"Melq'ilwiye" Coming Together in An Intersectional Research Team – Using Narratives and Cultural Safety to Transform Aboriginal Social Work and Human Service Field Education[1]

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Abstract

This article describes a unique community-based, participatory action research partnership between Elders, an urban Aboriginal community health and social services agency, Aboriginal university faculty, non-Aboriginal faculty, and research participants working together to develop culturally safe best practices in social work and human service field education in Aboriginal community health settings. The article reflects on the process of creating the space to talk together about issues of power, trust, and relationship with respect to histories of colonization past and present within research partnerships. The authors use narratives to link their experiences working as members of this interdisciplinary and intersectional research team moving across various social locations. Experiences are discussed alongside descriptions outlining the process of engagement for respective research team members within a culturally safe and intersectional framework. Grounding the research team in its community health context is *Melq'ilwiye,* the Secwepemc word for coming together. Thompson Rivers University (TRU) and Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT) campuses are located on the traditional territory of the Secwepemc and Nlaka'pamux peoples, noted throughout the paper as Aboriginal.

Key Words: community health; Aboriginal field education; Aboriginal students; cultural safety; intersectionality; intersectional research teams; narratives; storytelling; social work; human service

Introduction

We would like to begin with a story offered by Elder, Mike Arnouse, who is a part of our research team and who has been involved with our students at TRU.

> It was mainly my uncle Jim who told me about a journey that was the message to young kids going out on journey in their life — it was like a person was

walking through the woods and he really has to look at everything from tiniest creatures to bright coloured plants whether they are medicinal or beautiful and stop and look at them — especially the landmarks — you have to go around and look at everything — keep the picture in your mind and your own story of what you seen — but that sometimes takes a lot of work — your mind, heart, body and spirit ... so sit down and find a comfortable place on a rock and rest and look back at what you have just seen as you walked on the path and when you have rested enough you can get up and go again and continue to do the same thing. Because if you don't do that — to look back where you came from and to remember all the landmarks in your life you get lost and you lose the vision of your goal. It's a short little story that means a whole great deal — my uncle told me that one time when I was tired and whining away and he told me that story ... make some tea he said and sit down and visit with him. When I was rested I was laughing and on my way again. It was so easy when I would get stuck I could go ... uncle — now I have to rely on my memory now and my own trail. (Mike Arnouse, Elder, 2009)

This story speaks to the relevance of this project for many of us; in order to create an authentic partnership we must examine the history of our work together. For over 10 years the Interior Indian Friendship Society in Kamloops (IIFS) has worked with social work and human service students at Thompson Rivers University (TRU) and the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT) during their field placements. This partnership had not acknowledged or integrated Aboriginal knowledge in field education, and talking about issues of power, trust, and relationship with respect to histories of colonization past and present, lacked a culturally safe framework and practice. The IIFS has provided a range of community health services to urban Aboriginal populations for over 30 years, including health clinic care, nursing care, attending to health determinants through supportive programming, outreach components, and ultimately is a team of creative and responsive professionals dedicated to empowering Aboriginal people to achieve their fullest potential.

The story illustrates our desire to create space to sit together, reflect on our history together, and envision where we wanted to go on this journey. The result was a unique community based, participatory action research project and partnership between Elders, an Urban Aboriginal[2] community agency (IIFS), Aboriginal university faculty, non-Aboriginal faculty (NVIT and TRU), and research participants who worked together to develop culturally safe best practices in social work and human service field education

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2. We use the terms Indigenous and Aboriginal to include all First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples.

in Aboriginal community health settings. This article reflects on the process of creating a space to talk together about issues of power, trust, and relationship with respect to histories of colonization past and present within research and social work in order to move forward together on this journey. In this article, we use an intersectional framework which supports the multiple social locations of both us as researchers and of the students we work with and their relationship to health and wellness — a model implemented in field education within social work and human services. The experiential processes of the members of this interdisciplinary and intersectional research team underpinned the results of the study. Therefore, experiences are discussed alongside descriptions outlining the process of engagement for respective research team members. *Melq'ilwiye*, the Secwepemc word for coming together, reflects the research team's contextual situation as TRU and NVIT campuses are located on the traditional territory of the Secwepemc and Nlaka'pamux peoples, noted throughout the paper as Aboriginal. The term intersectional research team, as developed by Clark in her previous work with Sarah Hunt (see Clark, 2007; Clark and Hunt, 2007; 2008), reflects a research team with members of varying powers and privileges, based on respective social locations and their connection to oppression. As Clark and Hunt describe it:

> the contextual nature of identity across geography, social and cultural contexts, and time is understood and is integral in the development of a team that is intersectional. We further developed the concept of an intersectional research team in response to concern that research projects were applying intersectional health frameworks to the participants in the research but were not reflecting on the location and position of themselves as academics or professionals conducting research with vulnerable populations. As we have defined it, an intersectional research team is committed to ongoing dialogue and deconstruction of each of our intersecting axis of identity and their influences on the project. (Clark and Hunt, 2007, 2008)

It was also an integral commitment by this team to consistently deconstruct each of our intersectional identities and their influences on the project, which will be described throughout the paper.

Research Question

The study was prompted by the following research questions: What supports do Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal students and Aboriginal community partners require in facilitating their learning and research including men-

tors, Elders, access to Aboriginal faculty, learning resources, and interventions? What is good practice for social work and human service students at IIFS and other Aboriginal settings? How can they "do no harm" given the history of social work and Aboriginal peoples?

Throughout the process and highlighted throughout this article is our attention to this overriding research question: What process facilitates the creation of an authentic research and learning partnership?

STUDY RATIONALE

Social work has long recognized the importance of field education as a means for integrating knowledge and practice skills (Westerfelt and Dietz, 2001; Royse, Dhooper, and Rompf, 2007). As professionals in the making, social work and human service students attend classes to learn practice principles, values, and ethical behaviours, a body of specialized knowledge, and the scientific basis for practice (Royse, Dhooper, and Rompf, 2007). In field instruction, students apply, under supervision, what they have been learning in the classroom to real situations. Thus, the preparation to become a social work or human service professional is composed of formal learning as well as practical experience, sometimes known as field instruction, field placement, field work, practicum, or internship (Royse, Dhooper, and Rompf, 2007). Research into the practices of field education with Aboriginal students is required to better understand the supports necessary for students and to build sustained authentic partnerships between the university and Aboriginal community health agencies. There is, however, no available research on field education experiences in social work and human service by and with urban Aboriginal researchers and communities and within an intersectional framework. This project builds on existing literature that offers recommendations for Aboriginal social work education in the classroom by focusing on Aboriginal field education (Baskin, 2006; Battiste, 2004; Faith, 2007; Faith, 2007b; Fire, 2006; Ives, Aitken, Loft and Phillips, 2007). Cultural competence in social work practice, curriculum training, and field education has been continually written and researched coinciding with a call to move beyond cultural competence to culturally safe practice (Bernard and Moriah, 2007; Gallegos, Tindall, and Gallegos, 2008; Sakamoto, 2007). Cultural safety in field education is infrequently mentioned in the research on social work education.

Much research and discussion centres on the health benefits of education, specifically the link between health and education and the mean-

ing of this for Aboriginal sovereignty (Assembly of First Nations, 2007, 2007b; Jones, 2000; Ticknor, 2005). Education improves health outcomes for adults, children, and ultimately families as students increase their social support networks, self-esteem, sense of belonging; improve their socio-economic status; and build change for future generations (Assembly of First Nations, 2007, 2007b; Ticknor, 2005). If, however, education becomes a site of further marginalization, oppression, and culturally unsafe experiences it can uphold colonial practices. In our Advisory committee meetings, comprising Aboriginal health practitioners, Elders, and current students, many shared stories of the pain, grief, and loss while completing their social work education and the importance of access to Elders and cultural practices in their own wellness. Therefore, we found the topic of Aboriginal field education in social and human service an important and interlinked area for the health of communities. Since social work students are predominantly female, and the intersections of race, gender, parenting status, and health are often paramount for our Indigenous students, it was imperative to consider this research within an intersectional framework that includes diversity.

TRU and NVIT campuses are located on the traditional territory of the Secwepemc and Nlaka'pamux peoples: in many symbolic and real ways, all other people are visitors (Reid, 2003). The relatively recent arrival of Europeans and the subsequent colonization of Secwepemc and Nlaka'pamux and other Aboriginal peoples had devastating consequences which continue to manifest today (Reid, 2003).

Cindy Blackstock (2005) implicates the social work profession in the multiple harms experienced by Aboriginal children and Aboriginal families, in particular the residential school system and sixties scoop. In our experience, many social work and human service students enter the university with the best of intentions, which is not enough. The continued overrepresentation of child welfare and child protection cases makes it imperative that students become aware not only in courses, but in field education, of the realities and implications of colonization past and present. Considering the nature of our research questions within this grounded context, doing research that attends to cultural safety and decolonizing methods was vital to the research team.

Methods

The theoretical and applied framework guiding this project built on the work of Irihapeti Ramsden, a Maori nurse, and the work of Diane Wepa

(2007) a Maori social worker, who together with Maori national organizations developed the concept of cultural safety in response to Indigenous Maori people's ongoing concerns with nursing care. Cultural safety focuses on power relationships between the colonizer and the colonized and is linked to Aboriginal self-determination (NAHO, 2006). The emphasis is on the experience of the service user or client in defining the experience as culturally safe, thus shifting power relationships. In applying this framework to our research project it was important to consider how culturally safe research can be developed, the practices inherent in the ongoing shift of power from the university to the community, and to ensure that the goal of culturally safe research is monitored and defined by students and research participants, community partners (IIFS), and community advisors including Aboriginal Elders.

The search for culturally relevant research methodologies capable of grasping the experiences of those on the margins involves reclaiming and centring Aboriginal knowledge in a new way. In her book, *Decolonizing Methodologies Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Linda Tuhiwei Smith (1999), a Maori researcher, presented 25 indigenous projects as examples of culturally based methodologies. Kovach (2005) argues that gaining control of the research process has been pivotal for Aboriginal peoples in decolonization. The research methodology was a mixed approach using community-based participatory action research (CBPAR). Community-based participatory action research (CBPAR) was chosen for its focus on liberatory action and its focus on power, building community capacity, co-learning, trust, and relationships. Guiding principles and culturally determined ethics (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999) towards the goal of cultural safety were developed, and included statements of principles to guide the research that included respecting Aboriginal sovereignty, data ownership, ethical considerations, and a process for sharing results (Macaulay, 1998). Ethical approval was sought from the community advisors, who identified Aboriginal values to guide research, prior to seeking approval through the university research ethics committee.

Principles and ethics to guide the research process were developed in partnership among TRU, NVIT, and IIFS and included ownership of data, ethics, issues of consent, and evaluation (see Appendix A). Developing a statement of research principles together facilitated a dialogue about respecting and understanding intellectual and cultural traditions. We relied on Elders with respect to the tension between who knowledge belongs to

and the writing of this article; history shows that academic writing often benefits only the academics and is separate from the community.

> I learned from my uncle that knowledge doesn't belong to any one person, but there are some things that should never be shared. I would be cautious to mention my own private ways, but if we were sitting up on mountains I will mention it there — you will understand it better there — then you can realize what our people really mean with how close we are with our ways of life. (Mike Arnouse, Elder, 2009)

The creation of an intersectional research team and community advisory was a deliberate and intentional focus attending to the need for a deconstructed power division. Building on the work of Clark and Hunt, the research team spent time to ground in our own experience (see Appendix A), and to consider the various and intersecting identities we each brought to the team. As authors and research team members our various intersectional locations include a wide geographic representation, including on and off reserve, urban and rural, Indigenous to the territory and those who are visitors; Secwepmec, Metis, Mohawk, Sto:lo, Abenaki, and Shawnee; English, Irish, and French-Canadian; we represent a cross-section of ages from our 20s through to our 60s; two recognized Elders; community-based and academic-based researchers representing four different disciplines; tenured and nontenured; parenting and grand-parenting. Coming together as a team was central to the project, and meetings were always held in the community allowing time and space for sharing. The writing of this article began with a day-long writing retreat, allowing all members to come together and through storytelling share our various thoughts and reflections on the team and the work we had done.

The community advisors comprised past and current Aboriginal students, members of the research team, Aboriginal Elders on campus, and the Aboriginal Elders Council of NVIT. The community advisors were guardians of the project in many ways, developing the ethics to guide the project, and meeting several times throughout the project to revisit these ethics and our progress, as well as joining the team and members of the IIFS staff in a research training day where we shared in music and storytelling and were guided by the Elders from TRU and NVIT in Indigenous research methods.

Results

The sharing of our learning through this project falls within five areas grounded in cultural safety practices: 1. "Do No Harm"; 2. therole of story-

telling within re-search; 3. building partnership through looking in one direction; 4. centring Aboriginal knowledge and healing approaches within the university; and 5. "relational" relevance in the study.

1. "Do No Harm" The Importance of Cultural Safety

Cultural Safety

> "Enables safe service to be defined by those who receive the service." The main themes of cultural safety are that we are all bearers of culture and that we need to be aware of and challenge unequal power relations at the level of individual, family, community, and society. Cultural safety draws our attention to the social, economic, and political position of certain groups within society, such as the Maori people in A/NZ or Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Cultural safety reminds us to reflect on the ways in which our health policies, research, education, and practices may recreate the traumas inflicted upon Aboriginal peoples. (Papps, 2005; Ramsden, 2000, as cited in University of Victoria, 2009)

Jann Derrick, an Elder, and member of the research team, brought her expertise as an Aboriginal trauma specialist to transforming field education through cultural safety seminars for students before starting their placement. The primary concepts of cultural safety were shared including the power relationship between social worker and client; by placing Aboriginal teachings first, the person receiving services defines cultural safety — not the professional delivery person. This creates a shift in power with the result that the professional learns from the Aboriginal client, a humbling and human experiential shift. This allows the (re)building of trust between the professional — who represents the colonizing culture — and the Indigenous client. The process then becomes the practice of (re)building the relationship where the relationship has been historically harmful and broken, particularly by the professions of social work and education. In an educational setting this requires "first the educator must be culturally competent; and second, the student culturally safe in the learning relationship" (NAHO 2006, p. 2).

Students were receptive to the concept of cultural safety, with some expressing their concern that they behave respectfully, with little cultural knowledge. Video vignettes of BC Aboriginal men were shown and discussed in the context of cultural safety; these men shared pieces of their life story and many had experienced the loss of their children to foster care or

had themselves been apprehended by social workers. An additional note to cultural safety was added; some of the Aboriginal students are from cultures other than Secwepemc and Nlaka'pamux and cultural safety practices apply whenever they work from the base of their Aboriginal culture with clients from the local Aboriginal cultures.

For example, Nadine Mathews, a Master's of Social Work practicum student involved in the study, shared her experience working with Elders and considered her own position.

> Navigating my involvement in an urban Aboriginal social action community based research project has been complex. As a non-Aboriginal, Caucasian, able bodied, Masters student, I come very close to the oppressor and I found myself wondering — how do I involve myself in a cross cultural research project when the group I belong to has so often oppressed, excluded and misused Aboriginal ways of knowing in "research projects." I had many questions, took lots of time to observe and became curious about protocol and process. I found myself, one day, spontaneously being co-supervised by my field education supervisor and an Elder, whom also happened to be a guardian to the project, comfortably referred to as "Uncle Mike." As I looked for answers from my supervisor and waited, "Uncle Mike" shared a story. While the words of the story have settled into my memory the message is revealed to me over and over again — my cultural safety role was to look into my own heart and to direct my questions inward to find more answers or questions.

2. Storytelling and Its Connection to Research

Part of the preparation for research with a community-based and Aboriginal focused project involved the concept of a "re-searching" for what questions we should focus on and how to do this "search." In other words, what counts as "data," what sources should be used as research material, and what methods should be use to gather data. The ideas of storytelling and music were both proposed by community advisors early in the project as themes to incorporate. In one of the early research training days this was one of the themes presented. Several participants shared traditional stories and music (both guitar and drum) and talked about the meaning it had. Toward the end of the presentation a concept was introduced that research may be seen as a search again for meaning from the stories people tell. Not surprisingly, recent brain research looking at music and brain function is finding that the rhythm of a song played by a group serves as a social glue by promoting a

kind of physical bonding (Steinbeis and Koelsch, 2008). Also, music can be calming and reduce the levels of the stress hormone cortisol in the blood, lowering heart and respiration rates and alleviating pain (Schrock, 2009).

The debate about what constitutes legitimate research in the human sciences has raged for many years, especially with Aboriginal peoples who have been seen as exploited in the past by supposedly "objective" research design. There has been concern that data gathered through interviews and observations by "objective researchers" may have been taken out of context. The division between storytelling of "traditional" people, including Aboriginal peoples and what is often seen as objective research has a long history in the Western world. All of the oral traditions associated with women and people living in the "countryside" and other primitive minds were not considered objective (Bauman and Briggs, 2003). "Story telling" and "folk" traditions were clearly rejected as part of scientific objective research.

Today, in our research, we are left with the challenge of how to define what we are doing. The concept of "re" or searching "again" the words of others may be part of the answer. The traditional method of storytelling in Aboriginal communities often includes repetition. Each year in Turtle Island (North America for the colonizers) many First Nations peoples had midwinter stories that would be told after the time of the first frost or snows. Every year the same stories, often going on for weeks, would be repeated. There was so much detail, content, and meaning found in the multiple layers of these stories that there was little danger of running out of material for new insights and learning to occur. As children and adults passed through new experiences and life stages the repeated story could be "re" searched for new meanings and understandings.

Today we may not have the night by night retelling of stories but we do have academic and student researchers who are going out, listening to and recording the stories of other people. The stories may not be framed in the sense of a "traditional story," with set formula for telling and with thousands of years of storytelling tradition, but they are still stories that can be looked at from different angles or different times to give continually new meanings and insights into what is "best practice" for those of us in the human services. In fact, many Aboriginal peoples acknowledged the various storytelling genres of set "traditional stories" told much the same way each time and the important teaching stories owned by individuals coming from their own life experience. Research that is both "culturally relevant and community-based" whether it includes either qualitative

or quantitative research methods may be viewed from the retelling story method and perspective. This tradition is expressed in talking circles and focused group discussions as well as interviewing, storytelling, and analysis of the findings. What ties them together is a willingness to re-examine the material over time and include the interpretation of various "researchers" all at different stages of education, life span development, or community centricity. All meetings of the research team and community advisors took place in the community, within a circle format and used a storytelling approach. Elders and community advisors provided guidance and leadership on ethics, protocols, research questions, and traditional approaches to support students in their learning and wellness. Tears, laughter, and food were all elements present at every meeting.

3. "Melq'ilwiye" Coming Together: Looking in One Direction

Elder Mike Arnouse and other Elders involved with the project shared the importance of us "all looking the same way." Through sharing a similar vision and focus we can work together to develop best practices in social work and human service field education in Aboriginal health settings with a focus on traditional knowledge and healing approaches. This shared focus was essential in building a research team founded on cooperation and collaboration; in contrast to experiences of competition and power over strategies consistent with University settings. A key component of looking the same way was understanding that this research is for the benefit of not only current Indigenous students, but for the children and the generations that follow.

> A key decision in deciding to participate in a research project is will this be good for my people ... my main focus is keeping our students from quitting and not forgetting themselves. (Mike Arnouse, Elder)

This is further echoed by Vicky Michaud, author and an Aboriginal female community based researcher with IIFS.

> It is for the children and to help people — that is the goal — we lose our way when we don't continue this focus and when the paths of community and university split ways. I have a strong commitment to change and having students not dropping out but succeeding. (Vicky)

The "process is the practice" as discussed by Wallerstein and Duran (2006) and we found this to be true through the creation of an intersection-

al research team where each member considered their multiple positions and identities, and the places where we have power and where we do not.

> My work within the university is informed and mobilized through my inter-connected identities. My children include a mixed-race girl and twin boys, who are Aboriginal and from the Chase area and Secwepemc Nation. The reality of raising three children alone in east Vancouver resulted in my decision to apply for a job at the university and return to the Interior of British Columbia. After 17 years in Vancouver, as a now mother of three, my identity shifted again. I joined a university, becoming an "academic" and "rural." Power and privilege intersected with the move to Kamloops, and the shift from community-based researcher to academic. My status as a single-parent, lone parent, solo-parent is one of outsider status in the professional university community. But the status often unites me with my students, many of whom are parenting on their own. I often experience the process of being othered, while being aware that my education and my position within the university allow me the privilege of a nanny to assist me. Identifying axes of power and privilege, which intersect with spaces of marginalization, are found within the practice of attending the board meeting as a woman of English, Welsh, and Métis heritage who works at the university — seeking a partnership to proceed with community-based re-search. I had to identify and acknowledge and locate my power as an academic and representative of the university and in doing so to receive the stories of truth and the impact of ongoing colonization as we reflected on the past his-tory of the relationship between the university and the Aboriginal commun-ity. Simultaneously I engaged in an act of locating myself including right from the moment I entered the board room that my experiences as a solo-parent of Secwepemc children (given the time of the meeting and my childcare challen-ges) together and beside my current position as a researcher at the university, the process of eating together, and finally my ability to truly sit and listen to concerns and questions were all key in the practice. (Natalie)

The process of eating together and shared storytelling of who we are and where we come from, including stories of past pain related to racism and on-going colonialism, were all key in moving forward together. It is our belief that the willingness to hear this and engage in a partnership where Aboriginal ethics are front and centre and guided by community and Elders, made the research partnership possible.

4. Whose Tradition? Centring Aboriginal Peoples' Knowledge in the University

There is a tension between the "traditional" ways of research and the col-onizer with respect to protocols in research and teaching, and "traditional"

ways and protocols as recognized and understood in Aboriginal peoples' cultures. When we began this project there were no Elders on campus at TRU. As a result of this project, Elder Mike Arnouse, commonly referred to as Uncle Mike, has been hired by TRU, in addition to three other Elders. Relationships with students and the School of Social Work and Human Service naturally evolved as faculty requested his presence in the classroom, and students began to initiate his support. As the project unfolded, students verified that Elders were a central component of cultural safety within their social work education, as described below. The NVIT best practice of an Elders Council coincided with this research — an indication of the need for continued development of Elders on campus at TRU. Elders at TRU and the Elders Council at NVIT were central to all points of the research, from the "re" search, as ethics guardians, project informants, data gathering, co-facilitators, wisdom and knowledge offerings as data, data analysis, and support for the research team itself. This research truly helped to formalize the Elder role on campus at TRU with infrastructure to support this essential best practice.

NVIT provides an example of best practice for the support of Aboriginal students and the central role of Elders in all aspects of campus life and university governance. NVIT has a well established Elders Council, with over ten Elders, whose logo is "Ambassadors, Grandparents, Good Medicine." Key elements of best practices include a university that is proud and respectful of Elders, through visible symbols and representation with coats with their names and NVIT logo, business cards, and brochures. Elders are involved in decision making of the university, and hold visible and accessible office space. Many researchers (Battiste , 2004; Bobiwash, 1999; Fire, 2006; Ives, Aitken, Loft and Phillips; 2007, Jonstone- Makinauk, 2000; Ticknor, 2005) support this practice, indicating Elders are a key element to the health of students and maintenance of student involvement in education.

The role of Elders as teachers and supports for students and faculty in social work and human service field education was an important finding in this project. Some of the issues Aboriginal students needed support for included personal crises, past trauma, and the impact on learning of feelings of belonging, importance of "fitting in," large class sizes, and non-Aboriginal students as the majority. They shared the need to provide and create community for Aboriginal students, and their allies, through both informal and formal supports including potlucks, powwows on campus, or cultural retreats. Recognition of role models and success for student achievement

is also important to support students mentoring one another and the creation of new models of support. There is a need for supports to reflect on the needs of all Aboriginal students including those who know their culture, and those who are new to their culture, as well as those who practice tradition and those who were raised within the church. Community advisors and Aboriginal student graduates from social work and human service programs highlighted the role not only of Elders in their success but of other key supports.

> There is a need for counsellors, caring faculty and Elders because Aboriginal students need support right through ... someone they can trust — our people want the education but we need guidance — hand holding and it's important that the university accommodate Aboriginal students, they don't need to accommodate to it. (Vicki)

A tension exists between the labelling of outreach and supports to Aboriginal students as "enabling" within the university setting. Examples of good outreach supports can be found at NVIT through the Elders who hold faculty and administration accountable and provide support and advocacy for students, as well as food, emergency funding, drop-in time, a walk. As one of the community advisory members said "Elders gave me the courage to finish" and "encouraged me to go on." A similar traditional practice is the use of healing/talking circles.

> They are integral to our culture and they were essential in my own social work education at NVIT in getting through the pain in order to start healing... [we needed to] get rid of the pain and hurt and then we could start learning. (Vicki)

The use of circles is not always welcome in universities. For example, several faculty who teach their classes using circles have received complaints from others that they did not return the chairs to "traditional" row seating — again highlighting whose tradition is taken as the norm. The project is developing best practices for non-Aboriginal students learning in Aboriginal field placement settings, and toward the goal of "do no harm." An important part of non-Aboriginal students' preparation for this experience is an introduction to cultural safety.

5. Relational Relevance: Maintaining Connections to Family and Community

Another tension was the time commitment to this process. One of the challenges of doing team research that is both "culturally relevant and commun-

ity-based" is the need to view all participants as members of a complex community system. This may be a major consideration for Aboriginal students, faculty and staff of universities, and community-based agencies. Research schedules can be affected by life events that require flexibility and understanding. Because of the academic emphasis on the concept of "objective" and detached research we need to be aware that the idea of a person being able to separate themselves from family, community, and personal connections is often unrealistic and not even desirable for Aboriginal researchers. The model of the ideal student researcher, for example, is often based on a Eurocentric concept of the privileged white male youth without obligations to family or community. In contrast, some, if not most, Aboriginal researchers maintain personal connections to both family and communities which carry an expectation of shared responsibility.

> Often, with Aboriginal people the beneficiary of the education is not only the student but also the indigenous community. Aboriginal students may need to take longer because of the needs to connect and relate their experience to extended family and community. Some Aboriginal students face complicated social and cultural expectations in a field placement that other students may not have to deal with. This often requires students to do more work, sometimes outside the agency placement setting, in order to maintain a balanced connection to the Aboriginal community. (Paul)

Over the years some of us have found that rigid academic schedules and meeting times make it very difficult for many Aboriginal people to attend and participate fully in meeting agendas that do not consider community reciprocity. This is not simply an issue of irresponsibility on the part of the student but rather may be one of poor academic structural design and the belief that time and space should be divided into set segments for everyone. Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) remind us that education for Aboriginal postsecondary education must be aligned with reciprocity and the commitment Aboriginal people have within their communities.

The theme of breaking isolation and creating community, both for students and faculty, was recurrent throughout this process. Aboriginal faculty are often isolated in university settings.

> The residential school experience has created a legacy of suffering and social problems within Aboriginal communities, and there is much work that needs to be done. But in designing projects that include university researchers and Aboriginal communities, it is essential to develop respectful and trusting relationships first. Huge gains can be made by a small number of determined

people working together. As an Aboriginal faculty member and co-researcher the experience of working within this research team and since working with this project, and the resultant relationships formed both within the university and the community; I feel like I'm in a gang now. (Patrick)

Previous research conceptualizing university and community collaborations points to the agency developed through these partnerships and the essence of community engaged scholarship as critical to the healing of all of us, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal (Lafreniere et al., 2007). The situation needs to be understood in terms of real life child care, community memorials or funerals, traditional feasts or celebrations, and other community specific issues.

In my role as a full-time field education coordinator, faculty member and mother, I wear many different hats in my community-university partnerships. Balancing all of these responsibilities, in addition to being involved in research, can provide avenues of understanding between diverse members, or frustration. I have experienced both. If you work hard to create the space where people can honestly speak about themselves, their roles and their positions of influence and power, it can be the start of a process. The positioned researcher acknowledges power, oppression, and seeks to identify sites of resistance and sites of influence. By openly acknowledging one's position and location in the research the process becomes the means to bringing about social change in our respective environments — be it university, community, field agency, program. (Julie)

In order to ensure that research is by and with Aboriginal scholars and Aboriginal communities we may need to improve our knowledge of and connection to Aboriginal community life surrounding our institutions and accommodate schedules based on this rather than primarily academic or institutional needs.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This project contributed to a better understanding of the relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples and between their respective intellectual and cultural traditions in field education partnerships. Through community building, mutual storytelling, co-learning, and courageous conversations our research team members were re-membering "old" ways to do research like talking circles, storytelling, and music. Our learning together provided us all with a better understanding of how research by and with Aboriginal scholars and Aboriginal communities can and should be or-

ganized. Cultural safety and intersectionality health frameworks are newly emergent and innovative approaches that have much to offer these research partnerships. As stated by IIFS "learning together allows us to develop that closer relationship and to share our traditions and beliefs."

The project increased knowledge and appreciation of the needs, values, knowledge, experiences, and contributions of Aboriginal peoples both in British Columbia and in Canada, in particular the needs of Aboriginal students in field education experiences in social work and human service. For example, recommendation sheets were developed with students and shared in the community to benefit not only current students but future generations. An outcome of students, community agencies, and faculty participation is a valuing and sharing of Aboriginal knowledge, experiences, and contributions, including Elders, community agencies, Aboriginal researchers, and Aboriginal academics within the field of social work and human service field education. Through narratives and storytelling we are contributing to a culturally safe and intersectional research framework in our search for answers to what constitutes "best practice."

We would like to conclude with a statement from Elder Mike Arnouse:

> These kinds of things that we're saying and doing never end, it's just a new beginning.

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Appendix A
Learning Together: Best Practices In Campus and Community Partnerships – An Aboriginal Development Grant Guiding Principles Project Checklist

This is a checklist that staff, students, faculty and other members of the community advisory can use to ensure that this project is addressing these principles in developing a learning and research partnership and agenda that meets the needs of urban aboriginal families and individuals in Kamloops. This was created by Natalie Clark and Sarah Hunt (Justice Institute of BC 2002; 2006). Adapted from the sources below.

Principle	Question	Project Response
Determining groups own research needs and priorities	Have Aboriginal communities themselves determined the development and needs of this project?	
	Who wants this research to occur?	
	Who will benefit from it?	
Aboriginal sovereignty	How are cultural values, perceptions and expectations of the Aboriginal community included to respect the principles of Aboriginal sovereignty?	
Participation of Aboriginal students and community members	Are students and community members given leadership roles in our project?	
	How are students and community members supported in taking leadership positions in our project?	
	Does our project have an advisory committee?	
	To what extent are students and community members involved in decision making about the research they are participating in?	
	Are students and community members considered key stakeholders during evaluation of the project?	
Collective responsibility	Has our project created working partnerships with members of the community including elders?	
	Do we attempt to educate the broader community about issues impacting on the Aboriginal community?	
	Do we work with partners from other sectors in our work?	
	Is our project informed about larger systems of power in society, such as law, education and colonization?	

Principle	Question	Project Response
Equity of access to services	Do Aboriginal and non Aboriginal individuals feel they can approach our project without being judged?	
	Do students and community members have voluntary participation in our research project?	
	How is an Aboriginal perspective centred in our strategies for accessibility for Aboriginal students and community members?	
	Do our research practices create barriers to accessing our project?	
	How do we people know about our research project? Are there any gaps in our communication?	
	Are we aware of all the Aboriginal communities in our area? How are we engaging with them in an accessible manner?	
	How does our project make students and community members feel welcome?	
	How is training and mentoring built into the project to build opportunities for everyone to participate?	
Culturally specific and culturally sensitive research processes and methodologies	How do we ensure that our project is free from judgement?	
	How do we train our researchers to ensure cultural sensitivity to the diverse needs of participants?	
	How do we address racism and other forms of discrimination in our research project?	
	Do we offer culturally-specific opportunities for participants?	
	Do we conduct our research project in a manner that addresses the specific cultural needs of diverse communities?	
Relational perspective	Is there room in our project for workers to get to know the participants and to maintain contact with them?	
	Does the project work to foster naturally evolving relationships?	
	Does our project honour the relationships that participants already have within their peer groups, families, and communities?	
	How do we deal with conflict between individuals involved in the project?	
Respecting First Nations communities	Have First Nations communities been given an opportunity to collaborate on the research in their community?	
	Have First Nations communities been engaged adequately in outreach for participation in the research project?	

Principle	Question	Project Response
Protecting Indigenous knowledge	Have First Nations communities had the opportunity to organize what indigenous knowledge is to be shared, and in what format the knowledge will be shared, used, and stored?	
	How is the research meaningful to students and community members?	
	Has the meaning of "informed consent" for sharing knowledge been determined by the Aboriginal communities?	
	Is consent built as a process rather than an event, in order that participants can leave the research if deciding to do so?	
	Is the research led within Aboriginal communities?	
	Are informants involved in all aspects of the project?	
Self-reflective practice	Does the project allow for continued reflection, evaluation and critique of ourselves as community researchers?	
	Have individual members answered the questions – why am I doing this research?	
	How do I benefit in this research?	
	What are my trespasses and privileges, if any here?	
Sources: Brascoupe and Mann (2001); Duran and Duran (1999); Justice Institute of BC (2002); Macaulay et al. (1998); Smith (1999); Wallerstein and Duran (2006).		

Appendix B
Grounding in our own Experience: Intersectional Research

Please consider the following about your self

- Who am I? Demographics, class, race, gender etc.

- How do I define myself? How has this changed over time?

- How do my various identities mobilize each other in different contexts?

- What communities do I "belong" to? What are the relationships between these communities?

- Describe an experience of entering a community to which you belong as a researcher?

- Describe an experience of entering a community as an outsider?

- What strengths and challenges have you encountered in these contexts?

- How authentic am I in my research? What part(s) of me are not present?

- How able am I to engage in truth telling? To sit with discomfort?

- If a disconnection happens in a relationship can I move back into relationship and work on this?

- What challenges and strengths does your own context/identity bring to your work as a researcher?

- What are the hidden, submerged parts of your identity that you would like to invite into your work?

Sources: Clark and Hunt, Sarah (2007; 2008a; 2008b).