.

*Deb Simmons with youth participants at the second Dene Ts’ı̨lı̨ School at Dəocha (Bennett Field) in August 2017 (Photo: Jess Dunkin).*

There is so much more that could be said about Deb’s contributions to education and research in the Sahtú, the North, and beyond, to say nothing of her many other passions (which included worm composting, art and music, language, country food, and collecting books – oh so many books). We hope this is just the first of many published tributes. One area that deserves sustained attention is her support for Indigenous-led caribou conservation. This paradigm-shifting work has included the adoption of community conservation plans and the development of public listening sessions, a model for public hearings that centres Indigenous voices, knowledges, and languages. We know that her many collaborators, colleagues, friends, and mentees will carry on the work to which Deb committed her life.

Recognizing both the importance of and the barriers that exist to spending time on nę, Deb established the Dene Ts’ı̨lı̨ - Dene Way of Life Fund. The fund will support Sahtú Dene and Métis youth to live with and learn from elders and knowledge holders on nę. For more information and to donate, visit: https://makewaygifts.secure.force.com/donate/?id=a3061000002oeAh.

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***Jess Dunkin*** *is a settler historian and writer who lives in Sǫ̀mba K’è (Yellowknife, NT). She met Deb in 2016 and is fortunate to have called her a colleague, mentor, and friend.*

***Jean Polfus*** *is a settler who is grateful to have lived and worked in Tulít’a, NT, with Deb as a mentor and friend for 6.5 years. She now lives in the unceded territory of the sqilxʷ/syilx peoples (Okanagan Nation) in Kelowna, BC, where she works on caribou recovery plans for the Government of Canada.*

***Tee Wern Lim*** *is a Settler-Immigrant from Aotearoa/New Zealand who credits Deb with a big role in his moving north ten years ago. Tee is a PhD student at the University of British Columbia and Senior Research Advisor with the Tłı̨chǫ Government Department of Culture and Lands Protection.*

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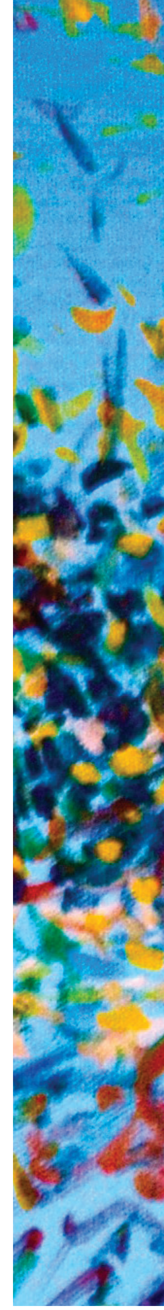


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