

Elders Teachings: Wisdom We Need for Addressing Social Exclusion and Building Better Relationships in Society

John George Hansen
Rose Antsanen

Abstract

Indigenous social exclusion is a significant topic for Indigenous communities and governments. This article discusses Indigenous social exclusion as it relates to Indigenous ways of developing positive relationships in schools and communities. We outline the Indigenous experience of colonization, and the perception of 'lack of social opportunity' for Indigenous peoples in Canadian society. Since many Indigenous communities turn to Elder's for guidance, six Cree Elders were interviewed on traditional teachings and culture. The findings reveal that life in Indigenous communities and schools can be improved by utilizing traditional teachings, cultural values and Indigenous knowledge.

Introduction

"Whatever the content and criteria of social membership, socially excluded groups and individuals lack capacity or access to social opportunity" (Silver, 2007, p. 15)

This quote by Silver suggest that social exclusion means that socially excluded factions of society lack social opportunities. The domination that Indigenous peoples experienced through colonization became the basis of cultural oppression and social exclusion. This article's premise is that better relationships in Indigenous schools and communities can be developed by restoring cultural teachings based on Indigenous experiences and knowledge. The article is based on the findings of a qualitative research study that explored Swampy Cree traditional teachings and culture in northern Manitoba, Canada. Six Elders were interviewed on the Opaskwayak First Nation territory. Opaskwayak is an Omushkegowuk (Swampy Cree), First Nation community located 600 highway kilometers' northwest of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

The first part of this article discusses the context of Indigenous social exclusion in Canadian society. The second section discusses the principles and theories associated with community development, and then explains these concepts. The third section discusses the research methodology and provides the findings and draws conclusions from the interviewed Elder's. The line of reasoning in all sections, as a whole, therefore, is an effort to demonstrate how to address the issue of improving relationships as it relates to Indigenous people. We claim that a crucial acknowledgement has been made in Indigenous research concerning schools and community, and this recognition is well grounded in emphasizing the perspectives of Indigenous Elder's. It is important to note that we use the term Indigenous to refer to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people in Canada. We decided to use the term Indigenous in order to be inclusive of Canada's First Nations, Métis and Inuit populations; and by extension, other Indigenous Peoples worldwide. The Indigenous people in this study traditionally call themselves the Omushkigo or Omushkegowuk , which translates as the 'people of the muskeg' also known as the Swampy Cree. In the language spoken by the Omushkegowuk the people also refer to themselves as Inninew, which means 'the people'. Inninew was the original name used by the Cree people to name themselves, but this name was not acknowledged by the West. To the Western newcomers, Inninew was an unfamiliar expression, so they called the people 'Cree', which is the French word for 'cry' or 'scream'. In colonial societies,

Indigenous peoples share a common experience of being re-named and socially excluded in colonial society (Adams, 1975; Hansen and Antsanen, 2014).

Context of Indigenous Social Exclusion

Social exclusion has been defined in various ways, but many scholars explain it in the context of particular groups being marginalized in the wider society, often because their identity differs from the norm. Although there is a diversity of marginalized groups, those who exist on the margins of society, and who experience social exclusion we focus our discussion on Indigenous peoples in Canada. Tobia, et al (2016) define social exclusion as the “experience of being kept apart from others (e.g. social isolation) or emotionally (being ignored or told one is not wanted)” (2016, p.1). Since colonized Indigenous people in Canada have been socially isolated and economically disadvantaged we include an explanation of how the notion social exclusion have been used by scholars and writers to articulate the development of the term. Hunter (2009) claims that:

The terms "social exclusion" and "social inclusion" arose because the debate about the causes and function of poverty has moved away from the rather narrow historical focus on the lack of income. The new focus on the dynamic social processes that perpetuate the lack of social participation in society is welcome; however, it is timely to ask what people are being socially excluded from or socially included in (Hunter, 2009, p.1)

This social exclusion perception describes it in relation to a general exclusion from participating in the activities of society that moves beyond notions of poverty. It is important to describe processes social exclusion and inclusion, in the context of the Indigenous experience, within a framework that takes the practices and relations connected with colonization. In a colonial relationship, Indigenous peoples values and culture tend in the process of being colonized to be suppressed and exploited. Adams (1975) claims that Indigenous people were, “denied the right to participate in the mainstream agricultural and industrial activity of Canada; even construction work on the railway was denied them. Instead cheap coolie labour was imported while Natives were confined to rural prisons” (Adams, 1975, p.66). As a result of colonization Indigenous people experience social exclusion in the present day. Wotherspoon and Hansen (2013) note that the “racialization of Indigenous people has invariably led to social exclusion from society's core institutions, including employment, education, housing, policing, and many other sites. Imperialism and racialization in the criminal justice system has been an important factor contributing to over-representation of Indigenous people in the justice system” (2013, p.31). The experience of institutional discrimination and colonization have impacted Indigenous communities.

According to the Indigenous sociologist Duane Champagne colonization has impacted Indigenous tribal members in a number of ways, and significantly it has caused weak commitments to both tribal culture and mainstream culture, and thus, some Indigenous people lack “direction or purpose, and are normless” (2015, p. 49). Champagne notes that Indigenous normlessness is a consequence of “historical traumatization, assimilative education and language policies, loss of traditional culture, and discouragement of family and kinship management of cultural and educational life” (2015, p. 50). Champagne observes:

Normless Indian tribal members tend toward alcoholism, drugs, underachievement by American education standards, and are usually in trouble with the police and courts. The normless Indians tend to need extensive rehabilitation, serve time in jail, need education, and incur other costs to the tribe, U.S. government and the community in which they live. A main treatment for people in normless states who have turned to addictions is to expose them to traditional values and norms (2015, p.50).

These kinds of problems reveal the outcomes of the normless mentality. Today, Indigenous youth in the Prairie Provinces are overrepresented in the criminal justice system. However, social exclusion cannot be understood without understanding colonial power relations and its racial ideology. According to Sensoy & DiAngelo (2012), racism functions through institutional power:

Racism is racial prejudice backed by institutional power. Only whites have the power to infuse and enforce their prejudices throughout the culture and transform it into racism. If you understand what racism is then you understand that there is no such thing as reverse racism. The term reverse racism implies that power relations move back and forth, one day benefitting one group and the next day the other. But as we can see from the founding of Canada and the United States to the present time, white power and privilege remain deeply rooted and intact (Sensoy & DiAngelo 2012, p. 126).

This passage clearly illustrates that racial minorities and Indigenous people lack the power to exercise racism. This does not mean that racial minorities and Indigenous people cannot hold prejudiced views, they can, but they lack the power to convert it into racism.

Colonial power relations were instrumental in shaping oppressive inequalities to Indigenous people's economic and political disadvantage. As a rule, Indigenous communities lack power, and are marginalized accordingly. Social exclusion, therefore, represents a pattern about the way colonialism tends to isolate and marginalize Indigenous communities. Indigenous communities tend to live in a separate world even when they are in close proximity to an urban or rural community, and this development is reflected in social economic status disparities. Such marginalization of Indigenous communities is recognized as a product of colonialism (CFNMP, 2004; Hansen, 2015; Hart, 2002; Yee, 2005; Wotherspoon and Hansen, 2013). Some aspects of that marginalization have been addressed in recent years, but its ultimate structures remain in place, and so the matter as a whole has not been eliminated or destabilized by current efforts.

Indigenous Community Development

Before colonization, Indigenous community development has always developed in a self-determined way. From an Indigenous point of view, the people made choices when situations occurred, however it now takes on the experience of a colonial matter. Since the colonization of the Indigenous world, community development has changed, it still occurs, but largely in a context dictated by the colonizers culture. Although such imposed community development has evolved considerably, it has not engaged the community sufficiently (Hart, 2010; Charlton & Hansen, 2016; Wotherspoon & Hansen, 2013). As

Briggs (1999) notes that, “attempts to involve communities have traditionally amounted to tokenism or resulted in inappropriately designed or implemented projects” (p.4). Such tokenism of Indigenous inclusion cannot produce significant positive change.

Indigenous community development needs to be grounded in inclusion rather than exclusion of the community. In the context of conducting research in Indigenous communities, it is necessary for researchers to include the community in the research process. As Hart (2010) advises that there is a crucial, “need to consider the perspective of local community values and aspirations and recognize that family and social network approaches that emphasize the relational self may be more consistent with Indigenous cultures” (2010, p.5). Hart maintains that, “within a relational worldview is the emphasis on spirit and spirituality and, in turn, a sense of communitism and respectful individualism. Communitism is the sense of community tied together by familial relations and the families’ commitment to it” (2010, p.3). The matter of addressing social exclusion leads directly to the recognition that Indigenous perspectives must be valued in order to develop better relationships in communities and schools. Wheatley claims that, “we can seek relationship with others who are exactly like us. We are responding to our instinct of community, but we form highly specialized groups in the image of ourselves, groups that reinforce our separateness from the rest of society.” (Wheatley, 2005, p. 49). And as we recognize the extent of the social exclusion of Indigenous communities, whose culture, language has been suppressed we have to see that Indigenous peoples have continued to reproduce their culture in spite of hundreds of years of colonization and imperialism.

Within schools, in actual, community development experiential contexts, both social exclusion and social inclusion are possibilities. However, while social inclusion and social exclusion are real options, we see that practically everyone would like to experience social inclusion. In their analysis of the theory of addressing Indigenous youth social exclusion and addictions recovery at the Saskatoon Community Youth Arts Program, Charlton and Hansen draw a parallel between social inclusion and addictions recovery. The addictions recovery process was expressed by urban Indigenous youth who were interviewed and who were interpreting what they had experienced with addictions recovery in accordance with a belief in social inclusion. Charlton and Hansen (2016) observe that the Saskatoon Community Youth Arts Program is a “strong example of how a community based intervention that does not undergird its presence with the threat of retribution, can work by simply offering a person something of value; the sense of belonging and acceptance” (2016, p.415). The participants at SCYAP are Indigenous, who need more healing than punishment; and their needs for social inclusion and acceptance are offered at SCYAP.

Relationships, of course can change, and some changes have taken place in the relations between Indigenous peoples and Euro-Canadians, and the last decade has saw increasing numbers of Indigenous people graduate from high school and universities. Still, Indigenous communities are behind when it comes to comparing their achievements with the mainstream. We wish we could state that the socio-economic disparities of today are a thing of the past, and that Indigenous communities are no longer socially excluded. But this is not the situation.

In the matter that concerns us best, that of developing “better relationships so that respect understanding and acceptance are more” apparent in schools. Frank and Smith (1999) show that principle and values are significant in the development of better relationships. They write:

Principal and values are key parts of both community development and capacity building, particularly when they are being considered as a participatory and inclusive process.

They should be based on respecting people, improving the quality of life, appreciating and supporting cultural differences and being good stewards of land, water and wildlife

(1999, p. 5)

All of the ideas in the passage above are well accepted teachings in many Indigenous cultures. We learned much of these concepts from the Elder's in northern Manitoba. These lessons come from the Indigenous peoples themselves who are struggling for the restoration of their culture and the development of their communities. In her discussion of promoting community development, Chadwick (2004, p. 95) identifies a five step process for partnership development:

1. Find out about constituent interests and needs; 2. Reach out to potential partners; 3. Spell out the purpose and the terms of the partnership; 4. Work out difficulties as they arise, making necessary modifications; 5. Build out from success by using it to leverage expanded efforts.

These five strategies clearly illustrate the methods for community building and partnership development. The process for improving schools emerges from the recognition of the need to improve relationships that are more meaningful and accepting, and speaks of social inclusion. Chadwick maintains that schools need to get the parents in the community involved in the activities of the school; she states that, "the time they spend in various activities has a direct positive impact on student development" (2004, p. 95). Clearly, Chadwick demonstrates that schools can be enriched through partnership development and community engagement. But, this process must develop in a way that will sustain the involvement of parents and communities. Chadwick maintains that, "it would seem appropriate to provide them permanent representation in the decision-making process to determine goals and priorities for public schools" (2004, p. 95).

In the context of addressing the state of 'social exclusion', this partnership development process must emerge from both the Indigenous peoples themselves and with those non-Indigenous supporters who are in harmony with them. In her analysis of the theory and practice of partnership development, Chadwick draws a parallel between improving schools and community engagement. The community engagement or social inclusion point of view was expressed in the notion that schools must address the current reality in the communities they serve; she notes that educators "need to reach out and meet our constituents where they are, not where we would like them to be. And that may require educators to move out from the public schools and into the community as a first step" (Chadwick, 2004, p. 74). It is the goal of the school to become for fully inclusive, but educators cannot achieve this goal by merely inviting the community to the school.

Community engagement implies the departure of school boundaries. School improvement is initiated by those who reach out to the community, who socially include, who recognize the community as diverse—not by those who restrict, limit and compartmentalize community engagement. "A common complaint

among educators deals with the low attendance at open houses and other opportunities for the public to visit schools. A superintendent might say, ‘I have a designated time each week for having coffee with the community and no one shows up’” Wrote Chadwick. She maintains that, “All school employees can reach out to the public through their day to day interactions with their day-to-day interactions with community members outside the school environment. Whether it is a friendly chat while waiting in line at the local supermarket or joining the conversation at the hair salon or barbershop... (2004, p.74). Chadwick advises these kinds of informal social interactions are “often easier for citizens to share their concerns about public school” (Chadwick, 2004, p.74). Such non-formal social interactions often present opportunities to listen and share with those who have been marginalized and socially excluded. After all, as human beings we need each other and we cannot thrive in a life by being socially excluded.

When students have a sense of belonging, including a school and a community of support, their education process is enhanced. Encouragement of social inclusion is a responsibility of schools, and plays a major role in the development of responsible citizens that promote personal and community wellbeing. Wheatley supports this tactic of engaging the community. She stated: “you can’t hate someone whose story you know” (Wheatley, 2005,p. 57). This means that people are less likely to hate ‘others’ when they know the ‘others’ history and identity. Therefore community engagement cannot function to socially exclude those who deviate from the norm. Perhaps all students are at risk in more form or another. According to Wheatley Western culture is leaning on a control-based model of leadership that restricts the capacity for school success. It does this in a number of ways- such as limiting diversity and social inclusion.

The principles and theories associated with community development have shown to be an enormous success and ought to be used as the basis for creating positive relationships. Wheatley argues that many schools have too many unnecessary rules and she documents that a junior high school of eight hundred students successfully functioned using just three basic rules: “1. take care of yourself, 2. take care of your community, 3. Take care of this place” (Wheatley, 2005,p. 95). These three basic rules are main methods for creating a more meaningful educational experience and are efficient approaches to community engagement so that ‘respect, understanding and acceptance are more visible in schools and communities’.

Wheatley writings are relevant to Indigenous communities—the methods described as well as the theories into what community development is all about and the approach necessary to achieve success. Wheatley knows about how to engage the community; of course, some schools are entrenched in a hierarchal model and resist change. However, too much reverence for a punitive approach and how things are traditionally done can be a severe disadvantage when it comes to making the most of current knowledge and practice on community engagement. Therefore, community engagement is a process that includes the people and should not be based on a hierarchal structure.

Community development programming needs to be designed to socially include the Indigenous community. Social inclusion is about allowing the Indigenous community to participate in the development of a meaningful school program, which challenges the ongoing colonialism, social exclusion and oppression of Indigenous societies. The concept of partnership development in schools provide the Indigenous community social inclusion, which relates with the need for families, parents and community to be involved in the schooling process. Belonging to a community helps to inspire better relationships and social inclusion, and this assists to reduce the two-solitude situation.

Engaging the Indigenous school and community is both an interdisciplinary and cultural approach. Intrinsic to that engagement is a wide range of social, physical, emotional and spiritual activities and the more holistically developed they are—for example, parents, students and community involved—the more likely the people are to feel satisfied with the school and themselves. This community development approach coincides with the same basic patterns of social inclusion that inspire the development of better relationships. Cajete (2000,p. 86) has said “community is that place that Indian people talk about the place through which Indian people express their highest thought”. This passage illustrates the need for social inclusion. In the context of research, an Indigenous community can advance intellectual thought and ways of knowing as a collective though research that includes Indigenous voices. Next, we discuss the research site and methodology conducted in the Opaskwayak community.

Research Site

All interviews were conducted in the Opaskwayak community and to acknowledge their contributions to the study all interviewed Elders were identified by name, with one exception (Jack) chose to remain anonymous. We use the term Opaskwayak to refer to the land both on the reserve and in the town of The Pas, Manitoba. Opaskwayak is an Omushkegowuk, Swampy Cree, community some 600 highway kilometers northwest of Winnipeg near the Saskatchewan border in northern Canada. The name, Opaskwayak translates as, ‘the narrows between the woods’ and is the home nation to over 4500 Cree. The Town of The Pas, Manitoba is situated across the river from Opaskwayak and this town is known as the ‘*Gateway to the North*’. It has a population of over 15,000 residents (including the Opaskwayak community). The name ‘The Pas’ derives from the Cree word "pasquia" means ‘wooded narrows’.

Research Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature and utilized the instruments of ethnography. Indigenous Elder’s, were interviewed on how to develop better relationships that are more meaningful so that respect, understanding and acceptance can be more visible in Indigenous schools and communities. The study draws upon Creswell (1998) qualitative research is appropriate when the fundamental research question asks “how” (p.7). The central questions of this study examine: 1) how to develop better relationships, and 2) the nature of ‘how’ Elder’s interpret ways to promote understanding and respect Indigenous schools and communities. The nature of these questions are suitable for a qualitative study. Creswell (1998,p. 15) that a advises qualitative inquiry entails that, “the researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting”. The traditions that are utilized in this research include ethnography and case study. Creswell notes that qualitative research offers:

- i) A systematic procedure for inquiry
- ii) Access to natural cultural settings
- iii) Collection of a variety of empirical resources including:
 - Case study
 - Personal experience
 - Interviews
 - Introspection
 - Observation in cultural context

Historical, International and Visual texts (Creswell, 1998, p. 15).

Data Collection

Data was collected using ethnographic methods that utilized traditional protocol for knowledge gathering. These traditional protocols included offering the participants food, cloth, tobacco to demonstrate appreciation and reciprocity for the Elder's contributions to the study. Data was collected through audio-taped open ended interviewing, field notes and general observations. The purpose of the study was explained to the Elder's before the official interviews took place. The interviews were carried out at a time and place chosen by the Elder's. The open ended interviewing style allowed the Elder's to express their views and share their stories without being interrupted.

Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed and analyzed for themes. Creswell (1998) recommends providing "in-depth descriptions of each case, (named within-case analysis), which is followed up with a thematic analysis" (p.63). The interviews were read over carefully before I began the identification of putting into broad categories or themes. The transcribed interviews produced the data which we can call a "rich, thick description" as discussed by Denzin (1989, p. 83). The descriptive data was used to organize themes based on the teachings the elders shared.

While the research questions deal primarily with Cree Elders teachings and community development the ideas relating to addressing social exclusion and building better relationships in society apply to many Indigenous communities. The reason for dealing with Elders in this particular region is the first authors cultural affiliation, which is based on my being a member of the Opaskwayak Cree Nation, and an insider of the group being studied.

Research Questions

- 1.1. Were there common teachings or stories in your community that assisted you in your personal development? Do you have examples of this?
- 1.2. Were there common teachings or stories in your community that assisted you in developing conflict resolution skills? Please explain.
- 1.3. What do you believe we need to do in our schools and homes to promote peace and justice in our communities?
- 1.4. Could you say something about Cree peacemaking approaches that you have experienced or witnessed?
- 1.5. How did the teachings you received from your family and Elder's influence relationships in your life?

The Elder's View of Education and Community Development

This section presents the Elder's responses to the research questions. Beginning with Stella's response to the question 1.1. Were there common teachings or stories in our community that assisted you in your personal development? Please explain? Stella responded as follows:

Well that's how we were taught our history and these teachings and these stories in the community there were storytellers and there were different kinds of storytellers... We used to hear about Wasekechak and those stories were told on many different occasions and some of it was just to laugh and get together in the evenings...

Stella indicates that Cree reality and the peoples culture was passed down through our oral narratives. She also mentions that the ancient trickster Wasekechak character is present in the narratives of educational or entertaining contexts. The trickster was sourced to teach gently about values, ethics, and lessons for living. Humor is also part of that system of education. In his response to the same question Jack stated:

There were stories of Wasekechak, and yes some of the stories were used to teach values but not all of them, some of them were just to entertain or make people laugh which was needed when someone was depressed or grieving and needed to be cheered up -- Jack.

Again, the trickster serves to help cheer people up, which is an additional apparatus in personal and community development. William's response reflects the value to develop into a responsible person, he states:

I guess for me it was a learning process that went through my entire life. From when I went to residential school and my dad getting sick and then I raised my brothers and sisters and having to take the role of father and helping my mom with the day to day stuff; hauling wood, boiling water, making sure that we had food on the table. There was no such thing as welfare. The only way I made money was making tanning moose hides me and my mom.

Similar to William's response to the above stated question, John Martin indicates the link between identity and language and the prominence of serving community:

... When we talk about who you are, based on your language. It tells you who you are and what you are. And that helps me like if there's something wrong with me physically it's going to affect the whole part, it will affect the mind because I'm sick, and it will affect me spiritually. So how I do things, like when you do things, that's not right it will affect the person that had done something wrong. Especially when they know they had done something wrong they had done something against their beliefs to feel good. When you're feeling good about yourself that means spiritually... pause ... the spiritual, when you accept what you did is good for yourself, like developing yourself, knowing yourself. A lot of times it is not only about using your mind, you have to keep on developing your mind but you have to keep on developing your values too, you have to keep on developing your emotional; you're emotional side, at the same time you have to keep on developing your spiritual part.

The elder reveal that personal development is largely related to a healthy identity and includes a spiritual dimension. In response to question 1.2 Were there common teachings or stories in your community that assisted you in developing conflict resolution skills? John Martin said:

We have to learn those things again, and being an aboriginal person we know that we are different, we are not part of that system. The system that creates a lot of conflicts between families, between people, eh, it's different, so we have to ask the creator to offer something. How we can make this right for us. So we started to remember, these are not the ways of our people. We didn't have no police, we didn't have no jails. But how we resolve those conflicts, we started to do things in our own community, we got a group of people that wanted to make a change because they knew that there was something wrong in that community.

The response by John shows the need for community development which involves bringing the community together and relearning the past traditions. Often the healing circle is used which promotes feelings of equality and social inclusion. Similarly, William responds by stating:

I guess in knowing that there were arguments and disputes and in knowing that there were some people in the community who are very protective of their children. If the children did something wrong then they got mad at the people who came. And there was a lot of conflict and that's when the Elder's would be called in to mediate the people

William clarifies that the traditional ways of resolving conflicts in the community were largely related to the Elder's and their advice on the conflict resolution process was held in high regard. Furthermore the Elders were seen as guiding the community in Stella's response to the same question, Stella states:

Yes...Poonā 'yé tum it means "not thinking about it anymore". And when that happened the conflict was resolved that's when we would hear the story Poonā 'yé tum no more thinking about it is what Poonā 'yé tum means after the conflict has been resolved and that's a good thing because when you're not thinking about it it's resolved but if you keep thinking about it then it's not resolved (laughing), because you're still thinking about it.

Stella is expressing that the concepts of revenge and punishment is alien to an Indigenous- Cree justice response. She also shows her view that the Anglo term 'justice' is synonymous with notions of retribution and punishment. Conversely, Stella reveals her understanding of Indigenous justice by using the Cree word 'Poonā 'yé tum' which means to 'not think about'. This does not mean that we just forget about wrongdoing. What it means is that when we heal we forget about our wounds. Thus Stella is discussing the Cree concept *Poonā 'yé tum* in relation to healing. For Stella, the Cree word 'Poonā 'yé tum' describes the phenomena of restorative justice. It is interesting to observe that in their descriptions of traditional peacemaking approaches the Elder's draw a parallel between 'teaching conflict resolution skills' and 'peacemaking.'

The Elder's said that teaching appropriate behaviors are done through stories that either directly or indirectly teach one how to correct their behavior. The significance of is reflected in their responses to question, 'What do you believe we need to do in our schools and homes to promote peace and justice in our communities?' the way to promote peace in our communities is through our own traditional teachings, which include the passing on of values and language. As the following responses to this question indicates:

In our schools we have to more or less go back to our traditional teachings and use the language at an early age. To me it makes sense to actually identify things that the students can relate to and go from there. We can use the language to teach them the peace and harmony. To me that would be the ideal thing -- William.

Clearly, William's expresses the way to promote peace in our schools and communities is through Indigenous traditional teachings, and the language is important to that declaration. John Martin's response to the same question reflects the importance of returning to the traditional teachings:

...The community development, form a council of Elder's, women's groups, community groups, youth groups, these are the people who decided to work with these people. We have to teach that kind of thing, so that people can understand why there is violence in the community, and why there is so much violence in the schools. Because they see it all the time, they get it from their families, big brothers and their family members, then they take it to the school. But these are things that we

have to teach, the values that we have and how it's going to help in the system, in the school, we don't carry that, we don't teach that in schools, teachers don't know that, they don't know how to work with kids, they send them down to the principal right away, and the principal will suspend the child, because they don't know how to handle it themselves. That's the only way they handle it with suspension. And so the kids become suspended. -- John.

John's words contain a critique of punishment; he explains how, for him, punishment does not work and why--because we do not teach our values in school, 'values like honesty, sharing, caring' are key to healing. For John, punishment like suspension from school is not the answer to promoting the wellbeing of Indigenous communities. Similarly, in her response to the same question, Sylvia emphasizes the importance of the traditional work ethic or value:

Oh, right now, what I see in Thompson here is pretty rough. It's a pretty rough place. I was looking at the newspaper yesterday, the police report what the kids are doing, I don't know if they're teenagers or who they are. But, they were throwing snowballs at the cars and when the police went there, they couldn't find them. There are lots of those kinds of things here in Thompson right now. It can also be because they don't work because it is different than what it used to be. It's very different now.

The concept of work is interpreted from an *Indigenous* perspective. When kids do not do any work they cannot develop the vital understanding of how life works. For example, in traditional times, Indigenous people did not just buy our food and eat it. Instead they needed to know the whole process of what it takes to survive; and this process is reflected in the concept of food. With food comes nourishment, and food preparation requires work and understanding these lessons for living comes from doing. Lessons for living, including food preparation are what the Elder's mean by work. Similarly, Stella responded to the same question by sharing her views that espouse the need for restoring traditional values:

We have to get back to our basic values in the school system all of those values that were ridiculed, those values that they tried to take out of us like our language and our culture to de-Indianize us. I was strapped for talking Cree in school, I was strapped if I asked to go to the washroom in Cree, and I was strapped if I was hurt and needed to express myself and that's the way it was for my brothers and my sisters. And my father finally by the time of the tenth child he said no more talking Cree in this house because all of my children come home crying every day and I don't want to hear about their pain in school so we stopped talking Cree to the three littlest ones in our family. And I would say that those three are the ones with the most problems because they don't have those strong teachings that we had that are associated with our language -- Stella.

Stella conveys the detrimental effects of the abusive and colonial pedagogy that occurred in the Indian day school. Since the Cree language of the people contains the values of the culture, the strap was used as physical punishment for anyone who dared speak their language. Such language oppression had distressed her family to the extent that her three youngest siblings did not learn the Cree language, which obstructed the internalization of the values. As a result, as Stella explains that these three youngest siblings also developed more difficulties in life than their Cree brothers and sisters who have the language.

When I asked Stella question 1.4, ‘Could you say something about Cree peacemaking approaches that you have experienced or witnessed?’ She replied:

The peacemaking that I have seen was in the immediate family with my parents my grandparents when there was a conflict. They would get involved the Elder’s would get involved and they would counsel more than reprimand they would take those aside they would separate the two who were having the conflict and they would counsel them until such time that they themselves would know what they needed to do in order to resolve the conflict. -- Stella.

Stella provides a detailed accounting of peacemaking formal elements, which espouses non-punitive teachings or no punishment at all, and the Elder’s were central to this process. The tendency for female Elder’s to counsel the girls; and the male tendency to counsel the boys is also reflected in Stella’s response. The kids are taught to understand the impact of their actions on the other. They will learn compassion and such realization encourages them to help in the conflict resolution or healing process. Similarly, in response to the same question, John Martin recounts his experience in facilitating a healing circle in the town of The Pas, in which he explains how a conflict was resolved through the circle:

This person was threatening others with guns; it was a real serious offense. I held a circle to resolve it... having the circles, it creates understanding, communication, in how we relate to each other... -- John.

John turns to the consequences of healing circles, which emphasize restoration and healing rather than revenge and punishment. He sketches for a larger peacemaking process that leads to inclusion with, rather than exclusion from the community. It is a process with a spiritual dimension, prayer, in the peacemaking process. Such comments about ‘forgiveness’ and ‘understanding’ are largely related to peacemaking. The healing dimension of an *Indigenous* peacemaking ideology recognizes that one can only forgive if the one having hurt you understands what s/he was doing. Also, s/he wants you to understand why s/he was doing it, and so it goes both ways. This is the source of peacemaking, which John is talking about. In her response to the same question Sylvia stated:

Yes, there used to be lots of old people who would talk to young people and tell them to...pause. Not that long ago there was this old lady, but she died now. But I used to talk to her up town and one time she said it’s good that you look after your husband when he’s sick because you will never be sorry if something should happen to him.

Taken as a whole, Sylvia's statement and similarly held beliefs constitute an Indigenous peacemaking model, and the Elder's guided the community people in education, including offering practical advice and peacemaking approaches.

In responding to question 1.5 'How did the teachings you received from your family and Elder's influence relationships in your life?' Stella recalled that:

A lot of the teachings that I received as a mother were received from my grandmother. I would say from our part that my grandmother and my immediate family who would come to camp with us, they used to be the ones who would teach about relationships how to raise children it came directly from my grandmother -- Stella.

Stella is disturbed with the breakdown of the family unit. She observed that the development of healthy relationships are vital to the culture. Stella observes the meat of the matter, which observing was significant to influencing her relationships, which suggests that her education was largely based on observations. In his response to question 1.5 William states that:

Well I was messed up; I didn't know whether to believe them or not. You see I lost that trust when I went to the residential school. To trust our way or the other way and that's when I got messed up and I was starting to dream. So when it turned to my turn to teach the children I didn't know what to do. But one thing I knew how to do is to make sure that my children had a good academic education, which they have, which I never did get; but in doing that I guess I robbed them of their spirituality. So that now they are searching for that. I told them that they had to find that their own way they're still young and they're still able to do it.

The teachings, successfully received by William from his family influenced his relationships. What is important, however, is that trust vanished because of the residential school ordeal. William also mentions that he urges his kids to embrace their own spirituality, which demonstrates he does not dictate their spiritual path. In her reply Sylvia says that:

Well I can see what they meant now after a long time ago. I can see what they meant, because a long time ago those old men used to talk about how it's going to be harder later on. They say there was going to be more people coming to this land and it's going to be very hard for the people. That's exactly what's happening right now. The natives you see them walking around and they don't get hired on anywhere. I think that's what they must have seen in their vision. So I guess it must have been true what they meant.

Sylvia describes that the teachings can be hard to understand at first, as the teachings come from the Elder's themselves who, years later, found significance in the stories and traditional teachings years. In his reply, John states:

When I was growing up you never speak out against your Elder's or your parents, you have to respect that. You have to honor them, so learning, listening to learn it was a big part.

John expresses that the Elders were valued highly. Many people continue to approach the Elder's for guidance in the present time.

Themes

<i>Factors that promote well being</i>	<i>Factors that obstruct well being</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance Elders • First Language • Wesakechak stories • Traditional teachings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colonial Education; Residential school or public (day) school effects • Loss or erosion of first language • Erosion of traditional teachings and values

Reflecting on the Elder's Perspectives and Teachings

When reflecting on the Elders perspectives and teachings, there were four main barriers to personal and social development and community well-being. The effects of colonial education, that is, the residential and public (day) schools, were identified as major factors in the loss of language, traditional teachings and values. Barriers to personal and community development were connected to the effects of colonial education. A commonly held notion among the Elder's was the alienation from traditional teachings, culture and language lead to an array of social problems in the Indigenous community. This alienation from decreases the capacity for personal and community development. The residential schools, played an important role in the suppression of traditional teachings, language and culture which participants observes ruptured the lives of Indigenous peoples.

Several generations of Indigenous children have passed through the residential schools, which brings up an interesting theory: "Those who commit crimes often had a childhood in which they were exposed to drug and alcohol use, physical and sexual abuse and poverty." (CFNMP, 2004: 2-5). Since generations of children were abused in the state and church run residential schools it is understandable that the experience can lead to crime.

The factors that promote social well-being in the Elder's responses include counseling from the Elder's, first languages, Wasekechak stories, and traditional values; such findings is consistent with community development that emphasize the dignificance of decolonizing Indigenous identity, values and practices (Antsanen & Hansen, 2016; Hart, 2002; Johnstone; 2002; Ross, 1996). A significant aspect of the participant's responses in this realm is the degree to which community development was largely related to an Indigenous interpretation of identity. Participants emphasized the importance of traditional

teachings. Wasekechak stories, ceremony and are important to the community. Such traditional teachings and customs encouraged learning which contributed to the personal and community development.

Conclusions

This article discussed Indigenous social exclusion in the Canadian context in relation to Elder's thoughts on how to 'develop better relationships in Indigenous schools and communities. The Elder's expressed their views on how to 'develop better relationships that are more meaningful so that positive relationships can be more visible in Indigenous schools and communities. The Elder's suggest that Indigenous lives and communities can be improved by connecting to traditional teachings, practices and spiritual ceremonies. However, in order to do this, individuals and communities need to return to cultural traditions that were obstructed by the colonial project. The significant social well-being obstructions arose from the alienation of Indigenous language, traditional teachings and values that emerged out of colonization. The Elder's spoke of traditional teachings that could be used for developing better relationships in communities and schools. For the Elders, language and culture are vital to Indigenous wellbeing and they advise that Indigenous people should continue to promote the culture in contemporary times.

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