

The Elders Speak About the Best Interests of a Stó:lō Child:
Family, Connection and Culture

by

Dayna Gawi-neh Mussell
BCYC, University of the Fraser Valley, 2005

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the School of Child and Youth Care

© Dayna Gawi-neh Mussell, 2024
University of Victoria

All rights reserved. This thesis may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopy or other means, without the permission of the author.

We acknowledge and respect the ləkʷəŋən peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

The Elders Speak About the Best Interests of a Stó:lō Child:
Family, Connection and Culture

by

Dayna Gawi-neh Mussell
BCYC, University of the Fraser Valley, 2005

Supervisory Committee

Dr. Sarah Wright Cardinal, Supervisor
School of Public Health and Social Policy

Dr. Billie Allan, Departmental Member
School of Social Work

Abstract

In response to recent legislative changes by the Government of Canada many Indigenous nations are engaged in the development of legal and practice frameworks to regulate culturally safe and equitable child and family services. To support this process there is a need to define the best interests of the child according to the nation based on cultural knowledge and traditions. Storywork, an Indigenous storied approach, is used to examine the question, “How do Stó:lō people define the *“best interests of the child”* based on the cultural, linguistic and governance structures of their nation?” Drawing on Indigenous literature and the history of child welfare in Canada affirms that culture is central to developing Indigenous based services. A series of sharing circle discussions with Stó:lō Elders from the Coqualeetza Cultural Education Centre and the Fraser Valley Aboriginal Children and Family Services Society were held to gather their life-experience stories. The Elders’ unique worldview and understanding of the teachings of a good Stó:lō life were central to mobilize community-based Indigenous knowledge on child-rearing in the past and present that centers the teachings of our ancestors. Thematic analysis was then used as a way to make meaning from the Elders’ life-experience stories to create new knowledge informing what is in the best interests of the Stó:lō child. As a result, a Longhouse Framework was created using four-story poles representing new stories of child well-being. These story poles include: 1) How children experience and understand shxwelí; 2) Children learn the ways of co-reliance; 3) Families and communities care for their children; and 4) Raising children in healthy Stó:lō ways. This knowledge will be used to inform better practices for those working in the field of Indigenous child welfare and offer recommendations for communities which are moving towards self-determination in the area of child welfare.

Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
List of Figures.....	vii
Acknowledgments.....	viii
Dedication.....	ix
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
The Beginning of the Journey.....	2
My Family Background.....	3
Maintaining Cultural Connections.....	6
Connection to Indigenous Child Welfare.....	9
Positionality.....	12
The Challenge for Today.....	16
Context.....	16
Research Question.....	17
Research Focus.....	18
Rationale.....	20
Disruptions to Indigenous Ways of Life.....	21
Benefits of the Study.....	22
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	24
Introduction.....	24
A Working Definition of Culture.....	25
Theoretical Perspective: How We Care for One Another.....	27
Cultural Disruption.....	29
Cultural Resurgence.....	34
Decolonization and Reconciliation.....	38
The Canadian Human Rights Tribunal.....	39
Jurisdiction: Bill C92 and Indigenous Governing Bodies.....	40
British Columbia and Bill 38.....	41
Cultural Restoration and Revitalization.....	42
Closing.....	44
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	46
Introduction.....	46
Indigenous Storywork and Indigenous Research Methodology.....	47
Indigenous Storywork.....	49
Types of Stó:lō Stories.....	52
Stó:lō Governance Systems.....	53
Stó:lō Ways of Being and Doing.....	55

Story of the Longhouse: My Research Plan.....	58
Gathering the Elders.....	60
The Coqualeetza Cultural Education Centre.....	61
The Fraser Valley Aboriginal Children and Family Services Society.....	62
Asking for the Elders Support and Involvement.....	62
Sharing Circles.....	64
Discussion Questions.....	66
Approach to Making Meaning: “Interrelatedness and Synergy”	68
Steps to “Interrelatedness and Synergy”	72
Phase 1.....	72
Phase 2.....	73
Phase 3.....	73
Phase 4.....	74
Phase 5.....	74
Phase 6.....	75
Ethical Considerations.....	76
Consent and Confidentiality.....	77
Gifting as a Way of Giving Thanks.....	78
OCAP: Ownership, Control, Access and Possession.....	78
Research and Tri-Council Policy Statement.....	80
Strengths and Limitations.....	80
Conclusion.....	81
Chapter 4: Discussion.....	83
Introduction.....	83
Elders Experiences as Ways of Learning.....	83
Story Pole 1: Culture, Land and Ceremony.....	85
Ceremony.....	86
Connection to Land.....	87
Language.....	88
Cultural Renewal.....	89
Story Pole 2: Communities Care for One Another.....	90
Familial and Communal Self Reliance.....	91
Giving and Taking Care of One Another.....	92
Coming Together.....	93
Story Pole 3: Families.....	94
Family Strengths.....	94
Family Challenges.....	96
Parenting and Grandparenting.....	97
Children and Youth Today.....	98
Story Pole 4: Spirituality and Healing.....	99
The Longhouse.....	100
Sense of Identity.....	101
Sense of Belonging.....	101

Reflecting on the Story Poles.....	102
Chapter 5: Discussion and Recommendations	104
Introduction.....	104
Discussion.....	105
Story Pole 1: Culture, Land and Ceremony.....	109
Story Pole 1: What is in the Best Interests of the Child?.....	110
Story Pole 2: Communities Caring for One Another.....	111
Story Pole 2: What is in the Best Interests of the Child?.....	112
Story Pole 3: Families.....	112
Story Pole 3: What is in the Best Interests of the Child?.....	114
Story Pole 4: Spirituality and Healing.....	115
Story Pole 4: What is in the Best Interests of the Child?.....	116
Recommendations.....	116
Recommendations for Self.....	117
Recommendations for Social Workers and Child and Youth Care Practitioners.....	118
Recommendations for Stó:lō Nation Communities.....	120
Recommendations for Community Engaged Research.....	121
My Future Direction and Involvement in Research.....	122
Closing Words.....	124
References.....	126
Appendix A: Participant Consent Form.....	138
Appendix B: Research Questions.....	141

List of Figures

Figure 1. Lhílheqey (Mt. Cheam).....	57
Figure 2. Story of the Longhouse: My Research Plan.....	59
Figure 3. Storywork: Making Meaning through "Interrelatedness and Synergy".....	70
Figure 4. An Indigenous Approach to Thematic Analysis: The Value of Respect.....	71
Figure 5. Raising of the New Story Poles.....	109

Acknowledgments

To our Stó:lō Elders, our recognized knowledge keepers. I cannot express in words how thankful I am for the time and the stories you shared. I honour each of your journeys and the roles you carry in our communities.

To my parents. My dad, Bill, who has offered endless amounts of love and support as a parent and an academic. I value our many conversations around the dining room table and will be forever grateful for the family stories and teachings you shared throughout this process. My mom, Marion, for your very practical advice always followed by a hug. Thank you for helping me grow with our Oneida teachings, they will forever keep me grounded in love and love for our family in so many ways.

My sister, Willow, who has shared a life journey with me, aside from a few short years! Thank you for being my sister. Your love of our Halq'eméylem language has inspired me on a new learning path. I am glad we can spend time together sharing the language and the good things it brings.

To my husband, Daryl, you offered quiet and steady support as I worked through my master's degree. I thank you for your encouragement and giving me the time to complete my work – I'm glad you love the forest.

To my grandson, Jax, for reminding me of the importance of identity and belonging in raising a strong Stó:lō child. Our time together brings me so much joy and reminds me of the importance of my work with our children and youth.

To Dr. Nick Claxton, thank you for introducing me to Indigenous Research Methodology. I will be forever grateful for your gentle strength in bringing forth ideas I felt were unfamiliar, but realized were the mirror in which I saw myself.

To my supervisor, Dr. Sarah Wright Cardinal, it's difficult to express the depth of my gratitude and appreciation for the role you have taken. Your knowledge, care and patience have helped me navigate this knowledge gathering journey through both steady and turbulent waters. To Dr. Billie Allan, my committee member, for the guidance and knowledge you shared as you joined me on this journey.

Dedication

To my Grandmothers,
Genevieve Mussell (1920 – 1993), Grace Young (1931 – 1980)
and Mary Lou Andrew (1933 – 2000).

You are ever present in my life through the love and guidance you have given me.

To My Parents, Bill and Marion Mussell.
Thank you for keeping me grounded and for giving me the
teachings about how to live a good life.

I hold my hands up to you all.
You have made all the difference on my journey through life.

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Introduction

As a child I remember sitting and listening to stories. The best storytellers in our family were my uncles, Fred and Jack. They entertained us with hunting stories, stories of being on the river, and stories about growing up in the community. As I think about these stories now, I know there was a greater purpose in gathering to listen to what was shared with me. In many of these stories were lessons and teachings of our Stó:lō community. The story that I paid the most attention to was my Uncle Fred's story of the sas'qets, better known as the sasquatch. For the Stó:lō people, the sas'qets is recognized as a mystical being who moves between our physical and spiritual worlds. He is also our relative and so we honour and respect sas'qets in ceremony. As a young girl, I remember my uncle telling us how the sas'qets would swim across the river and wander through our community. We were taught we had to be careful after dark, because while the sas'qets was not there to harm us, he would sometimes take people back to the spirit world with him. Because of this story, I was always careful not to be out alone after dark and would often run as fast as I could down the road between my Granny's house and our home to avoid being caught by sas'qets.

Today I think of sas'qets and the lessons I have learned from him throughout my life. I think of my family and the strong relationships we have with one another. I also wonder what it would have been like to be stolen away by him. The story about sas'qets ultimately reminds me that while there are dangers in the world, there are people who love and care about us. People who take the time to share their stories are important, so that we can understand Stó:lō teachings and create a better life for ourselves, our children and our communities.

The Beginning of the Journey

I have come to see myself through many different lenses; however, for the purpose of my academic study, I share myself as an Indigenous woman and scholar from two strong Indigenous cultural backgrounds. Through my father, Bill Mussell Jr., I come from the Sqwà First Nation located in Chilliwack, British Columbia; this community is part of the Stó:lō Nation (Coast Salish) and is often referred to as “People of the River”. Through my mother, Marion Mussell (John), I am also connected to the Oneida First Nation, near London, Ontario; this community is part of Six Nations (Iroquois) and is known as “People of the Standing Stone”. My mother moved to Chilliwack in the early 1970s after she met my father, so I was raised with my younger sister in Chilliwack and maintain strong ties to my Oneida family. Our family would travel to Ontario to spend time with my mother’s family so the teachings of the Oneida people remain with me. The Oneida people are also matrilineal; in this, women are responsible for carrying their culture and taking roles of leadership within their family. Being the eldest daughter of an eldest daughter carries additional responsibility for looking after my family and the well-being of our Nation through the cultural teachings of leadership and guidance.

My name is Dayna Gawi-neh Mussell. It is our Stó:lō way to honour our family and community first before we introduce ourselves. I carry the Oneida name Gawi-neh, which was gifted to me at birth by my grandmother, Grace Young (John), and my great-grandfather, Evan John. The name belonged to my great-grandmother, Jemima, who was married to my great-grandfather, Evan, through an arranged marriage. Our Indigenous names are traditionally passed through families, which is why my great-grandmother’s name was passed to me. My mother also shares a name with her great-grandmother, as names and responsibilities are

passed on. The name Gawi-neh is an old name and, therefore, has been interpreted in different ways. My great-grandfather translated the name as “Free Spirit Like the Wind”, while my mom’s uncle later explained the meaning as “Keeper of the Corn”. The Oneida Elders shared that through time names may change, although both meanings are tied to the reciprocal and spiritual relationships we have as Oneida people.

My Family Background

Through my parents and grandparents, I have strong ancestral ties to the lands from where I come. My paternal grandparents, Bill Mussell Sr. and Genevieve Mussell (Micholuk), were married in 1937 and made a home at Sqwá First Nation. My grandpa was Stó:lō, born in Ts’elxwéyeqw (Chilliwack) like his ancestors before him. My Granny was Ukrainian, born from settlers who travelled to Canada from Slovakia (Ukraine and Poland) prior to the Russian Revolution. My grandparents raised my father and his siblings on a dairy farm in the community during the 1940s and 1950s. Because of the responsibilities of the dairy farm, my father and his siblings had the benefit of being raised at home and attending the Federal Indian Day School established at Sqwá in March 1915. However, the purpose of the day school was similar to that of the Indian Residential School, “Indian Day schools were created with the purpose of facilitating child-targeted assimilation – a term coined by Indigenous scholar Wahéhshon Shiann Whitebean (<https://shewalksabout.com/>) – and of eradicating Indigenous language, culture and community connection in the process” (McDaniel, 2022, para. 2). The main difference between the day school and the residential school was that the children were allowed to return home in the evening. Despite being able to return home, it is noted that

many of the children still faced, “the same forms of physical, psychological and sexual abuse” (McDaniel, 2022, para. 6) as those at residential school.

My father started at the school when he was 6 years old. According to his recollection, he was a good student and did not face the abuses that other students in day schools suffered. It was my grandmother who began to take issue with the day school. In her later years she commented that while my father was able to memorize and recite the catechism beautifully, she knew it would not help educate him. As part of my grandmother’s desire to have her children educated beyond what the day school could provide, she lobbied the provincial government, and in turn, my father and his brother, Fred, were the first Indigenous children from our community to attend public school. My father shared that although there were still struggles within the family, being at home and within the family structure ultimately prepared him well for his future.

It is interesting to reflect on this time in our family history and the role that my grandmother played. She was a Ukrainian settler and because of this, I wonder if her whiteness afforded her the benefit of being able to have her children stay at home and attend the day school. While I tend to think of my grandmother as very much a part of our Indigenous community and family, I also recognize that her whiteness may have afforded her special power and privilege that her Indigenous relatives did not have. According to Ricketts (2021), “whether you like it or not or intend to be or not. Simply by virtue of belonging to whiteness all white people perpetuate and benefit from the global system of white supremacy – on an individual and collective level” (p. 64). On this level, I understand that my grandmother used this power and privilege for the benefit of her children, and the community that accepted her. My

grandmother was raised in poverty, so while she experienced white privilege, she also faced aspects of oppression and marginalization as a poor, eastern European immigrant woman, of which shaped her throughout her childhood. As a young woman she recognized the ill effects of these experiences that later led her to feel at home in the Sqwá community. My grandmother, Genevieve Mussell, was able to move into a position to resist the imposed rules and regulations of the Indian Act put upon herself and her children.

My maternal grandparents, Don Young and Grace Young (John), lived in the community of Mt. Brydges. My grandmother came from the Oneida of the Thames, while my grandfather came from the neighbouring Chippewa of the Thames. After they were married, they made the conscious decision to raise their family off reserve as a way to ensure that my mother and her siblings did not attend residential school. This does not suggest all families across Canada could move off reserve to avoid residential school, this speaks to what was possible in the area my grandparents lived. In my mother's recollection, "The best option for children in the 1950s was to attend a white school where they could learn English and have good academics" (M. Mussell, personal communication, May 29, 2023). Public schools in Canada started desegregation in the 1950s, this allowed Indigenous children in certain jurisdictions to attend public school. In turn, my mother attended one of the last one room school houses in Southwestern Ontario.

Leaving the community was a difficult decision for my grandparents. My mother describes it as being emotionally difficult because my grandmother was close with her parents and held a special role in her family. The decision to leave was possible because my grandparents were able to move in with my great-grandmother, Elizabeth "Lizzie" Young, and her partner, Harvey Graves. Harvey was a white settler farmer who owned land in Mt. Brydges.

Harvey is remembered as not having any family and when he married Lizzie; her family became Harvey's family. My grandfather worked as a truck driver and was able to buy a small piece of land from Harvey, which is where they built a home and raised their children. My grandparents were also one of the few Indigenous families who could share their home with children in government care, thus extending the care and nurturance they could provide to others. I share this piece about my grandparents to honour them for the decisions they made to keep their families together as this was not possible for all Indigenous families in the 1950s, as in many communities children were continuing to be forcibly removed.

As I look back into my family history, I see the relative absence of effects from residential school. Only my maternal grandfather attended residential school; both of my grandmothers did not. I thank this family era for contributing to the health and wellness of our family and the strong influence of the women who raised my parents, both Oneida and Ukrainian. This commitment led to each of my parent's having a strong cultural identity and connection to who they are as Indigenous people.

Maintaining Cultural Connections

There are those who would argue that my grandparent's decision to move off of the reserve would contribute to a loss of cultural connection. I believe my mother's family was in a unique situation. My grandmother had a strong connection and responsibility to her family and they were fortunate to own a car which allowed them the ability to travel back and forth to the reserve. My mother spent a lot of time on the reserve and remembers spending summers with her grandparents at Oneida. Her family continued to practice ceremony inside their home, and also relied on traditional medicines when family members were ill.

On my father's side, his parents built their home within the Sqwá community where they raised their children. For his first nine years of life, my father was raised in the community and actively engaged in the day-to-day life involving his cousins and other relatives. My grandpa taught my dad about hunting ducks and geese, which were important aspects of everyday living. He also has fond memories of visiting close relatives within his home community and at other First Nations villages in the area. Such connections enhanced his knowledge of family history and the importance of sustaining the health and wellness transmitted to us through our ancestors. I understand my family histories reflect the importance of land, language, culture and ceremony and establish who we are as Stó:lō people in passing this knowledge on to future generations.

As I reflect on my family and how they remained connected to culture, it is important to mention our belief as Indigenous people that cultural identity begins with a connection to spirit. The connection between identity and spirit is grounded in our natural laws and comes to life in our teachings, stories and ceremony (Wright Cardinal, 2016; 2017). There is an unspoken understanding that we are intrinsically tied to spirit and that spirit can be found in all things around us (Simard & Blight, 2011). Simard (2011; 2019) provides a theoretical framework that asserts the fundamental importance of Indigenous children being connected to their family and their culture. Building on Jeanine Carrière's child welfare research and the importance of cultural connection for Indigenous adoptees, Simard developed a theory of culturally restorative child welfare practice in response to Indigenous understandings of attachment theory. Based on a 20- year review of Anishnaabe child welfare practice, Simard (2019) recognizes that children need to feel a connection with the land, culture and mother nature in

order to develop a sense of identity and belonging to family, community and spirit. Expanding on the work of other Indigenous scholars who have written about spirit-based identity and child welfare, Simard (2019) articulates this theory to place attachment and relationships within the context of culture, cultural restoration and revitalization and the role they play in transforming Indigenous child welfare.

Dr. Sarah Wright Cardinal also highlights the importance of spirit-based identities in her work on Indigenous child welfare and reclaiming Indigenous identity. Wright Cardinal draws on the work of sociologist Eva Garroutte to help articulate the importance of spirit-based identity. Garroutte (2003) examines the topic of identity formation among Native people in North America and observes four dimensions of Native identity in the literature: legal, biological, cultural and personal (self-identification). Garroutte (2003) contends there are limitations to and often serious issues within these definitions, as Indigenous identity is largely defined by the government which ultimately fails Indigenous people. Garroutte offers a fifth dimension of Indigenous identity, a spirit-based identity which she calls “a definition of kinship” (2003, p. 118 in Wright Cardinal, 2017). Kinship involves what we often term as ways of being and ways of doing; Garroutte describes the condition of being as relationship to ancestry, and the condition of doing as responsibility to reciprocity (2003, p. 118). Thus, when we seek cultural connections for Indigenous children in care, we are asking “who claims this child”, who are the kinship connections and what are the practices of this kin. In her dissertation, Wright Cardinal (2017) expands on Garroutte’s work:

Her perspective supports the work of later scholars who invite us to look to the traditional teachings of our respective Indigenous nations to understand identity. Here

we will find our spirit-based relationships, how we come into relationship with human and non-human relations, and our connections to the natural world which includes language, relationship to land and to each other (p. 40).

As I consider the importance of spirit-based identities, I look at my own experience in my family and community and I am confident in my belief that families are at the core of the connection between spirit, culture, identity and well-being. The relationship with spirit connects us to land, language, culture and ceremony. It is the family's role to protect cultural knowledge and teachings and to teach this in a good way to future generations, a role that has faced ongoing interference by the child welfare system (Garrouette, 2003; Haight et al., 2018; Simard, 2019). While it is up to Indigenous people to carry on the traditional teachings and ceremonies that inform their way of being and doing, it is equally important for the non-Indigenous community to respect, support and make space for culture to be alive and present for Indigenous peoples (Garrouette, 2003; Wright Cardinal, 2017; Haight et al., 2018; Simard, 2019). By honouring the inherent knowledge of Indigenous peoples, including our own cultural lifeways and natural laws, non-Indigenous peoples can recognize and act on the Calls to Action outlined by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015).

Connection to Indigenous Child Welfare

From 2010 to 2022, I worked as a social worker in the unrest of the Indigenous child welfare system at Fraser Valley Aboriginal Children and Family Services (FVACFSS), a Delegated Aboriginal Agency (DAA) in British Columbia. I openly admit that during that time, I was part of the turbulence and upheaval experienced by Indigenous children, families and communities who became involved in the child welfare system. What made this journey so challenging is that

I am also Indigenous, so along with some of the chaos in this role, I tried to remain grounded in my teachings about how we care about one another as Indigenous people. Because of those teachings, I spent a great deal of time thinking about how I fit into the child welfare system, my roles and responsibilities as both a professional and as part of the Stó:lō community.

Ultimately, as a social worker I was responsible for the safety and well-being of children using policy and practice standards provided by the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). I worked within a paternalistic, colonized system created by the government responsible for the assimilation of our people into western society. At the same time, as a Stó:lō person, I carried a heavy responsibility to bring both a cultural and relational lens to the work that I was doing in order to better meet the needs of the children, families and communities I was working with, some of whom are my relatives. In my 12 years of practice, I witnessed times where the use of cultural practices has been supported by the agency and positively impacted families, and times when it created a clash of values within the policy and practice framework. In recent years, there has been a shift in considering cultural strengths of our nations and how to recognize and integrate these strengths into better practice models. These shifts can be attributed to the recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015), the implementation of the Aboriginal Policy and Practice Framework released by the Ministry of Children and Family Development (2010), and most recently, the BC Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (BCDRIPA) (2019). I believe these attempts at integration are part of the reconciliation process, along with the larger hope of creating better outcomes for our communities.

As I reflect on this process, I wonder where this journey will take us. What will our final destination be? There is ongoing transformation in the field of Indigenous child welfare across Canada. Indigenous nations have been relentless in pursuing better standards of care for how child welfare is implemented in our communities. Due to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission findings and recent legislative changes by the Government of Canada, primarily Bill C-92: An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Metis children, youth and families (2019), many nations are able to move towards local decision making, with the legal ability to re-establish their own child welfare systems. As a result of Indigenous lobbying, Indigenous governments and organizations that are authorized to act on behalf of Indigenous peoples, whose rights are recognized and affirmed under section 35 of the Constitution Act (1982), are asserting governance over child welfare. These are referred to as Indigenous Governing Bodies (IGBs), described as “a council, government or other entity that is authorized to act on behalf of an Indigenous group, community or people that holds rights recognized and affirmed by section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982. (*corps dirigeant autochone*)” (Government of Canada, 2022, p. 2). The inclusion of Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982 recognizes and affirms the constitutional rights of Indigenous peoples in Canada, including existing and treaty rights (Government of Canada, 2021, para. 1). What is important about these pieces of legislation is that they represent changes in the ongoing relationship between Indigenous people and the Government of Canada. I am aware of some of the changes that are happening within my own nation in relation to child welfare. Within Stó:lō territory we have a Delegated Aboriginal Agency, now referred to as an Indigenous Child and Family Service Agency; we also have Indigenous Services provided by MCFD and communities that are moving forward with legal

agreements to become Indigenous Governing Bodies. The hope in the creation of IGBs is that they will advance self-determination for communities in the delivery of child and family services by creating space for Indigenous governments to move forward in creating agreements with the provincial government for services. In today's context of the Canadian system, self-determination means reclaiming Stó:lō ways of child-rearing and child safety.

As I reflect on the many ways that child and family services are being delivered within my nation, I know that it is our land, language, culture and ceremony that bring us together and that are at the core of how we care for our children, families and communities and should be at the very centre of how we intervene and support those who are struggling with the effects and consequences of colonization. To be truly community-based, we need to re-establish our own ways of caring for one another through our systems of care, rooted in our lifeways, including our language, cultural teachings and practices, traditional governance and approaches to healing (Garrouette, 2003; Hall, 2012; Wright Cardinal, 2016, 2017). Being grounded in our land, language, culture and ceremony will help us move ahead (Wright Cardinal, 2016, 2017), leaving behind the burdens of a broken child welfare system that we did not create but have been left holding without a safety net of any kind. In Stó:lō, we understand this as s'xweta:s selh tset te mekw'stam (the way we were with everything).

Positionality

My positionality has been greatly influenced by my social location as an Indigenous, university educated, middle class, home owning, cis-gender, light skinned and able-bodied woman. I also had the privilege of growing up in a safe environment, knowing the love and care of both my parents. In the early 1970s, my parents were able to build a home in our community

at Sqwá on land given to them by my grandfather. My father worked professionally in the area of health and education, which allowed my mother to stay at home and raise my sister and I. Because we lived in the community, we were surrounded by extended family. My aunts and uncles were extensions of my parents and my many cousins were considered siblings. As a child I never questioned how I grew up. As an adult, I see how I grew up in a strong, safe, secure and happy family, and how that shaped who I am as an Indigenous woman. Being on the land and growing up in community with “all my relations” has grounded me in my Indigenous identity. I look to our place names and our stories as a way to make sense of what is culturally meaningful.

One of the significant teachings is that of our creation story. What is significant about our creation story is that there are many versions within Stó:lō territory, in fact, every community has a version of their “first people”. It is the mystical Xà:ls (the Transformer) that ties Stó:lō people together, Xà:ls (the Transformer) existed in a time before man, and “came through the world, transforming monsters and other myth-age beings into rocks and animals, and setting things in order for people of the present age...” (Carlson, 1997, p. 185). Sxwōxwiyám refers to our traditional stories and acknowledges “the existence of people who lived before the ‘first people’” (Carlson, 1997, p. 186). I use this teaching to explore the power of transformation within a holistic context.

As a Stó:lō woman working with children and families within my own territory I have knowledge of the impacts of Residential Schools, the Sixties Scoop and the inequitable power relationships which typically describe how the provincial, territorial and federal governments have provided child and family services to Indigenous people. I am currently considering ways

to support the children and families I serve because, if we can work together to help families reach a place of holistic wellness we all are well.

On a personal level, I recognize that through the eyes of Canadian society I am of the oppressed and marginalized, but through the eyes of my community I am recognized as coming from privilege. I find this an odd comparison. From a historical perspective, the federal government is responsible for the marginalization and oppression of our communities through their race-based legislation. I came to learn of our marginalization and oppression as a young adult largely from the work my parents did in health, education and social work. As I went through university and began working with children and families in our communities, I was able to see the effects of colonization and began to understand my own positionality on many different levels.

In my community, we are seen as a privileged family, and some community members refer to us as “The White Mussells”; I sometimes wonder where this term comes from and why it is used. “The White Mussells” is both an indication of the inter-racial marriage of my grandparents and how colonized our community has become. Wolfe (2006) states, “Here, in essence, is assimilation’s Faustian bargain – have our settler world, but lose your Indigenous soul” (p. 397). I wonder if I am seen as not having an “Indigenous soul”. My Ukrainian grandmother received Indian status due to the Indian Act legislation of the day and lived on reserve with my Stó:lō grandfather within the confines of the Indian Act while also holding white privilege. I often reflect on how a person can be both oppressed and privileged. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) addresses this through the concept of intersectionality: “Intersectionality is just a metaphor for understanding the ways that multiple forms of inequality or disadvantage

sometimes compound themselves and they create obstacles that are often not understood within conventional ways of thinking” (National Association of Independent Schools, 2018, n.p)”. Through the lens of intersectionality, my identity includes experiences of privilege; growing up middle class, in a two-parent home, where I was safe, supported in my education and had opportunities for extra-curricular activities, while still living in my community and identifying as an Indigenous woman, sharing a history of assimilation. As I reconcile the intersectionality of my identity, I think of my family’s history and how we have become divided and marginalized within our communities and at the same time challenged to resist exclusion. My positionality must not offer exclusion as an alternative; instead, it must offer meaningful opportunities for inclusion that permit and promote ways of being and doing that uplift and sustain our lifeways and teachings.

As Indigenous people we are resilient and have the ability to create wellness for our children, families, and communities. I attribute our resilience to our sophisticated knowledge systems that come from our natural laws. I believe that we can work toward wellness through cultural resurgence and that this path needs to be community led, not prescribed to us by the current structures that were created by colonialism. The teachings of our ancestors imbedded within the worldviews of our respective nations are essential to this wellness strategy (Wright Cardinal, 2017). These teachings feature wholeness, represented by the medicines which highlight balance and harmony (physical, emotional, social and cognitive) and the spiritual nature of life. Grieving and healing from the effects of trauma at the hands of our colonizers represents today’s challenge. Trauma informed care is being employed to bring about family health and community wellness where culture is the foundation.

The Challenge for Today

The forced separation of Indigenous children from their families and communities due to Residential Schools, the Sixties Scoop and the current child welfare system resulted in disconnection, loss of culture and language and intergenerational trauma (Milloy, 1999; TRC, 2015; Holyk & Harder, 2016; John, 2016; RCY, 2017; Starblanket, 2018). The continued reality of forced separation is visible in the overrepresentation of children in care in British Columbia (TRC, 2015; John, 2016; RCY, 2017; Rousseau, 2018) with the most recent statistics indicating that there were 5,037 children and youth in care in British Columbia in 2022, with 3,425 or 68% of these children being identified as Indigenous (MCFD, 2023). For a province where only 5.9% of the population is Indigenous, this statistic is significant. This over-representation is a legacy of colonization and the discriminatory policies and laws that were put in place by federal and provincial governments (TRC, 2015).

Context

In 1991, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) was assigned the task of examining the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Government of Canada from the time of Confederation (1867) to the present. According to Former Co-Chair of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Justice Rene Dussault (2007), “Two themes emerged again and again in the Commission hearings: an overwhelming concern for the well-being of children and the belief that families are at the crux of personal and community healing” (p. 9). The RCAP also supported the inherent right of Indigenous people to care for and plan for their own children and “urged Canadians to begin a national process of reconciliation that would have set the country on a bold new path” (TRC, 2015, p. 7). The notion of reconciliation was revisited

with the creation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2008 to inform Canadians about the history of the residential schools in Canada and the experiences of First Nations, Inuit, and Metis survivors. The Final Report of the Commission released in 2015 generated 94 Calls to Action in order to “redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation” (TRC, 2015, p. 319).

A sense of urgency was added as the first five calls to action applied directly to addressing child welfare. The first five calls to action demanded the provincial, territorial, federal and Indigenous governments be committed to: 1) reducing the number of Indigenous children in care; 2) being accountable to the number of Indigenous children and the reasons why; 3) implementing and utilizing Jordan’s Principle; 4) establishing national standards for Indigenous child welfare, specifically apprehension and custody; and 5) developing culturally based parenting programs (TRC, 2015, p. 319-320). The federal government responded by creating legislation to include Indigenous peoples in the provision of child and family services, known as Bill C-92: An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families (2019). It is important to recognize that while many nations have been involved in this process prior to the creation of Bill C-92, this legislation gives Canadian political recognition and support to Indigenous nations to move toward local decision-making, with the right to re-establish their own child welfare systems.

Research Question

Indigenous nations know that their traditional teachings and natural laws provide the underlying basis on which wellness can be created. For decades, Indigenous nations have been fighting for a return to self-determination in order to have the right to improve their lifeways

from the many struggles imposed on them through colonization. Through the federal government's creation of Bill C-92, Indigenous nations now have the opportunity and support to create community-based models of service that are centered on cultural teachings and natural laws. Recognizing culture as a foundation in the creation of a care system will likely promote more positive strategies in addressing the current issues faced by Indigenous people today (Simard, 2019; Wright Cardinal et al, 2023). To support this process, it is necessary to define the best interests of the child according to the nation/community they belong to. In my thesis research, I have utilized Storywork, an Indigenous storytelling methodology, to address the overarching research question: "How do Stó:lō people define the best interests of the child based on the cultural, linguistic and governance structure of their nation?".

Research Focus

How we define ourselves as Indigenous people is different from how the provincial, territorial or federal governments define us. We define and understand ourselves through our cultural teachings and worldviews. It is these diverse worldviews and cultural teachings that provide the foundation for the child well-being systems that we intend to provide. This study relies on the cultural teachings of our Stó:lō Elders as relatives who are highly regarded for their wisdom and knowledge in our Indigenous traditions. Stó:lō researcher and educator Dr. Joanne Archibald, who also worked with Stó:lō Elders in her research, states that "Elders have varying knowledges, or 'gifts,' to pass on to others, whether spiritual, healing, medicinal, historical, storytelling, or linguistic" (Archibald, 2008, p. 37). Elders also share a special connection with our children; in our teachings, Elders and children are closest to the spirit world, and therefore are highly valued members of Indigenous society. From a cultural perspective, I view Elders as

having most knowledge and wisdom to contribute to my research project in guiding a Stó:lō-specific definition and understanding of “best interests of the child”.

I approach the work of learning about a Stó:lō-specific definition through the lens of the teachings of a good Stó:lō life because our work as Indigenous peoples must be based on our cultural teachings and worldviews. As Indigenous peoples move forward in re-examining the concept and definition of the “best interests of the child” we must ensure that it encompasses the holistic nature of who we are.

To truly conduct a culturally appropriate best interests analysis, the analysis must be done with the recognition that culture extends to every other factor in a best interests analysis. In this way, indigeneity is not a factor to be considered in an “objective” “best interests” checklist, but is actually the lens through which best interests should be determined (Tesarek, 2021, pp. 410-411).

While the value of defining the “best interests of the child” is the recognition that all children are to be holistically protected, we must also be cautious that this definition is largely based on a Western based ideology and has been used to cause great harm to Indigenous children (Long & Sephton, 2011; Tesarek, 2021). Therefore, I am using the approach that culture be the foundation for determining what is in the best interests of a Stó:lō child, using questions that capture the knowledge of Elders based on their understandings of wellness and what it means to live a “good Stó:lō life”. In this research study, I examine how the Stó:lō people define “best interests of the child” based on cultural teachings, language and governance structures. The intention of gathering this information is to support Stó:lō communities moving towards self-determination of child and family well-being; study findings may also be helpful for other

Indigenous communities undertaking similar work. Please note that the term “best interests of the child” is not present in the Halq’eméylem (Stó:lō) language which suggests there has not previously been a need for this definition. From our stories, “best interests of the child” were inherent to the quality of life lived by family and community.

Rationale

In Stó:lō Territory, there are two political groups taking active roles in making change for children, families and communities: the Stó:lō Nation Chiefs Council (9 First Nations) and the Stó:lō Tribal Council (7 First Nations). In addition, there are 8 First Nations that are not part of either group who identify as independent. At this time, Sqwá First Nation identifies as one of the independent nations. In Stó:lō Territory there is also a mix of services from both the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) and Fraser Valley Aboriginal Children and Family Services Society (FVACSS), a Delegated Aboriginal Agency (DAA), which has been providing services since 1995. In 2018, Grand Chief Doug Kelly, then president of the Stó:lō Tribal Council, called for changes to the current child and family service model. Kelly contends that MCFD has a narrow approach respecting children’s safety, and that “Indigenous families take issue with that approach. We want to keep our children safe and keep families together. The current model does not do that” (Feinberg, 2018, para. 7). Kelly further shares that we need to reinstate our matriarchs as the decision makers when it comes to families (Feinberg, 2018, para, 15), simply because no one loves our children like their aunties and grandmothers. Kelly’s concerns speak to the ongoing tensions in regards to the high number of children in care and the lack of prevention services for families within our nation, as well as the need to establish more culturally relevant systems of care.

Disruptions to Indigenous Ways of Life

First Nations, Inuit and Métis have a complex relationship with provincial, territorial and federal governments in Canada based on a history of Canadian government policies and laws meant to assimilate Indigenous peoples (Milloy, 1999; Dussault, 2007; Holyk & Harder, 2016; John, 2016; RCY, 2017; Starblanket, 2018) that have had devastating effects that Indigenous people often described as genocide. Generation after generation faced physical, mental, emotional and spiritual harm, and were lost, often forever, to their families and communities through child removal policies (BCGEU, 2015; TRC, 2015; Starblanket, 2018).

The arrival of settlers and settler laws and policies put in place by provincial, territorial and federal governments disrupted Indigenous people's ways of life, including child rearing, familial relationships and relationships with the land (Milloy, 1999; TRC, 2015; Holyk & Harder, 2016; RCY, 2017). The removal of children from their families and communities to Residential Schools institutionalized intergenerational trauma through the loss of connection, culture and language and the enactment of physical, emotional, spiritual and sexual abuse (Milloy, 1999; Dussault, 2007; Holyk & Harder, 2016; John, 2016; RCY, 2017; Starblanket, 2018).

Despite the ongoing push for better services, the number of Indigenous children in care continues to increase. Information from Statistics Canada shows that as of 2021, Indigenous children make up 53.8 percent of children in care nationally, compared to 52.2 percent in 2016 (Needham, 2022). In taking steps toward reconciliation, the federal government introduced Bill C-92: An Act respecting First Nation, Inuit and Metis children, youth and families in June 2020. The Act "affirms the rights of Indigenous governments and organizations to exercise jurisdiction over First Nations, Inuit and Metis child and family services" (Government of Canada, 2023,

para. 4). Because Bill C-92 is a federal act, it supersedes provincial and territorial legislation and authority. The Act supports Indigenous communities in planning for their children and places a priority on keeping children connected to family and community. BC is the first province to implement the act through, Bill 38 – 2022: Indigenous Self-Government in Child and Family Services Amendment Act which acknowledges the jurisdiction of Indigenous governments and organizations over child welfare.

Members of our Indigenous communities are familiar with evidence of discrimination and are hopeful for their future. In recent years, Knowledge Keepers have agreed by consensus that the teachings of their ancestors were vital for cultural restoration and revitalization. The recognition of Indigenous beliefs and practices are being realized through the implementation of Bill C-92, the recognition of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the recent decision made by the Federal Court of Canada that ruled that the Government of Canada discriminated against Indigenous children and their families.

Benefits of the Study

From the time Xal:s (the Transformer) brought us together as Stó:lō people, we established our lifeways based on our sacred knowledge and in relationship to our land, language, culture and ceremony. These systems of care were disrupted when colonized systems were forced upon us, causing generations of harm. My hope is that we can work towards reclaiming our systems within a modern context to meet the needs of our people today. The primary benefit of this research will be to support Stó:lō and other Indigenous communities in developing systems of care for children and families. I believe that awareness of and the ability

to apply our cultural teachings in caring and competent ways can transform how we care for one another.

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Our knowledge systems have supported and ensured our survival as Stó:lō people. Despite many attempts to destroy or invalidate this knowledge, it is through sustaining our cultural knowledge and teachings that we have been able to stay grounded. With current transformations happening in the area of Indigenous child welfare, it is important for communities to use their traditional knowledge systems to help determine what is in the best interests of their children. Therefore, the focus of my research is to explore and articulate how Stó:lō people define the best interests of the child based on culture, language and governance systems. In order to create context for this definition, this chapter will examine relevant literature on the history of child welfare, focussing on areas of cultural disruption, cultural resurgence, decolonization and reconciliation. I utilized the UVIC library search engine to search for relevant literature using the following search terms: “Indigenous child welfare,” “history of Indigenous child welfare,” and “decolonizing Indigenous child welfare”. In addition, I also reviewed numerous articles that were commonly referenced in other books and articles on Indigenous child welfare, as well as looking at local sources focussed on Stó:lō knowledge. I reviewed this information to create a better understanding on the context and role of Indigenous child welfare from an Indigenous perspective.

This literature review will consider information on the scope of Indigenous child welfare in British Columbia, particularly in relation to the Stó:lō Nation. I begin by offering a working definition of culture informed by the literature and then briefly examine how Stó:lō people care for one another based on Stó:lō laws. The importance of culture and the ways in which Stó:lō

people care for one another serve as the foundation of my analysis of Indigenous child welfare literature which I present to readers through the following three phases: 1) cultural disruption, which will focus on the history of colonization, 2) cultural resurgence, and 3) decolonization and reconciliation.

A Working Definition of Culture

For the purpose of this research, culture is understood in the context of Indigenous people and the unique worldview and practices that were, and continue to be, part of our everyday lives. In regards to child welfare, culture is what the Government of Canada attempted to remove through the forced assimilation of children by removing them from their families to Indian residential schools, Indian day schools, transracial adoption and ongoing child welfare apprehension into foster care.

The First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework was developed in partnership with Indigenous Services Canada, the Assembly of First Nations and the Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, in order to “improve mental wellness outcomes for First Nations” (ISC, 2015). While this document prioritizes mental wellness, it highlights the principle that culture is foundational for supporting wellness (ISC, 2015, p. 22). The framework points to language, culture and identity as being “spirit centered” (ISC, 2015, p. 22) and offers a broad definition of culture to encompass these principles. The authors acknowledge there are many ways of understanding culture, in general terms, the First Nations Wellness Continuum Framework (2015) defines culture as:

- grounded in the creation story of each Indigenous language family and maintained through their sacred knowledge structures;

- based on the truth that the pattern of creation continuously repeats itself across all aspects of life;
- maintained across generations and yet created through individuals' interactions with the changing world;
- identified through language, land, and nationhood and expressed spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and physically through unique values, relationships, and ways of being and doing (p. 34);

and

- dynamic, ever evolving and changing, created through individuals' interactions with the world, resulting in ways of naming and understanding reality;
- symbolic, often identified through symbols such as language, dress, music, and behaviours;
- learned and passed on through generations, changing in response to a generation or individual's experiences and environment; and
- integrated to span all aspects of an individual's life (p. 34).

To create a meaningful definition, the components must come from our own nations teachings and traditional ways of life to truly reflect our Indigenous belief systems. The focus on Indigenous understandings of culture, including components such as the creation story, relationships with land, and the inclusion of spirituality take a central role in the expression of culture.

Theoretical Perspective: How We Care for One Another

From time immemorial, Stó:lō people have had strong connections with one another. These relationships are grounded in our land, spirit-based identity and systems of Indigenous law. Borrows (2010, as cited in Napoleon, 2016) concludes that there are at least five sources of Indigenous law: sacred, deliberative, custom, positive, and natural (p. 3). Borrows (2006) also writes that legal traditions can come from multiple sources:

They can be based on supernatural declarations, naturalistic observations, positivistic proclamations, deliberative practices, or local and national customs. Some Indigenous laws are regarded as divine, given by the Creator in precise fashion for the world to follow. Others may be regarded as more naturalistic; some derive from the Creator, but others are timeless and independent of any force. (p. 9)

It is a combination of the sacred and the natural law that inform the theoretical perspective in which I base my research. Our sacred laws come from our creation stories. In Stó:lō tradition, these are called *sxwōxwiyám* (traditional story) and represent events that happened either at or just before the time of creation. Our natural laws are defined by our relationship with the natural world, such as the belief that we are created from the earth, sky and water of our ancestral homeland. One of the stories that has come to represent how these laws define how we care for one another is the story of Lhílheqhey, otherwise known as Mt. Cheam. The following story was shared in 1962 by Stò:lō Elder, Óyewot (Amy Cooper) from Th'ewá:li (Soowhalie First Nation):

Well, Mount Cheam is a lady, and Mount Baker is a man. This is an old legend. So Mount Baker, he comes over and he looks for a wife, and he finds a nice-looking girl. So he

takes her over to the state of Washington. They live there and they have three boys, Mount Hood, Mount Ranier – I can't tell you who the other one is. And they have three girls, but the boys are the oldest ones. After the boys grew up and she had three little girls she says, "I had better go back home," she says, "to my people, to the Fraser River." So she comes back, and she says, "I'll stand guard," she says, "I'll stand and guard the Fraser River, that no harm comes to my people, and no harm comes to the fish that comes up to feed them". That's the legend. (Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Centre, 2016, para. 2)

Through my search for knowledge about Lhílheqey, I discovered there are many variations of this story. In some versions she leaves her husband because she misses being with her people, in others she returns because she and her husband are at odds with one another. There are also differences in how her children come to be with her, and finally why she is transformed into a mountain. What helped my understanding of Lhílheqey was realizing that the true essence of our beliefs is found within all the variations, and that it is "necessary to collect as many versions of the same story as possible" (Napoleon, 2012, p. 55). Through this collection of stories, we can then discover what remains consistent and use that knowledge to inform our values and, ultimately, how we choose to live. What remains throughout the stories of Lhílheqey is that she misses her family, and because of her sense of responsibility, she returns home to care for her people. It is because of this love that she is transformed into a mountain where she can watch over her people for eternity. In her transformation she also gains the ability to provide for her people's needs: water, food in the way of berries and fish, a place for the mountain goat (who in turn provides meat and wool for blankets), among many other

things. My grandfather, William Mussell Sr., shared stories with his children about hunting the mountain goat in the mountains north of the Fraser Valley. Knowing my grandfather's connection to Lhílheqey and the mountain goat validates my family's relationship with her and how she has provided for us.

As Indigenous people it is the sacred and the natural that also inform who we are spiritually. We believe that through spirit we are all connected and that this connection works as a foundation to the creation of community and nation (Carlson, 2010; Simard & Blight, 2011). This belief is supported from the Stó:lō worldview, as summarized by Carlson (2010): "One of the most central is a concept of connection through the unifying power of a supreme spiritual force responsible for creating the universe and providing it with life and sustaining that life through the distribution of power" (p. 59). The power that Carlson refers to is the power of the Xà:ls (the Transformer). As Stó:lō people we were grounded in our culture and our beliefs, which were uninterrupted until the establishment of colonization.

Cultural Disruption

To truly understand the history of Indigenous child welfare, it is important to understand colonization and the role it has played and continues to play in the development of the Canadian nation state. While the oppression of Indigenous peoples in Canada is becoming better understood by mainstream society, we are continually looking for ways to reframe and share the effects of this complex colonialist relationship. It is only within this colonial context that we can make meaning of our experience and the long-term effects of this relationship that are at the core of the crisis for Indigenous people, especially as viewed through our perspective of the child welfare system.

Prior to confederation, Indigenous people lived in complex, self-sustaining communities where all aspects of life were met (Wilson, 2008; Blackstock, 2009; TRC, 2012; Absolon & Tabobondung, 2017). It is well documented that the coming of settlers and settler laws, along with policies and legislation were intended to disrupt all aspects of Indigenous peoples' ways of life (Milloy, 1999; TRC, 2015; Holyk & Harder, 2016; RCY, 2017). Race-based policies and legislation accelerated the assimilation of Indigenous peoples from the 1850s onward. In 1857, the Gradual Civilization Act was introduced to compel Indigenous people into voluntarily adopting an "European" way of life through enfranchisement; this was followed by the Gradual Enfranchisement Act in 1869, which "granted the Superintendent of Indian Affairs extreme control over status Indians." (First Nations Studies Program, 2009, para. 7). Aspects of control were exerted over deciding if an individual was of "good moral character," and could therefore have special privileges to live within white settler society. Two major elements of the Gradual Enfranchisement Act included: 1) the establishment of the Band Council system, a European form of government in which men took leadership in the community under the control of Indian Affairs, and 2) the subjugation of Indigenous women, in which Indian women would lose their status under marriage to a white man (Milloy, 2008, p. 6) while non-Indigenous women would gain status under marriage to an Indian man.

These two pieces of legislation contributed to the establishment of the Indian Act, a statute of law passed by the federal government in 1876, and gave the federal government jurisdiction over all aspects of Indigenous life (Milloy, 1999, 2008; Holyk & Harder, 2016). In essence, the Indian Act dismissed the rights and recognition of Indigenous people as autonomous nations, making them legally "wards of the state" and dependent on the

government. In 1884, amendments were made to the Indian Act in order to allow for the legal establishment of Indian residential schools. The interest of the colonial government was to terminate the familial relationships between children and their parents in order to destroy traditional cultural ways of life of Indigenous people. The removal of children from their families and communities to residential schools also reinforced the loss of connection, including connection to land, culture and language and experiences of intergenerational trauma (Milloy, 1999; Dussault, 2007; Holyk & Harder, 2016; John, 2016; RCY, 2017; Starblanket, 2018).

Residential Schools in Canada were created as early as the 1830s as a way to separate Indigenous children from their families and communities in order to assimilate them into a Western or “civilized” lifestyle (Milloy, 2009; Haight et al., 2018; Starblanket, 2018). It is well documented that Indigenous children who attended Residential School were not only separated from family but were often sexually and physically abused, used as labourers, and neglected by those tasked to care for them (Milloy, 2009; TRC, 2015; Starblanket, 2018).

Alongside this, the potlatch ban in 1885 was another law within the Indian Act forbidding the practice of Indigenous ceremonies, which were critical to individual, family and community well-being.

The Indian Act did not have any provisions for child welfare services. According to Callahan and Walmsley (2007), there were two primary differences why child welfare services were not provided to Indigenous children and families; the first reason was that the residential school system was providing the service of being orphanages and residential care facilities, and second, the establishment of residential schools provided a government run facility for Indigenous children. The schools were typically located far from home communities in order to

further break down the connection between the child, their family and community (MacDonald, 1985; Callahan & Walmsley, 2007; TRC, 2015) and taught a government run curriculum to facilitate Indigenous children's assimilation into settler society, mainly as a domestic labour class.

Indigenous people were considered to be wards of the Federal Government with services being provided through an Indian Agent assigned by the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) (RCAP, 1996), therefore the province had no legal responsibility to Indigenous people. Funding was also intended for the institutional care of children, not for individual family support (Callahan & Walmsley, 2007). Charitable organizations that were established in the province targeted mainly the poor, living in urban communities, which included some Aboriginal families, although the majority of the families who received services were mixed race (Callahan & Walmsley, 2007). This led to a vast number of Indigenous children being placed in residential schools, mainly on the basis of what was perceived by the authorities as issues of poverty and neglect (RCAP, 1996; Milloy, 1999; TRC, 2015; Starblanket, 2018).

There were significant changes to the Indian Act in 1951. Indigenous people were enfranchised, gained citizenship, including gaining the right to vote in Canada and access to post-secondary education. These changes to the Indian Act also caused a major shift to Indigenous child welfare when the federal government made the decision to transition child welfare services to the provinces and territories. Through agreements between the provincial and federal governments, the provincial governments agreed to administer child and family services to Indigenous people, including families living on-reserve (Holyk & Harder, 2016; RCY, 2017; Sinha, 2017). Unfortunately, there was no consistency in how child welfare services were

implemented, so programs and service delivery to Indigenous families varied greatly by province (Blackstock & Trocmé, 2005). It was at this time the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) “saw the development of provincial programs and services as a further opportunity to continue its assimilation policy”, as well as an opportunity to “offload some of its fiduciary responsibility for ‘Indians’” (Bruyere, 2005, p. 283). In keeping with their exclusory policies, there was no discussion or consultation with Indigenous leadership or community about the transition of services and no consideration for the unique history of Indigenous nations within the province of British Columbia, the effects of colonization, or how Indigenous people could play an active role in service delivery.

As child welfare services were shifted to the province, “almost immediately there developed a pattern of wide spread apprehensions of Native children by social workers, followed by placement in off-reserve foster homes” (MacDonald, 1985, p. 289). This time period became known as the Sixties Scoop due to the vast number of children who were removed from Indigenous communities and placed with non-Indigenous families in Canada, the United States and as far away as Europe. Within a 10-year period, Aboriginal children went from making up less than 1 percent of the total number of children in care in British Columbia to comprising just over 30 percent (Stanbury, 1975; Bruyere, 2005). Since the 1960s more children have been removed from their families than those who attended Residential School (RCAP, 1996; Milloy, 1999; Starblanket, 2018).

By the early 1970s, in BC, effects of the residential school and child welfare systems were becoming key topics of discussion among community leaders and in emerging political organizations, such as the Native Brotherhood of British Columbia. In their discussions, they

acknowledged the deprivations the children suffered and the implications for holistic health. Parents had very few rights, support services for families were ignored, and there was a lack of knowledge by social workers about Indigenous culture and kinship systems. As social workers became more invasive in the lives of Indigenous people, there were more “frequent traumatic and demoralizing encounters between Native families and non-Native social workers. In time, however, it also led to search for alternative ways of responding to the child care problems of Native peoples” (MacDonald, 1985, p. 289). Child welfare by nature is problematic because it starts with removal of a child from their kinship family system, which is supported by the belief that Indigenous people do not know how to parent. This is due to colonial beliefs that Indigenous people are inferior and our practices are wrong. Thus, child welfare agencies tend to focus on intervention services based on the premise that removal is the appropriate course of action rather than focus on prevention services rooted in the rights of Indigenous nations and communities to child rearing.

Cultural Resurgence

Based on the number of children removed in the 1960s, the contentious relationship between Indigenous communities and social service agencies, and changes in the Indian Act, communities were in a better position to advocate for the well-being of their children and families (Hudson, 1997). Changes to the Indian Act opened a small window that allowed for active resistance from Indigenous leadership in that Indigenous peoples could legally challenge the restrictions of the Indian Act itself (Cardinal, 1999; Manuel & Derrickson, 2015). These acts included legal actions in court, as well as acts of resistance which put Indigenous people at risk of jail or worse, death (Rindfleisch, 2011). In regards to child welfare, Indigenous leaders

recognized that in order to maintain and sustain their communities and traditions they needed to reinstate their own practices based on their own worldviews. MacDonald (1985) states that, “By the mid 1970’s, therefore, steps were taken in cooperation with federal and provincial authorities to develop relevant services for Indian families both on reserves and in urban communities” (pp. 289-290).

The Province of British Columbia felt pressure from Indigenous nations due to the crisis in child welfare, impending lawsuits and continued acts of resistance. To address this pressure, the Province of British Columbia created an opportunity for Delegated Aboriginal Agencies (DAAs). In the mid 1980s, DAAs were developed in response to the demands of Indigenous nations for more cultural and support-based services. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, communities were struggling with issues that Hudson (1997) refers to as “consequences of past oppression” (p. 162). Symptoms of oppression, such as alcohol use, suicide rates, family violence, sexual abuse and poverty (MacDonald, 1985; Hudson, 1997), led to increasing numbers of children being removed from their communities. For the majority of Indigenous adults, the challenges they were facing were tied to their own experiences of forced removals from their family, community, way of life, language and culture, to either Indian residential schools, Indian day schools, or to foster care or closed adoption in the child welfare system. Indigenous leadership of the day saw how damaging government services had been and wanted control over how those services were provided in their communities.

In the 1970s, Spallumcheen was the first community to take a stand respecting the need to establish control over child welfare services, which were sparked by mass removals of children that occurred in their community in the mid 1960s (Bruyere, 2005). Chief Wayne

Christian and his supporters organized the Splatsin to Secwépemc Indian Child Caravan of 1980, which resulted in a group of community members and leaders arriving at the home of Human Resources Minister, Grace McCarthy, on Thanksgiving Day. This public demonstration forced the provincial government to meet with the leaders of the Child Caravan and enter into discussion regarding the inherent rights of Indigenous people over the care of their children and families (Knickerbocker & Nickel, 2016; McFarlene & Manuel, 2020). Together, these two parties developed a by-law which allowed Spallumcheen to take jurisdiction over their own child welfare services. Although Spallumcheen is not considered to be a Delegated Aboriginal Agency (DAA), they were instrumental in forcing the provincial government to take steps to establish space for Indigenous-led child and family services. It soon became apparent that other First Nations in BC were interested in following Spallumcheen's example and the provincial government proposed the Delegation Agreement. Indigenous communities became more involved in child welfare services by signing delegation agreements, in which it was clearly outlined that "through delegation agreements, the Provincial Director of Child Welfare (the Director) gives authority to Indigenous Child and Family Service (ICFS) Agencies, also known as Delegated Aboriginal Agencies (DAAs), and their employees, to undertake administration of all or parts of the Child, Family and Community Service Act" (MCFD, 2023, para. 3).

Although DAAs were initially viewed as a positive step towards culturally based services, child welfare continued to be a colonizing vehicle. In 2017, there were 24 DAAs in British Columbia that serve approximately "...1,900 of the approximately 4,400 children in care of the B.C. government, representing 42 per cent of all Indigenous children in care in B.C." (RCY,

2017). DAAs provide three levels of services, C3 – Resource and Voluntary Service Delivery, C4 – Guardianship Services and C6 – Full Child Protection Services.

The structure of DAAs offer numerous challenges. DAAs are based on a contractual model between the provincial government and Indigenous communities, in which the Indigenous communities remain accountable to the government (Holyk & Harder, 2016; RCY, 2017). This type of relationship inherently limits Indigenous self-determination because agencies are required to follow government policies and practice models. There are also multiple issues identified in the literature that limit the work of DAAs and their staff, including: 1) identified federal funding models that are inadequate and discriminatory; 2) inconsistent funding for DAAs across the province; 3) lack of trust in the relationships between DAAs, communities and both the provincial and federal governments; 4) short staffing due to recruitment and retention issues; 5) higher caseloads than MCFD counterparts; 6) higher percentage of cases dealing with multiple complex issues; and 7) the ability to offer culturally based prevention services (John, 2016; RCY, 2017; Rousseau, 2018). Given these issues, there are mixed feelings about the role of DAAs, although it is generally agreed that having some type of Indigenous based services is better than having nothing at all (Kovach et al., 2007). Kovach et al. (2007) documented an increasing resistance to the DAA model because of the level of oversight and involvement from the provincial government. As this time, there are shifts happening within child welfare because of the federal legislation passed in 2019, Bill C-92: An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families. In BC, there have also been advances in the acknowledgement of the role that Indigenous communities play through the recognition of the United Nations Rights of Indigenous People and the implementation of Bill 38: Indigenous Self-

Government in Child and Family Services Amendment Act (2022). These changes can be attributed to Indigenous lobbying and the government's efforts toward decolonization and reconciliation, which will be further discussed in the next section.

Decolonization and Reconciliation

The Government of Canada is taking steps toward decolonization and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. Through a better understanding of the role of colonization and the evaluation of inequities faced by Indigenous people, radical change must be sought in the relationship between the federal government and Indigenous people. While there have been ongoing efforts by Indigenous leadership and community lobbying to bring about change, the Government of Canada has often been slow to address any recommendations in improving this relationship, despite having supported the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP, 1996) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC, 2015).

Both the RCAP and the TRC have recommended reconciliation as a course of action for Canadians in improving their relationships with Indigenous peoples. Other consistent themes included in these reports are that they attribute the current situation of Indigenous peoples to the effects of residential school, the child welfare system and the systemic effects of poverty and racism (RCAP, 1996; TRC, 2015; NIMMIWG, 2019). There has been a myriad of recommendations for the government as part of these reports, although one of the most significant messages is about the well-being of children and how that is embedded in family, community and the rights of Indigenous people for self-determination.

The Canadian Human Rights Tribunal

In 2007, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada (the Caring Society) filed a complaint with the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT) because the federal funding model for Indigenous child welfare was discriminatory, providing much lower funding rates for services than their provincial counterparts (RCY, 2017; John, 2016; Blackstock, 2010). This case was based on the failure of the Government of Canada to implement recommendations from two government supported research projects: the *Joint National Policy Review on First Nations Child and Family Services* (McDonald & Ladd, 2000) and *Wen:de – We are Coming to the Light of Day* (Blackstock et al., 2005). These reports were government supported research, whose outcomes highlighted the discriminatory nature of Indigenous child welfare, including issues of funding and the impacts to service delivery for children due to jurisdictional disputes. In January 2016, the CHRT ruled that the federal government was in breach of the Canadian Human Rights Act, a ruling appealed by the federal government. In November 2019, the CHRT upheld the ruling and ordered the Federal Government to compensate Indigenous children and families who were harmed due to an inadequately funded child welfare system (Barrera & Stefanovich, 2019, para. 3).

Following the decision made in November 2019, the Federal Government, and the parties involved in the court case were ordered to enter into a process to outline what the procedure would be for compensation. It was four years later, on October 24, 2023 the federal judge approved the settlement put forward. The settlement agreement includes \$23 billion in compensation for more than 300,000 children and their families, and an additional \$20 billion for reforming the Indigenous children welfare system (Major & Stefanovich, 2023). Cindy

Blackstock was reportedly encouraged and hopes “that this might finally be some measure of justice for the many victims, children, youth and families of Canada’s discrimination”, although she does also caution that the work needs to continue to ensure Indigenous children, specifically those on-reserve, are treated fairly “not only today, but the day after tomorrow, and the year after” (The Canadian Press, 2023).

As a result of the steps made through the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action, the federal government introduced Bill C-92: An Act respecting First Nation, Inuit and Metis children, youth and families in 2019. This legislation is significant because it’s the first time the Canadian federal government has enacted laws supporting Indigenous rights in the area of child welfare.

Jurisdiction: Bill C-92 and Indigenous Governing Bodies

Under the Department of Indigenous Services Act (Government of Canada, 2022), an Indigenous Governing Body (IGB) “means a council, government or other entity that is authorized to act on behalf of an Indigenous group, community or people that holds rights recognized and affirmed by section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982. (*corps dirigeant autochtone*)” (p. 2). The Act supports an Indigenous nation’s role in planning for their children and puts a priority on keeping the child connected to their family and community, thus keeping cultural and familial knowledge intact. In the context of Indigenous child welfare, IGBs are to provide oversight, governance and decision-making to plan for their nations children and families who are requiring child and family services.

Indigenous Governing Bodies (IGBs) are taking over jurisdiction of child and family services in order to reduce the number of children in care by providing culturally-based services

to its members. At the time of this writing, there are 12 IGBs in British Columbia that represent 16 of the more than 200 nations within the province (Province of British Columbia, 2023, para. 7) and four Nations working towards jurisdiction: Cowichan Tribes, Gwa'sala – 'Nakwaxda'xw Nations, Splat'sin First Nation and St's'ailes First Nation. Currently, the IGBs are also involved in discussions around amendments to the Child, Family and Community Service Act, along with the Adoption Act.

British Columbia and Bill 38

On November 25, 2022, the Province of British Columbia further announced Bill 38: Indigenous Self-Government in Child and Family Services Amendment Act, that “makes BC the first jurisdiction in Canada to recognize an inherent right of self-government specifically in provincial legislation” (Province of British Columbia, 2022, para. 2). This bill sets up Indigenous people for the possible future of reimplementing their traditional laws as the basis for decision making practice. The bill presumes and envisions a future where First Nations return to decision making practices that reflect their natural laws and traditional practices.

While the government received many accolades for passing legislation upholding Indigenous jurisdiction of child welfare and making space for Indigenous nations to revitalize their care systems, there are some clear concerns. Although the legislation is connected to Indigenous people's inherent right to jurisdiction of child welfare services, the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) states that it “will help keep Indigenous children and youth safely connected to their families, cultures and communities” (MCFD, 2022, para. 2). What Indigenous people need to be aware of is that while the government is in the process of “recognizing” Indigenous rights, there is still little recognition of culture on the front line when

it comes to supports and services being provided to Indigenous peoples. Currently, there is much discussion about how Bill 38 and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act are working in the best interests of Indigenous communities, although the guiding legislation is still being upheld under the Child, Family and Community Service Act (CFCSA) and the Family Law Act (FLA). Both of these Acts are limited in how they address culture and who can provide cultural knowledge to children in care. Within the child welfare system, cultural connection is provided in “good faith” when it comes to social workers and caregivers. It appears as though there is still no real recognition of culture by the legal system. As with previous situations involving support of Indigenous peoples by the Province, we can only hope that this decision doesn’t turn sour, leaving Indigenous peoples lacking the resources and support to follow through with their own self-determination.

Cultural Restoration and Revitalization

We believe that child, family and community resiliency are interdependent and thus culturally based family interventions must be coupled with culturally based community development approaches to redress structural challenges to the safety of Aboriginal children (Blackstock & Trocmé, 2005, p. 2).

Making effective and meaningful change in child welfare necessarily requires understanding Indigenous worldviews, including ways of knowing, making meaning and understanding attachment to the land. Recurring themes in the literature include: 1) the work Indigenous people do today will affect seven generations into the future (The Seven Generation Principle); 2) holistic models and approaches of living in balance and harmony; 3) interconnectedness in that we are all one; 4) a spirit-centered identity and worldview; and 5)

strengths-based approach creating opportunities to work towards a sense of wellness within the community (Haight et al., 2018; Simard & Blight, 2011; Williams, 2019; Wright Cardinal, 2017). Challenges include needing people who are working in government, including policy makers and leadership to truly understand that Indigenous worldviews, together with a secure land base, are necessary so that effective, sustainable and long-term changes can be achieved by Indigenous communities.

Throughout the literature there are significant components of what to consider when looking at how to move forward with Indigenous based services. Recurring themes include culture and the importance of delivering culturally effective programming, employing holistic practices, as well as utilizing cultural knowledge and practices that are child centered and family focussed (BCGEU, 2015; Absolon & Tabobondung, 2017; Rousseau, 2018; Simard, 2019).

There were also hopeful messages that came forward in reviewing the literature that speak to promising measures that can bring about transformational change (Blackstock & Trocmé, 2005; Blackstock et al., 2006; Kovach et al., 2007); for example, a strengths-based approach where families and communities discover opportunities for change that increase health, wellness and community governance. Absolon and Tabobondung (2017) describe the process of identifying wellness and working together as putting together your “sacred bundle” which “is a return toward restoring and reconciling a rich cultural history, knowledge and tradition in contemporary contexts on Native child welfare” (p. 54). In healthy Indigenous communities’ members enjoy good health and wellness, while relating to each other in supportive and caring ways.

Closing

Indigenous people have suffered from the violation of Indigenous autonomy and natural laws by mainstream child welfare policies and practices for over 150 years. The Canadian nation state has long embraced epistemic racism as a way of being in relationships with Indigenous people. Through this process, Canadian society has been supported and has adhered to the idea that Western knowledge is superior to Indigenous knowledge systems. We know that Western-based societal structures have had negative impacts on the health and wellness of our children, youth and families, as seen through our history and how we live with those impacts today (Loppie et al., 2009).

As I reflect on the literature, there are clear themes of assimilation, oppression, decimation of culture and language, and the loss of identity due to race-based legislation, the Indian residential school and child welfare systems. Race-based policy and legislation has been enacted by the Government of Canada to allow for systemic genocide of Indigenous people. Grievously, it has been Indigenous children who have been the target of this vanquishing or assimilation. Indigenous child removal has been part of the entire history of Canada (Wright Cardinal et al, 2023). Alongside these many challenges, we also connect with the ongoing resistance and power of Indigenous nations and communities in their efforts to restore, maintain and sustain all the beautiful things they have known from time immemorial.

As Indigenous people, we must continue to assert our right to plan for and to care for our children and families. According to Reading et al. (2016) "Indigenous communities continue to emphasize the need to embrace the diversity of indigenous peoples and need for health care systems and practices that are free from discrimination and ideally controlled by and for

Indigenous peoples” (p. 225). Historically, Stó:lō communities have done this through living together in our longhouse with our extended families and sharing responsibility of caring for both children and Elders. As caregivers, we were well informed about the health and wellness of others by being together, where the intimacy of living together was important. As we move towards transforming the current systems of Indigenous child welfare, it is our interpretation of our worldview that will help us stay grounded and continue in sharing the responsibility for the wellness of the community of people in which we live.

CHAPTER 3: Methodology

Introduction

In my role as an Indigenous social worker, I have often gone through the process of critical self-reflection as a way to evaluate and refine my beliefs about how I work with children and families, mainly as a way to ensure that my practice is aligned with both my cultural and personal beliefs. It is through this process that I often ran into a clash of values between my worldview and how child welfare policies determined my interactions with families; this led me to believe that a more cultural and community-based system would be a better fit. As I considered the topic of this thesis and relevant literature, I wanted to center Indigenous knowledge as a way to support the families and communities within S'ólh Téméxw (Our World), the ancestral homeland of the Stó:lō people.

It is through the gathering of Indigenous knowledge that we also come to know ourselves (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Absolon, 2011; Hall & Cusack, 2018). My own sense of self has evolved through the process of gathering knowledge for my thesis. I have become firmly rooted in the land that I know, and in turn the land has helped to liberate who I am, giving me the freedom to share my own story in my own voice. Before deciding to use an Indigenous methodology, I was considering using critical ethnography because of its ability to understand culture and empower participants by bringing forth their voice in the research (Thomas, 1993; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Lincoln et al., 2011). It wasn't until I began to read the works of Kathleen Absolon (2011) and Shawn Wilson (2008) that I felt a connection between who I am as a Stó:lō and Oneida woman, an academic student and researcher; creating a sacred space where I can bring forth knowledge and wisdom that comes from an Indigenous heart,

mind and spirit. It was clear to me that using an Indigenous methodology would make space for the cultural knowledge I was hoping to gather, honour the relational aspects of who we are as Indigenous people, and centre the research from a spiritual and land-based perspective.

Indigenous Storywork and Indigenous Research Methodology

Indigenous research methodology emerges from Indigenous worldviews, including land, language, culture and ceremony. Absolon (2011) states that “Indigenous methodologies are wholistic, relational, interrelational and interdependent with Indigenous philosophies, beliefs and ways of life” (p. 22). Because there is growing recognition of Indigenous knowledge as central to revitalizing and retaining our cultural practices, I felt a deep sense of purpose undertaking this research. As a Stó:lō woman and researcher it was important for me to follow Stó:lō cultural teachings and protocols as I planned to work with the Elders, the recognized knowledge keepers from my nation. I was also certain that I wanted to use Indigenous Storywork as the method to gather stories in a way that honours the teachings and practices of our Stó:lō people, communities and nation, and recognizes the importance of the oral tradition of our Elders (Archibald, 2008; Wilson, 2008; Absolon, 2011).

Integral to Indigenous research methodology is an understanding of the interconnectedness to all things around us. Wilson (2001) defines Indigenous methodology as “talking about relational accountability” (p. 177). He expands on this concept by sharing that “as a researcher you are answering to *all your relations* when you are doing research” and in this way the researcher is upholding the highest accountability to “the world around you” (p. 177). Archibald (2008) refers to this concept as “respectful reciprocal relationships” (p. 48), where we uphold balance and harmony with all living creatures knowing that knowledge is

shared by all creation. As a researcher I do not own the knowledge I am collecting; I am gathering the knowledge and sharing it back to the community so it can again be shared further afield. Alongside this, is my responsibility as a researcher to share my own story because what I share also speaks to the relationships that I hold with those around me, which is an intrinsically valued part of the work (Archibald, 2008; Wilson, 2008; Kovach, 2009).

Using an Indigenous research methodology relies upon cultural knowledge as the foundation giving voice to Stó:lō values, beliefs and practices. Typically, Euro-Western methodologies centre their own values, beliefs and practices creating evidence-based knowledge and practices that don't often fit with Indigenous worldviews. As Stó:lō communities move forward to reclaim their own child welfare systems, it is essential to center our cultural knowledge, including our relational ways and an understanding of our traditional governance systems. It is through being grounded in the knowledge and ceremony of our people we can move forward in a good way and create a system that truly represents our best interests as a community, avoiding the recreation of a westernized, patriarchal system under the guise of being Indigenous or culturally-based.

As Stó:lō people, it is our spirit-based identity and connection to land that asserts our Aboriginal rights and way of attaining self-government as Indigenous people (Naxaxalhts'i, 2007, p. 130). In his writing, Naxaxalhts'i (2007) affirms our Aboriginal rights by connecting them to how we care for one another: "*S'ólh Téméxw te ikw'elo* – "this is our land" – *Xolhmet te mekw'stam* - "we have to take care of what is ours" – we have to take care of it. Because nobody else can. We have to take care of it. It's ours" (p. 130). While Naxaxalhts'i connects this mainly to caring for the land, I relate these teachings to our responsibility to care for one

another, especially our children, youth and families. I have applied an Indigenous Storywork methodology (Archibald, 2008) because this methodology centers Indigenous-led, community-based research that features the relational nature of who we are and will also help illustrate how we work together (Wilson, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Absolon, 2011).

I was able to turn to the work of Stó:lō professor emerita, Dr. Jo-ann Archibald, in my search for a Stó:lō-based research methodology for gathering knowledge. Archibald worked with the Stó:lō Elders from 1976 to 1983 at the Coqualeetza Cultural Education Centre (CCEC). She writes that she left Stó:lō Nation to pursue her education at the University of British Columbia. It was upon her decision to enroll in a PhD Program at Simon Fraser University that she “wanted to find a way to fully examine Indigenous knowledges and Indigenous ways of knowing within academe” as a way to legitimize our knowledge systems (Archibald, 2008, p. 5). This decision led her to return to Stó:lō Territory and to work with the Coqualeetza Elders. Archibald (2008) writes, “Along the way, I decided to focus on the topic of Indigenous stories, even though at the time I did not have full appreciation of their power” (p. 5). While I do not know Dr. Archibald personally, I know of her and the good work she has done. As a Stó:lō researcher, my own work is strengthened by her approach and the involvement of the current Coqualeetza Elders in my own work.

Indigenous Storywork

When one is connected to community and to place, the relational aspects of communities, people, families, and their context become the important elements of how to process with knowledge search and production (Battiste, 2013, p.74).

Through her work with the Stó:lo Elders, Dr. Archibald developed a Stó:lō based methodology rooted in the oral traditions of the Stó:lō people which she named “storywork”. The Storywork methodology is described as a “cultural learning process” (p. 1) where learning takes place within the relationship between the listener and the storyteller, or Elder. In her book, *Indigenous Storywork*, Archibald (2008) describes seven principles that inform a Stó:lō-based theoretical framework for “making meaning with and through stories”, these include respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness and synergy (p. 140). It is through the relationship that honours these seven principles that the listener can then “make meaning” without being told what that meaning is by the storyteller, instead the listener reveals to the storyteller by their engagement of the principles what they are learning reflective of his ability to create new knowledge. To clearly understand and employ and create knowledge we need to be in relationship with our family and community members, especially with our Elders and Knowledge Keepers. As Stó:lō people we are born with gifts of ancestral knowledge that serve to foster the relational ways required to nurture creation of knowledge.

Through the use of Indigenous Storywork, the aims of my research are two-fold: 1) I seek to reveal the “epistemological certainties” that supported colonial practices and to contribute towards deconstructing colonial child welfare; and 2) I seek to contribute towards a new foundation for child and family services based on the cultural, linguistic and governance structures of the Stó:lō people. The use of Indigenous Storywork in this study is both relevant and necessary because the study of child and family services from a cultural perspective requires a relational approach. Further, in order for this information to be truly meaningful to the community, the information needs to be community-based in order to “meet the specific

identified needs of the community for new information, or documentation of knowledge” (Wilson, 2008, p. 110).

Storywork equips us with a strategy for gathering Stó:lō stories and understanding why Stó:lō knowledge is vital for creation of our Stó:lō child and family wellness practices. While Archibald focussed on Storywork as a way to improve curriculum and learning experiences, this thesis will use Storywork to explore how Elders understand and approach the concept of the best interests of a Stó:lō child. Through gathering the stories shared by our Elders, I will be able to make meaning about what the Elders believe about child well-being and how that informs what we, as Stó:lō people perceive to be in the best interests of the Stó:lō child. What informs the best interests of the Stó:lō child can then be used as a foundation in the creation of our own child welfare systems based on the natural laws and teachings of our nation.

Indigenous Storywork is a way to gather knowledge and give voice to the Stó:lō people as we create our own definition of the “best interests of the child.” I also hereby honour the oral tradition of our people and the sharing of knowledge through storytelling as a way to create powerful change. Ortiz (1992, as cited in Archibald, 2008) asserts that “The oral tradition of the Native American people is based upon spoken language, but it is more than that too. Oral tradition is inclusive; it is the actions, behaviour, relationships, practices throughout the whole social, economic, and spiritual life process of the people” (p. 25). Archibald (2008) also describes the power of our oral narratives noting that “in Stó:lō and Coast Salish cultures the power of storywork to make meaning derives from a synergy between the story, the context in which the story is used, the way that the story is told, and how one listens to the story” (p. 84). It is in the retelling of the story and how we hear its content that we create diverse

understandings. Archibald (2008) highlights the principles of “interrelatedness and synergy” as contributing to the power of change (p. 84); our interrelatedness connects us and synergy shows the powerful effect we can have when we connect with one another.

Types of Stó:lō Stories

Every nation will have their own stories of their land, language, culture and ceremony. Archibald (2008) writes that stories may vary “from the sacred to the historical, from cultural traditions to personal life experiences and testimonials” (p. 83). She identifies two specific types of stories: traditional stories and life-experience stories. Archibald focusses on how the Elders use “personal life-experience stories as one way to teach others” (p. 108). In this way, both time and space are used to create meaningful interactions in which “we can share our own stories in our own way and create discourses based on our Indigenous knowledge systems” (p. 18). As a Stó:lō person, I can understand why Archibald takes this approach to storytelling. I would like to expand on this as it relates to our Stó:lō traditions and understanding about stories.

The Stó:lō people share an oral tradition which remains important to understanding knowledge translation, specifically through oral narratives. Oral narratives are described by Stó:lō people as “s̓xwō̓x̓wiyám” or “sqwélqwel”. According to Stó:lō traditions, “s̓xwō̓x̓wiyám” can be thought of as our traditional stories, set at or just before the arrival of the Transformers (XeXà:ls), in the distant “mythological” past” (Carlson, 1997, p. 185). Our “sqwélqwel” are our “true stories or news” that come from people’s everyday lives in the present time (Carlson, 1997, p. 187). Carlson further states that XeXà:ls is used to describe “the powerful transformer siblings – the three sons and one daughter of black bear and red-headed woodpecker”, while

the term Xà:ls is most often used to describe one of the siblings. In contemporary society, Xà:ls is used to describe the “Transformer”, similar to the “Creator” or “Great Spirit” (p. 185).

As a Stó:lō person, I find it is important to understand the creation story as a way to make sense of what is culturally and politically meaningful. What is significant is that there are many creation stories within Stó:lō territory; in fact, every community has a version of their “first people”. It is the mystical Xà:ls (the Transformer) that ties Stó:lō people together, Xà:ls (the Transformer) existed in a time before man, and “came through the world , transforming monsters and other myth-age beings into rocks and animals, and setting things in order for people of the present age...” (Carlson, 1997, p. 185). Sxwōxwiyám (traditional story) acknowledges the existence of people who lived before the “first people” (Carlson, 1997, p. 186), as Stó:lō people living in the present day we will use this teaching to set things in order once again for the benefit of our children and families.

Stó:lō Governance Systems

Dr. Wenona Hall (2012) looks extensively at both the traditional and current forms of Stó:lō leadership in her dissertation, *Xexal:s and the Power of Transformation: The Stó:lō, Good Governance and Self-Determination*. Hall attributes the success of traditional leadership to the Stó:lō peoples connection with the land; the relational reciprocity in understanding that the land provides for all areas of life, and that we, in turn, are responsible for our Stó:lō lands and places (p. 228). The teachings of the land also helped guide the Stó:lō people in their day to day lives, determining times of the year people needed to work to harvest and hunt food, pick and prepare medicines, move between summer and winter dwellings, and engage in ceremony

(Hall, 2012). The collective harmony of the land and how people lived also spoke to the leadership that was provided.

Leadership was highly regarded in Stó:lō society. While some people were born into leadership roles, others gained leadership positions due the recognition of special qualities often displayed from childhood (Carlson, 1997; Hall, 2012). In *S'ólh Téméxw* (Our World), our leaders are referred to in Halq'eméylem as "siyá:m" (respected one) (Carlson, 1997, 2010; Hall, 2012), and traditionally recognized as having the following qualities: 1) "unblemished ancestry" - referring to a person's lineage, 2) "good manners" – living a good life and being held in high regard, 3) "extra human support" – connection to the spirit world and honouring our ancestors, and 4) "wealth" – often referring to "high status" people, who often had privileges such as rights to fishing grounds and lands for hunting that gave them the ability and means to host potlatches (Carlson, 1997, p. 91). The concept of being a leader was in how you lived and your connection to spirit; while being considered to be of a "high class" gave you an advantage, the advantage was in your family connections and the knowledge you carried.

The power and influence of a chief in any given tribe would seem to have depended upon his personal qualities and character, the more able and intelligent he was the greater and wider in his influence; and one might lay it down as a general rule that the office of headman in a Salish tribe was held by the ablest, most intelligent and therefore wealthiest man in a tribe (Carlson, 2010, p. 234).

The role of the siyá:m (respected one), therefore, was to work with the people in the community in a position where "people simply respected their opinion, and tended to draw their advice and follow their lead" (Carlson, 1997, p. 91). This type of role varies greatly from

the political role of Chief and Council that was enforced under the Gradual Enfranchisement Act in 1869 as the new colonial government worked to abolish Indigenous governance and replace it with a system in which they could be in control of Indigenous relations. This pattern of government control continues to remain in place as Chief and Council remains the dominant model of political leadership, where the Chief and Council are responsible to the federal government and remain dependent on funding allocations to sustain the community. It is my hope that as we move forward in reclaiming our traditional child well-being system we can also work to improve our governance system by bringing forward some of our traditional beliefs and practices today.

As I reflect on some of the aspects of traditional Stó:lō governance, I see how these values of relationships among extended family and connection to land and spirit can help to create an approach to child welfare rooted in culture and traditional ways of caring. With the changes to federal and provincial Indigenous child welfare legislation, I hope outcomes from this study will contribute to the reclamation of Stó:lō child well-being practices within a transformed system.

Stó:lō Ways of Being and Doing

S'ólh shxwelí (our life spirit) fosters our values of sq'eq'ó (unity), ólhet (respect), stl'ítl'el (love), selá:wa (humility), smáth'el (pride), yóyes sq'eq'ótel (cooperation), and shxwlístexw te stl'et'eaxwtexw (community of care) (Sqwá First Nation, 2023, n.p.).

Interpersonal relationships are at the core of how we learn. As Leon and Syrette (2020) note: “the ancestors taught that throughout life, we are faced with choices and must address them holistically” (p. 13); it is in our choices and how we address them that our ancestral

knowledge systems have survived. As food for our shxwelí (life spirit) we are taught s'í:wes ye syewá:lélhtset (teachings of our ancestors). Such teachings are passed on through a relational context of storytelling and connecting with one another in the community. More generally, it is believed that knowledge is waiting to be discovered through one's personal experience and teachings; hence the importance of personal balance and harmony in our lives and awareness and understanding of life being lived by birds, trees, animals and other relatives in our community. The Stó:lō have always been very spiritual. It is our spiritual practices that help define us as a unique cultural group. We have an understanding that we are one with all that surrounds us. Our songs are found in the mountains and the rivers of S'ólh Téméxw (Our World). We know we are one small part of Creator's world and because of that we respect the shxwelí (life spirit) that is all around us, and which we, as Stó:lō people carry inside us. Because of this connection with the natural world, I can look up to my relative, Lhílheqey, who watches over the Stó:lō people to keep us safe and away from harm. It is comforting to know Lhílheqey is there, with her own daughters laying safe beside her. She is one example of how we care for one another, and how we are connected to family, community and nation.



Figure 1. Lhílheqey (Mt. Cheam)

We learn how to love and care for one another in the arms of our parents, grandparents and the many aunties, uncles and cousins that surround us. Absolon (2011) writes, “We have a history of being brutally dismembered from our families, communities, culture, language, ancestors and so on. So, when we remember, we actually become re-membered and reconnected with our history, family members, identities, language, ancestors and so on” (p. 77). When I journey to the time and place of my ancestors, I find myself at the longhouse. The longhouse was where families resided together, where they connected and cared for one another; this was at the core of community and a rich source of knowledge and wisdom.

Story of the Longhouse: My Research Plan

When I think of Lhílheqey as the representation of our natural law of how we care for one another, I envision the longhouse as the actualization of where caring took place.

Longhouses provided shelter and protection for the Stó:lō people. The structure of the longhouse encouraged multi-generations of people to live together. Traditionally, grandparents took the responsibility of raising young children so that parents could work; women could prepare meals, weave blankets, make clothing, while men would have opportunities to hunt, build shelters, and provide leadership to the community. For the Coast Salish people, “...settlements often consisted of interconnected longhouses, stretching together as a single structure sometimes for hundreds of metres along a river’s bank or shore” (Carlson, 2010, p. 128). It was within the walls of the longhouse that daily practices took place. As I prepared to write my thesis, this was what I envisioned in the longhouse:

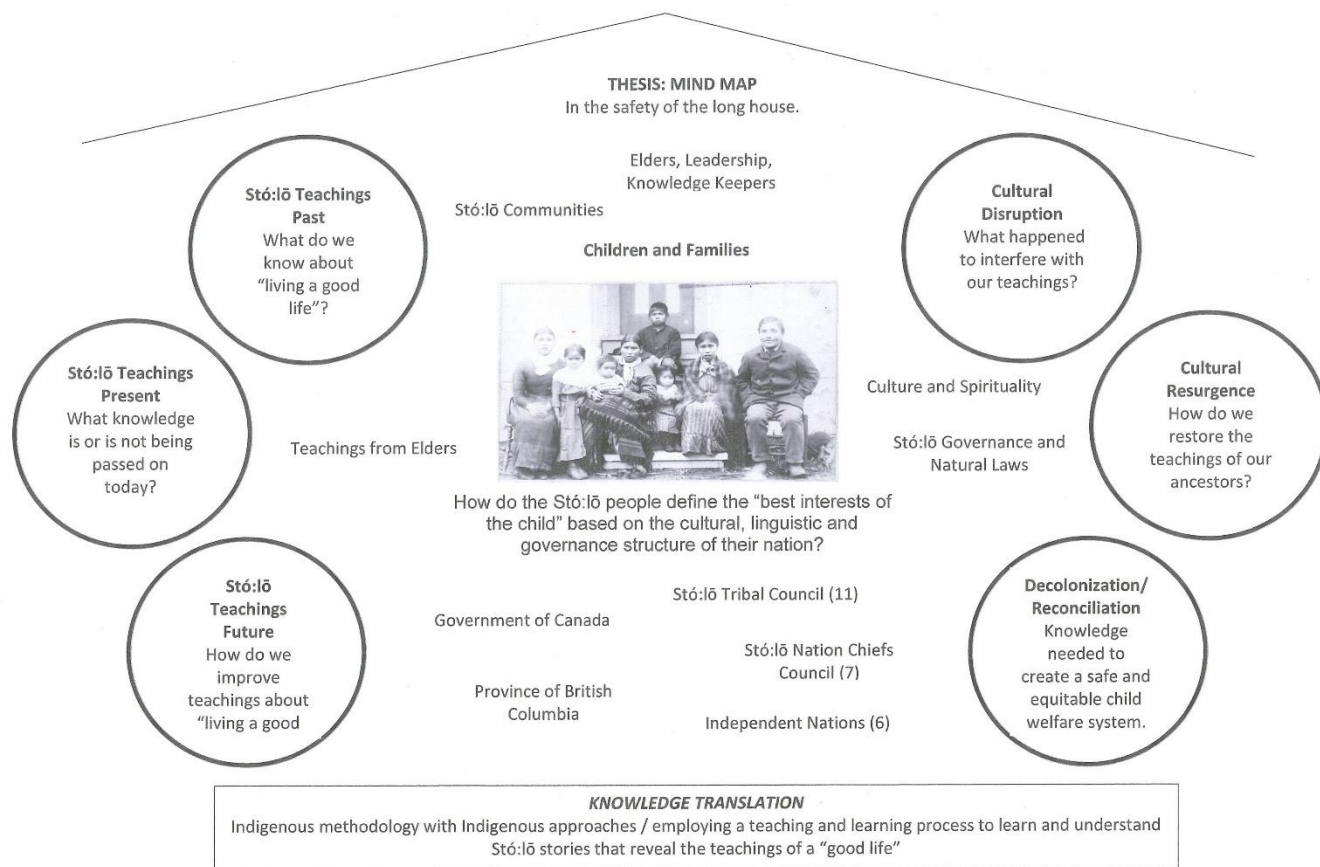


Figure 2. Story of the Longhouse: My Research Plan

For me, the longhouse represents a place of well-being, a place where belonging, love and safety are provided without question. At the center of the longhouse are our children and families. The longhouse frames the research question: How do the Stó:lō people define the "best interests of the child" based on the cultural, linguistic and governance structure of their nation? Surrounding the family are the systems that have impacted the family structure. The systems include the colonial government, represented by the Government of Canada and the Province of British Columbia, alongside the colonial government are our own bodies of government, including the Stó:lō Nations Chief Council (SNCC), the Stó:lō Tribal Council (STC), and eight independent First Nations. These governing bodies represent all 24 Stó:lō

communities. Other factors which have an impact are our leadership, Elders and Knowledge Keepers, alongside culture and spirituality, and our Stó:lō governance and natural laws. These systems are all interconnected, and all play a role in either creating a good life for our children and families, or an unhealthy life.

What surrounds all these systems are the posts that hold up the longhouse. Traditionally, the posts featured representations of spirit animals and stories that were meaningful to the family, and often illustrated gifts the family chose to share with the community. In the context of my research, each post represents one of the questions used to gather the knowledge to help answer the research question.

At the foundation of the longhouse is its connectedness to the land, which is often expressed as the culture. I included knowledge translation as the way in which the knowledge is to be shared, coming back to the need to use an Indigenous methodology with Indigenous approaches to center the voice of the Stó:lō people within this research.

Gathering the Elders

Throughout my life I was taught to have a strong respect for Elders. As a young girl I was fortunate to know my great-grandfather, Evan John, from Oneida. I also remember spending time with each of my grandparents; my Grandpa and Granny Mussell, and my Grandpa and Grandma Young. I had love and respect for my grandparents, not only because I knew they loved me, but because I could see how much they cared for the community around them. My grandparents were a special part of my life and from them I learned that our Elders and grandparents are an important part of the family and community. As I considered my research proposal, I immediately knew I would have to go to the Elders, not only to consult about my

research process, but to ask for their involvement. Our Elders hold the wisdom and knowledge of our nation. Because my research focus was connected to Indigenous child welfare, I chose to be intentional with the Elders who I approached as part of the project knowing the value of reciprocity in our togetherness. This led me to contact two Elders groups in Stó:lō Nation: a) the Coqualeetza Elders Group, connected to the Coqualeetza Cultural Education Centre (CCEC); and b) the Elders Advisory Committee, supported by the Fraser Valley Aboriginal Children and Family Services Society (FVACFSS). I was comfortable in reaching out to these groups; I knew Elders who were involved in each group and was able to draw on these established relationships to ask for each group's support and involvement in my research project.

My initial plan in developing my research proposal was to involve Elders from each of the 24 Stó:lō communities. Through the development of my research proposal, I came to realize that involving Elders from each community made the scope of the research too cumbersome for a Master's thesis. I was aiming to gather stories with 8 to 12 participants in total. Because the CCEC Elders Group and FVACFSS Elders Advisory Committee are made up of Elders from different communities there was an opportunity to involve Elders from multiple communities. I wanted to avoid placing limits on which Elders could or could not participate, so the only restriction was that the Elders be from a Stó:lō community.

The Coqualeetza Cultural Education Centre

The Coqualeetza Cultural Education Centre was incorporated in 1973. My father, Bill Mussell, was involved in its establishment and the group has always been a special place for me. The CCEC was created on the premise that "culture is the basis for an identity. Without it, one is lost" (CCEC, 2020, para. 13). The CCEC was also created to provide a centre to support

Stó:lō people in maintaining traditional ways of teaching and learning from one another. While some the Elders who established the centre in the 1970s are no longer with us, I am pleased to acknowledge that they are ancestors continuing to guide the younger generation. The Elders have always filled important roles as the CCEC recognizes that “one cannot help but realize the importance of Elders to our communities and to the preservation of our culture” (CCEC, 2023, para. 1).

The Fraser Valley Aboriginal Child and Family Services Society

The Elders Advisory Committee at FVACFSS takes on the role of working in partnership with social workers and staff to provide guidance in cultural teachings and ways to work together. The Elders Advisory Committee was originally required to meet once a month at each of the five offices (Langley, Mission, Abbotsford, Chilliwack and Agassiz). A social worker would be asked to present a challenging case and ask for guidance from the Elders as a way to move forward in supporting the family. In the last five years, the Elders Advisory Committee has become a lot more active and diverse in their role at FVACFSS. Currently, Elders are involved in working with the social workers to provide guidance in a variety of ways, including attending family meetings and offering mentoring for those on the front line.

Asking for the Elders Support and Involvement

I initially reached out to both the CCEC Elders Group and the FVACFSS Elders Advisory Committee in March 2021 to present my research proposal and ask for their support and involvement in my study. I provided the main contact of each group with a copy of the poster and provided basic information outlined on an information script. Both contacts invited me to meet with the Elders to present my proposal. Meetings took place in the spring of 2021; I met

in person with the CCEC Elders Group on April 7, 2021, and met with the FVAFCS Elders Advisory Committee via Zoom on March 29, 2021. When I met with each group I provided a power point presentation to go over the purpose of the research and outline their potential involvement as participants. Because it was my first connection with the Elders in my role as a researcher, I wanted to create a positive and somewhat relaxed atmosphere. At this stage I did not record the numbers of Elders who attended each meeting as I was simply coming to ask for their support.

Due to the impact of COVID 19, I ended up postponing my work with the CCEC Elders Group and FVACFSS Elders Advisory Committee until September 2022. That fall, I reconnected with each group and was invited to introduce myself and present the research project. I followed the same approach as when I met with the Elders in the previous spring. What I learned was that some of the Elders had passed and other Elders had joined the group, but what remained was a keen interest and support from both groups. Following the meetings, I felt confident that it was the right time to move ahead with my sharing circles.

Over the course of the research project, I planned to meet with the Elders three times for the following purposes:

1. Introduction: to share my research topic and ask for their support and involvement. At this time, I also shared a copy of the discussion questions to be considered in the research.
2. Sharing Circle: to spend time sharing Elders knowledge, using the agreed upon questions as a guide and allowing time for sharing through storytelling.

3. Review: to report back on the findings and themes, and ask the Elders to review my work in order to make changes and approve what was being brought forward from the Sharing Circle.

Sharing Circles

Following my first meeting, I remained in contact with the two Elders groups. Fortunately, each group had a coordinator who I could contact to help organize the sharing circles, including contacting the members of the group to see who was interested and available to attend, as well as help organize the date, time and location. Prior to the sharing circles, I had confirmation of six Elders from the FVACFSS Elders Advisory Committee who were willing to participate. This sharing circle was held November 9, 2022. The CCEC was unable to provide a number prior to the day of the sharing circle, which was held on November 23, 2022.

Sharing circles facilitate the relational generation and sharing of information. As we sit together, we engage in a process that “benefits those who participate in the exchange and sharing of ideas and experiences” (Absolon, 2011, p. 35). The sharing circle demonstrates the importance of knowledge possessed by each person and enriches the quality of the information shared so we have a deeper understanding of what is being discussed. Sharing circles with the Elders brought forth their life-experience stories as they related to the concept of child well-being and what it means to live a “good Stó:lō life”. Through this process I felt gratitude toward my Elders, the CCEC Elders Group and FVACFSS Elders Advisory Committee, joining together to do this priority work as they represent our most valued knowledge keepers, being closely connected with the spirit world and the teachings of their ancestors, and through their guidance and teachings to better child and family services in Stó:lō territory.

The format of the sharing circles included a Welcome Ceremony - drumming or an opening prayer and introductions. For each sharing circle, tables were organized in a circle with special attention being paid to the Elders' comfort, ensuring comfortable seating and breaks throughout the day. When I was arranging the schedule for the sharing circles, I offered two options; to meet for a full day or hold the sharing circle over two half days. Both of the Elders groups opted to meet over one full day from 10:00am to 3:00pm, with the opportunity to modify the time as the day progressed based on the needs of the Elders.

As the researcher, I wanted to ensure that food would be provided throughout the day. This included light snacks for the Elders upon arrival, as well as lunch. While I offered to provide these meals, the coordinators of each organization agreed that they would provide the snacks and the lunch. I ensured that I brought in some homemade cookies and muffins as my own contribution. Gifting is an Indigenous research ethic in recognition of the time and knowledge shared by the Elders. At the end of both sharing circles I gifted each Elder with an Indigenous designed re-usable bag that included a mug, a coaster, tea, a jar of homemade jam, a homemade crocheted dishcloth and tea towel, and a small bag of hard candies. I made the jam from berries I gathered in the summertime, and my mother made the dishcloths and sewed the tea towels from fabric I purchased for this project. It was important for me to provide homemade items as it shows personal effort and thoughtfulness for the Elders which truly made it a personal thanks for their time and knowledge. With the permission of the Elders, the sharing circles were documented through audio recording and later transcribed.

Discussion Questions

I relied on the life-experience stories of our Elders because Elders traditionally filled a primary role and responsibility in the raising and caring of our children. I created six questions to help generate discussion in order to answer my research question. The six questions were guided by findings from the literature review, my lived experiences and through discussion with family members and colleagues who were interested in my research and had experience in the field of education and social work.

My research question includes the child welfare phrase the “best interests of the child”. I chose not to use this term in my questions because I wanted to prioritize the Elders knowledge, which comes from life experience and the teachings they learned from their parents and grandparents. This grounds the work in Stó:lō knowledge as the term the “best interests of the child” is a Westernized concept that has been applied to Indigenous children, mainly in systems such as child welfare. It is a common understanding that removing children from our communities is not in the best interests of Indigenous children and current child welfare practices contrast with Indigenous ways and practices that highlight relational ways of life. The best interests of a Stó:lō child are based on our worldview and natural laws, the quality of life modelled and lived by our Elders and other caregivers who share the responsibility of sustaining a good way of life, or what Archibald (2008) terms a “good (Stó:lō) life”. While Archibald uses this term in her research, it is a concept that is well known among Indigenous peoples. I grew up knowing what it meant to live “a good life” based on the work my parents did, and continue to do in the community. To me living a “good life” is about living a high quality of life, knowing that you are representing your family in both your thought and actions.

To live a good life is also a way of being in your relationships and with all those connected through our life spirit. I wanted to use this term in my research because living a “good Stó:lō life” requires us to be our best selves. For these reasons, the sharing circles with the Elders focused on understanding a “good Stó:lō life”.

The sharing circles were guided by the following questions:

1. Let’s talk about what we know about our Stó:lō teachings regarding “living a good life.” What are these teachings? These are the ones you learned as children.
2. Which of these teachings are being taught by today’s parents? Which of these teachings are not being taught by today’s parents?
3. What do you believe happened in our lives to interfere with teachings of our next generation about how “to live a good life”? Describe the main differences between what you learned as children and what today’s parents are teaching.
4. In your view, what do you think we can do in the next few years to improve the parental teachings to prepare their children to enjoy “living a good Stó:lō life” as young adults?
5. Let’s share our “best thinking” about what we need to do to restore teachings of our ancestors about living a good Stó:lō life? Think about the resources we have within our home community as a whole and desired outcomes (non-community) to help us make desired changes as we move into the future.
6. Let’s also share our feelings and thoughts about the need for safe and equitable child and family services and how such conditions would be best satisfied?

The questions are meant to inspire discussion of the lived experience, and therefore the culture, as expressed by our Stó:lō Elders.

As I drafted my questions, I was able to engage in meaningful conversations with my parents, both of whom are recognized Elders in our community; however, I did not seek input from the Elders groups on the discussion questions. Working towards reclaiming a healthy system of caring for our children and families starts with Elders engaged in our current child welfare system, matriarchs of families, and as knowledge keepers of our nations teachings. I wanted to follow protocol in working with the Elders to ask for their wisdom in considering what is a “good Stó:lō life”. The information gathered through the analysis of these conversations will help us understand how Stó:lō people define “the best interests of the child”.

Approach to Making Meaning: “Interrelatedness and Synergy”

The “interrelatedness and synergy” refers to the meaning that we create from our relationship to the story and the storyteller. In my role as the listener I sought to create a meaningful definition of the “best interests of the child” from the Elders’ stories. After the recordings of the sharing circles were transcribed and reviewed by the Elders, I used an Indigenous approach to Braun and Clarke’s (2006) Thematic Analysis, which I refer to as “interrelatedness and synergy” to honour the Storywork approach. Thematic analysis is defined as “a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (p. 79). Thematic analysis aligns with the use of Storywork because of its adaptability. Thematic analysis can be used “to identify patterns within and *across* data in relation to participants’ lived experience, views and perspectives, and behaviour and practices; ‘experiential’ research which

seeks to understand what participants' think, feel and do" (Clarke and Braun, 2017, p. 297), further validating knowledge shared by the Elders during the story gathering process.

Braun and Clarke (2006) outline thematic analysis in a clear step-by-step process:

- Phase 1: Familiarizing yourself with your data;
- Phase 2: Generating initial codes;
- Phase 3: Searching for themes;
- Phase 4: Reviewing the themes;
- Phase 5: Defining and naming themes;
- Phase 6: Producing the report.

My Indigenized approach is:

- Phase 1: Familiarizing myself with the stories;
- Phase 2: Generating commonalities in stories and experiences;
- Phase 3: Searching for themes;
- Phase 4: Reviewing the themes;
- Phase 5: Understanding stories and experiences;
- Phase 6: Coming to know.

As I look at these six steps, I see a strong connection to the values in Storywork. The first four values, often referred to as the four R's: respect, responsibility, reciprocity and reverence are intrinsic to Indigenous research, and cited as part of Storywork. Archibald specifically tells us that these values were taught to her by the Stó:lō Elders (2008, p. ix). As a Stó:lō woman and researcher, these values are also part of who I am and how I was raised. Throughout this process, my own personal belief system and cultural value systems have worked together, and have informed my personal approach to the research. I believe knowing me and my family is part of the reason why the CCEC Elders Group and the FVACFSS Elders Advisory Committee were willing to share with me the way they did. This is a significant part of recognizing the value of Indigenous people doing their own research, in their own nations and with their own people.

How I specifically see this approach is in the following diagram I created:

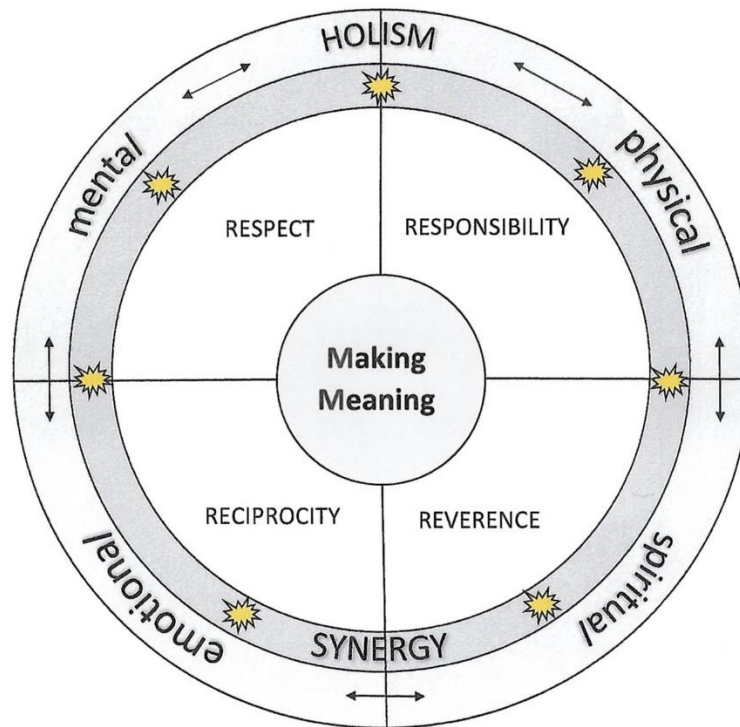


Figure 3. Storywork: Making Meaning through “Interrelatedness and Synergy”

Making Meaning is at the centre of the diagram as it represents the process that the researcher goes through to make meaning from the stories. The values of respect, responsibility, reverence and reciprocity surround making meaning as these values can be applied to all six stages of the process. One example of this is respect; respect can be applied at each phase of the process, as outlined on the following page:

Making Meaning through “Interrelatedness and Synergy”	Indigenous Research Methodology: Application of respect.
Phase 1: Become familiar with the stories.	Enter into relationship with the stories, the researcher is preparing to work with the stories.
Phase 2: Generating commonalities in stories and experiences.	As the meaning making progresses, the researcher continues to honour what the Elders are saying and what is beginning to be expressed from the stories in the initial codes.
Phase 3: Searching for themes.	At this phase the researcher is fully attentive to the themes, and is making connections between the words of the Elders and how the themes are connecting to the research question.
Phase 4: Reviewing the themes.	At this phase, the researcher is asking self if a holistic view of what the Elders are saying has been completed, is the meaning that is coming forth connected to the research question.
Phase 5: Understanding stories and experiences	Engaging with the Elders to ensure they have input into the themes, honouring their knowledge and giving time for feedback.
Phase 6: Coming to know.	For this purpose, the knowledge is to be written in a thesis with the purpose of being shared back to the Elders, communities and nations interested in this topic.

Figure 4. An Indigenous Approach to Thematic Analysis: The Value of Respect

As we refer back to Figure 3, surrounding the values of respect, responsibility, reverence and reciprocity is the value of holism. Holism speaks to the holistic nature of who we are, including the four aspects of the medicine wheel: mental, physical, spiritual and emotional. As we listen and work with the stories, our holistic self is going through various levels of change. The arrows in the diagram show the interaction or interrelatedness of our mental, physical, spiritual and

emotional self. As I listened to the stories of what the Elders experienced, I responded in a holistic way on many of these levels. Through the interaction of the different areas of the holistic self, we start to generate different ideas or meaning that emerge from within us. This phase creates the synergy as new ideas and new knowledge are created.

Steps to “Interrelatedness and Synergy”

As I worked through each phase I kept my research question forefront in my mind: *How do Stó:lō people define the “best interests of the child” based on the cultural, linguistic and governance structure of their nation?* In the Making Meaning process, themes are generated through the process of reviewing transcripts multiple times and the researcher, either on their own or with the story tellers, identifies themes based on what the story tellers shared and their own knowing (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). With the Elders support, I worked through the following phases:

Phase 1: Familiarizing myself with the stories

In the first phase I immersed myself in the stories shared as a way to become familiar with what the Elders shared. This step included “transcribing the data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 887). During this phase, I transcribed the recording from each sharing circle. As I engaged in the process, I began to build my own relationship with the personal life stories the Elders shared. I was emotional at times as I read through some of the traumatic experiences the Elders described. As part of my own process as the researcher, it became important for me to take time to hold space for these emotional experiences. As some initial thoughts and ideas about the stories became apparent, I wrote down some key words and phrases on a notepad for later reference.

Phase 2: Generating commonalities in stories and experiences

The second phase began after I spent enough time to feel comfortable with the stories. At this stage, I was developing a sense of what was both interesting and important in what was in the transcripts. Through this process I took an inductive approach to my meaning making, reading the stories and starting to see the repetition in what the Elders shared. I decided to use coding as a way to organize the stories. I used a pencil to highlight portions of each transcript (e.g. words, phrases, ideas) that contained information relevant to the research question. My initial effort to code began by looking for word repetition (e.g. residential school, parenting skills, teachings), then progressed to phrases or ideas (e.g. bringing back culture, what we need to teach our children). As I worked through this process, I became aware of the interconnectedness between the stories the Elders shared and the relevance to the intention of my research question. Interconnectedness is vital in identifying and honouring the knowledge shared by the Elders, and speaks to the synergy of knowledge creation throughout this stage.

Phase 3: Searching for themes

As Braun and Clarke (2006) explain, there are no hard and fast rules about what makes a theme. A theme is simply a pattern that captures something significant or interesting about the stories. From an Indigenous perspective, this involves reflection on values, teachings, and nation. Once the stories were coded, I sorted them into themes by printing each code on a piece of paper. At this point, I had a list of approximately 30 themes. After this process was completed, I considered all the different codes. Reflecting on my research question, I began to re-organize the codes. I printed each code onto a separate piece of paper so I could physically lay them out and reorganize them with ease. I was able to take time to combine the codes into

different themes and make changes when needed. By the end of this process I had gathered the stories into 10 themes, namely: 1) Colonization, 2) Community, 3) Culture, Tradition and Ceremony, 4) Elders Experiences Growing Up, 5) Families, 6) Role of Government, 7) Sense of Self, Belonging and Self Esteem, 8) Spirituality and Connection to the Land, 9) Stó:lō Teachings and 10) Trauma, Grief and Healing.

Phase 4: Reviewing the themes

During this phase I reviewed and refined the themes that were developed during Phase 3. Some of the themes did not have enough content to be considered a theme, and others could be combined. I used the following questions by Maguire and Delahunt (2017) to help me during this phase: “a) Do the themes make sense? b) Does the data support the themes? c) Am I trying to fit too much into a theme? d) If themes overlap, are they really separate themes? e) Are there themes within themes? and f) Are there other themes within the data?” (p. 3358). For example, at this stage the set of stories titled Federal Government and Bill C-92 was very small and did not add to answering the research question. The themes regarding spirituality and connection to the land, overlapped with trauma, grief and healing, so I decided to combine the two sets of stories under one heading.

Phase 5: Understanding stories and experiences

This phase calls for the final refinement of themes. The aim is to “identify the essence of what each theme is about” (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 92). At this point, I returned to the transcripts and used a colour coding method to validate that the information in the transcripts matched the themes that had emerged. Through this process the themes were further refined.

By the end of this stage there were four individual themes, each with its own set of sub-themes which I will discuss in Chapter 4:

1. Culture, Land and Ceremony

Subthemes: Ceremony, Connection to Land, Language and Cultural Renewal;

2. Communities Caring for One Another

Subthemes: Familial and Communal Self-Reliance, Giving and Taking Care of One Another and Coming Together;

3. Families

Subthemes: Family Strengths, Family Challenges, Parenting / Grandparenting and Children and Youth Today

4. Spirituality and Healing

Subthemes: The Longhouse, Sense of Identity and Sense of Belonging

As I worked through the process of reviewing and refining themes, I reflected on my research question to determine how well I was honouring both Elders' groups in the development of the themes that were being created from their stories. The research question and the image of the longhouse kept me focused on the voice of the Elders. Due to the challenges of the pandemic and my adjusted timeline, I did not engage all the Elders in the overall development of the themes. However, I was able to share my analysis and themes with six Elders in order to obtain their feedback.

Phase 6: Coming to know

The goal of the final phase was to write the analysis and findings in a report, or in this case, a thesis. Braun and Clarke (2006) write, "It is important that the analysis provides a

concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and interesting account of the story the data tell” (p. 93). During a discussion with my supervisor, I was reminded of the meaning connected to the posts of the longhouse. Earlier in this chapter I wrote that house posts were designed with the “representations of spirit animals and stories that were meaningful to the family”. The question asked was, “If the themes were what was meaningful, would it make sense that they be the new house posts?” It was such a simple and yet poignant question. The transformation and re-visioning of the longhouse with the knowledge of the Elders would make certain that Stó:lō knowledge was at the centre of the response to my research question. It is this image of the re-visioned longhouse (in Chapter 5), that I shared with some of the Elders prior to submitting my thesis.

Ethical Considerations

Dr. Jo-ann Archibald (2008) writes about some of the “complexities of co-operative research with Elders”, which include: 1) Needing lots of time to record, listen to, and then transcribe the talk verbatim; 2) Examining together the correctness of the English words, which will become the public cultural record for future generations; and 3) Ensuring that both the co-operating research partners are satisfied with the article before it is printed (p. 54). It was important to honour the voices of the participants by carefully attending to the three measures highlighted by Archibald. In this study and with the challenges of the pandemic, I did not completely fulfill the third measure. During the third meeting, we agreed to meet once my findings were complete to seek final approval. Although I was not able to organize these two sessions prior to submitting my thesis, I did review my findings with six of the Elders from these two groups and incorporated their feedback. My intention is to bring my research findings and

recommendations to the groups as part of my doctoral research process. Further, each of the Elders are invited to my master's thesis defence to witness and hold me accountable to what is being presented.

Consent and Confidentiality

At the start of the sharing circle, I provided each of the Elders with a Participant Consent Form. This form was shared with the Elders prior to our sharing circle to give them time to review the form. While the majority of the Elders were willing to sign the Participant Consent Form, I had two Elders ask to give verbal consent. I honoured this request based on our oral tradition and the desire to maintain our "respectful reciprocal relationship" with one another. Their verbal consent was witnessed by other participants and was recorded. Further, the University of Victoria acknowledges verbal consent as culturally appropriate in Indigenous research.

I also facilitated discussion respecting the issue of confidentiality with the Elders. These discussions outlined their option of using pseudonyms or first names in the research document so that their individual experiences would remain confidential was explored. I agreed to ask for specific permission to use the Elders names if specific stories or quotes were selected, otherwise they would remain as a pseudonym. I chose the pseudonyms in reference to the location of the quote or story in the transcript. There were some limits to my ability as the researcher to protect the confidentiality of the participants because the sharing circle was made up of multiple participants who knew each other on a personal level.

Giftng as a Way of Giving Thanks

It is our Stó:lō tradition to bring a gift when we are going to see an Elder, especially if we are asking something from them. In a discussion on research ethics, Brant Castellano (2014) shares “it is proper, however, to give gifts. If you go see an Elder and you are asking to set up a relationship, it is proper to give gifts: a blanket, food to feast on people and that represents consent” (p. 6). By giftng, we are acknowledging an exchange for the gift of knowledge that is being shared. I ensured that this was met throughout my meetings with the Elders by bringing food, and giftng each Elder on the day of the sharing circle.

OCAP: Ownership, Control, Access and Possession

The First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGG) oversee the First Nation Principles of OCAP: Ownership, Control, Access and Possession. OCAP recognizes and supports First Nations involvement in research and data collection. The principles are understood as follows:

Ownership: Refers to the relationship of First Nations to their cultural knowledge/data information; Control: The aspirations and rights of First Nations to maintain and regain control of all aspects of the lives and institutions include research, information and data; Access: First Nations people must have access to information and data about themselves and their communities, regardless of where it is currently held; and Possession: While ownership identifies that relationship between a people and their data in principle, possession or stewardship is more literal (First Nations Centre, 2007, p. 4,5).

Awareness of OCAP benefits Indigenous peoples because it brings attention to the past harms of research, as well as establishing standards that recognise the rights of Indigenous people to their own knowledge. The goal of the principles of OCAP is that communities and nations have access to their information and can use the knowledge to lead to better outcomes and improve the quality of life for Indigenous peoples. OCAP supports the standards of using Indigenous research methodology through recognizing the benefits of respect, responsibility, reverence and reciprocity.

When considering the purpose of the research, the principles of OCAP are of great value. As I consider the potential use of the knowledge gathered for this thesis, I am mindful that the knowledge belongs to us as Stó:lō people. It was gathered from the wisdom of the Elders and represents our culture, identity and traditions respecting child well-being. My initial proposal included sharing the findings of my project with our two political bodies, the Stó:lō Tribal Council (STC) and the Stó:lō Nation Chiefs Council (SNCC) in the hopes that such action will contribute to discussion about Indigenous child welfare and to assist communities in working toward a new, community based system of Stó:lō based child and family services that is focussed on traditional knowledge, and our self-determining aspirations. Due to time restrictions and the need to focus on the analysis and findings of the research, I have not shared the outcomes with our two political bodies. Based on my belief in the four R's, it is evident that the analysis and findings will be shared with the STC and the SNCC, along with other Stó:lō communities in the near future.

Research and Tri-Council Policy Statement

To maintain high ethical standards, UVIC requires the completion of a course on research ethics. I completed the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS) Course on Research Ethics Tutorial, which led to the completion of the TCPS2 Certificate, which is designed to support ethical conduct when researchers are working with Indigenous peoples. It is based on the belief that research with Indigenous peoples upholds principles such as respect and reciprocity, which upholds “respectful relationships”. It also recognizes the values of cultural protocols around research.

Strengths and Limitations

In this study establishing a respectful and trustworthy relationship with Elders was vital. As Archibald (2008) states, “In seeking to understand Elders’ teachings, knowing the values and actions of responsibility, respect, reverence and reciprocity are essential” (p. 42). Besides knowing and following cultural protocol and ceremony, it is important that community members decide what is to be studied (Archibald, 2008; Wilson, 2008; Kovach, 2009). Both Elders groups are involved in shaping the future direction of Stó:lō child welfare law and understanding child well-being in our communities. Therefore, it was imperative that I start with Elders perspectives. Another strength is my relational connection as a Stó:lō member, raised in community, and with experience working in our current child welfare system.

Kovach (2009) shares the words of Indigenous scholar Marlene Brant-Castellano, who said “the challenge of and responsibility for Indigenous research lies within all of us” (p. 156). For me, this highlights the need to be aware of the challenges and limitations within my own research effort. Some limitations to be aware of include:

1. Ensuring equitable representation from each of the 24 Stó:lō communities;
2. Importance of and the need for time to establish quality relationships (Wilson, 2008; Kovach, 2009);
3. The specificity of nation and place-based knowledge; as Kovach (2009) states:
“Indigenous knowledges can never be standardized, for they are in relation to place and person” (p. 56). This is true in Stó:lō territory, where there are differing versions of stories based on community, place and history.

Because of the limitations of time, I met with six of the 11 Elders who participated in the sharing circles to gather feedback on my draft thesis findings. I met with three Elders from the CCEC for a small group for discussion, and three Elders individually from the FVACFSS for the same purpose. The experience overall was helpful as the Elders affirmed my findings and offered some good feedback, such as including more use of the Halq'eméylem language and visual representations for the poles of the Longhouse.

My experience as a social worker in Stó:lō communities, as well as the need to attend to my own intersectional identities as informed by my own life-experience, can also be viewed as limitations. In order to counter my limitations, I had a raised level of self-awareness as I continually checked my own assumptions and judgments when conducting the data analysis.

Conclusion

To pursue using an Indigenous research methodology, I needed to choose a research question that is important to my nation and focus on the relationships that I have in the world around me. This act of relationality requires accountability and practicing the values of respect, reverence, responsibility and reciprocity. Being in the role of researcher, or knowledge

gatherer, required that I ask knowledge keepers to give of their time for my university degree and to be mindful of how I was engaging with the Elders. Typically, Indigenous research questions come from the community, and a researcher is invited to help answer that question. In this case, I understood because of my job, that we were in the early stages of addressing Stó:lō specific child welfare practices and the two Elders advisory groups welcomed me to do this research for my Master's degree. What created a transformative experience was being a knowledge gatherer working with the Stó:lō Elders from my own Nation and using a Storywork methodology that is grounded in Coast Salish and Stó:lō culture.

Knowledge was gathered through the use of Storywork in sharing circles with two Elders advisory groups. Due to the pandemic and my own challenges with time, I analyzed the data on my own. Using thematic analysis can be a layered, rigorous process that is useful in organizing complex transcripts into theme-based knowledge for practical use. Through this use of thematic analysis, a new set of knowledge both from and for my nation was created, knowledge that can be built upon in future research and that can have a positive impact in how we see ourselves and the work we do to support our children, families, and communities.

CHAPTER 4: Discussion

Introduction

To conceive of a culturally-based Stó:lō model it is important to listen to and hear the voices of the Stó:lō Elders, our recognized knowledge keepers. Our Elders were raised in surroundings shaped by the teachings of their ancestors, and in turn, applied these teachings in their child rearing practices. Drawing from the Elders' voices and stories they shared, I have documented Stó:lō knowledge and wisdom emerging from this study.

Elders' Experiences as a Way of Learning

I am grateful to the 11 Elders who participated in this research study: the three Elders from the Elders Advisory Committee at Fraser Valley Aboriginal Children and Family Services Society (FVACFSS) and the eight Elders from the Coqualeetza Cultural Education Centre (CCEC). The Elders came forward to participate in the sharing circles; in these circles they shared their stories of Stó:lō land, language, culture and ceremony alongside teachings of how to live a good Stó:lō life. I want to acknowledge and hold my hands up to the Elders who came forward to give in this way. I also want to recognize that many of the Elders acknowledged that they did not always live "a good Stó:lō life," and that for many of the participants it has taken years of healing and personal awareness to regain a good life. Their lived experience speaks to both the impacts of colonization on child well-being and the possibilities of reclaiming our teachings and practices. For many of the Elders, what they remember about having a good life came from the time before they went to residential school. As one Elder spoke, "I share my childhood prior to residential school, which was a great childhood. My mom was a great warrior. She taught us a lot of love. You know, she just loved us... She had lots of hugs, a lot of caring and lots of

teaching” (Elder, F3). It was during this time of living with their parents and siblings that the Elders felt loved and cared for, a key aspect of child well-being.

In this study, I discovered the Elders were able to find pathways to live in the best way possible. For some, this change occurred when they were parents or grandparents. Archibald (2008) reminds us, “Not all Elders are storytellers, and not all Elders have lived a good life. But to learn the highest degree of cultural knowledge, one could go to an Elder or someone not yet an Elder who understands and who lives good teachings” (p. 13). This type of transformative change is part of what gives today’s Elders their ability to step in as our cultural knowledge holders. It is also through this lived experience that the Elders will be able to create new stories which will replace the colonial narratives of child removal that conflict with Indigenous identity and belonging.

It is through my experience with the Elders that I am finding new meaning in their life-experience stories that will support new knowledge to share collectively as Stó:lō people. I see how Storywork has supported the use of both traditional and life-experience stories in order to create a new story about how we understand child well-being. I can reflect on Archibald’s (2008) experience “I did not intentionally set out to become a storyteller, but I did set out to learn more about the nature of Indigenous stories and how they could be used” (p. 85). In my own way, I am also sharing new stories about how the Elders understand child well-being.

How I want to share these stories is to invite the reader back to the longhouse, where we can sit and share our stories. I have created four new Story Poles to represent the stories of the Elders and how they understand the best interests of the Stó:lō child. The Story Poles are presented numerically from one to four. No theme is more important than any other, as they

all work together, supporting the longhouse. Also, each theme is enlivened with quotes from the Elders' sharing circle transcripts. The four themes and sub-themes are as follows:

1. Culture, Land and Ceremony

Subthemes: Ceremony, Connection to Land, Language and Cultural Renewal;

2. Communities Caring for One Another

Subthemes: Familial and Communal Self-Reliance, Giving and Taking Care of One Another and Coming Together;

3. Families

Subthemes: Family Strengths, Family Challenges, Parenting / Grandparenting and Children and Youth Today

4. Spirituality and Healing

Subthemes: The Longhouse, Sense of Identity and Sense of Belonging

Story Pole 1: Culture, Land and Ceremony

The deep connection to culture, tradition and ceremony was shared throughout the circle discussions. The Elders commented that culture is at the root of who we are as Stó:lō people, therefore culture is embedded in everything we experience. Many of the Elders reflected that as children they experienced culture through the day-to-day experiences of living at home with their parents and siblings. It was often not until they went to residential school or day school that their cultural teachings became "mixed up". However, throughout their life, culture has continued to play a role in their identity and sense of connectedness. As one Elder pointed out, "But, you know, somehow our elders, they come to the culture regardless of what they endured," (F16). Today, Elders are part of our cultural renewal and want to both teach as

well as learn alongside children and youth. Subthemes from this section include ceremony, connection to land, language and cultural renewal.

Ceremony

Ceremony was identified as an integral part of living a “good Stó:lō life”. Ceremony is an opportunity for people to gather and share with one another while practicing their teachings within our natural laws. The Elders highlighted the role of ceremony as bringing forward beliefs, values and traditions that are shared across the generations, from babies to Elders. In this way, transmission of knowledge takes place within families and communities. Through the process of ceremony, we are “taking hold of what we stand for and what our beliefs are” (Elder, F19).

One of the main challenges the Elders identified is that there are differences in ceremony, and that how one family’s practices may differ from how another family might practice the same ceremony. This is in part because when the government made ceremonial practice illegal, gatherings went underground and became secret. One of the Elders offered the following reflection: “There are differences within the culture, from person to person, from family to family... I don’t think anyone needs to criticize anyone about that and say, “No, that’s not the way to do it. No, you can’t do it that way. No you can’t do it that way” (Elder, F32). This Elder’s guidance is coming from a place of acceptance and sharing. This suggests families and communities need to conduct ceremony and make their own decisions about how ceremony is to be conducted.

With Soowhalie, we’re real big believers of culture and that when we have our ceremonies, we do it in a cultural way. We do our honouring ceremony for our babies, we do our honouring ceremony for our elders, and we blanket people and it’s just

getting to be an everyday thing. We're trying to get our kids into drumming and singing, more into cultural ways, and we're teaching them (Elder, F12).

Ceremony can be connected to both people and places within our territory, and is part of our strong connection to the land and our spiritual spaces.

Connection to Land

The Elders described a profound connection to the land. When speaking about the land, they shared stories of being on the land, including fishing, and growing fruits and vegetables as a way of sharing and taking care of family and community members. The Stó:lō belief is that we share our shxwelí (life spirit) with all life around us: the creatures of the earth, air, land and water. This life spirit also extends to the flowers, plants and trees, all of which are part of our medicines. One of the Elders summed up their connection to the land by saying, "Even though our parents and grandparents went to residential school, we still had that connection with Mother Earth. Yeah, I think it's just something natural that came to us. Like our parents had that and they just gave it to us and yeah, I think that's it. Everything was so natural" (Elder, F5). The Elders model the connection they have with the land in the stories they share and the desire to maintain connection through hunting, fishing and being on the land. They also remind us that our connection to all living things, our shxwelí (life spirit), is alive within us and waiting to be recognized and reclaimed. That our identity is spirit-based and tied to our shxwelí (life spirit). If we immerse ourselves in our community and teachings, we can reclaim our shxwelí (life spirit) and ensure our children grow up knowing who they are.

Language

Our worldviews are embedded in our language (Absolon, 2011; Kovach, 2009). Because our ways of knowing are expressed in the language, it is the way we think, feel and do (Leon & Syrette, 2020). This sentiment is expressed by many Elders in their belief that culture and language are indivisible. The language is intrinsically tied to the land, culture and ceremony because it is through our language that we understand who we are and how we know. The concern for the loss of the language shows the importance of preserving the language and passing it on to the children and youth. An Elder shared her experience with language:

We were sent away to residential school and the culture was torn back and forth with the language. I call my culture the language. So, you'd learn a word here and then you better forget it before you got back to school, or whatever, because we couldn't use anything like that in school. But that part of it, when I'm at home or when I'm with my grandchildren, I talk to them and I tell them. I'll say for instance, "[HALQ]," "Get me a coffee, I need a tea or I need this or whatever..." I don't hesitate to speak with what I know (Elder, C3).

Two of the Elders in the discussion group have a level of proficiency with the Halq'eméylem language and remembered learning language from their parents. Another Elder, Indigenous to another nation and who married into a Stó:lō family, talked about travelling with her father-in-law to meet people in the local communities: "They would talk in the language, in Halq'eméylem, both of them, and I understood them because I understood the island dialect, but I couldn't really speak it or speak, but I could understand a lot of it. I was really amazed that I, you know, I can understand them" (Elder, F15). As the Elder shared this story, she reflected

that knowing the language and travelling throughout the local communities was significant to our ways of being and doing; meeting with people taught her about relationships amongst the families, and travelling throughout the nation was also a way to learn place names and stories.

Cultural Renewal

There was a strong focus on cultural renewal and revitalization. Many of the Elders reported that they had strong teachings of culture within their families prior to attending residential school. It is these aspects of culture, ceremony, language and tradition that the Elders remember and bring forth into their everyday lives. Other Elders shared that they felt they weren't raised with a lot of culture, but made an effort to learn culture as adults. One of the Elders shared her experience, "...it's really awesome how, even though I wasn't taught culture, cultural and traditional ways, I learned more through the years. Like it's been brought and taught to us as we got older" (Elder, F11). This Elder has learned many of the cultural ways through involvement in the smokehouse, and is now stepping into her responsibility of serving as matriarch in her family. She shares that this role carries a lot of responsibility, and sometimes feels some uncertainty as she steps into this new, but very traditional role.

If there's something they want to know about our culture, they'll ask me, and if I don't know, I'll try and find out for them what it means. So, we're always open to finding out things. My R and W and R and E are really big in the culture. Yes, so I'm thankful that they're brought up with the culture and my grandson sings and he dances and he drums and that makes me feel proud that my boys are that side of the family. My other boys are really into culture, and R and E have taught them the culture. That's really a special thing for me and my girls, my daughter C, who's in addiction, she's smokehouse, too,

but she kind of pulled away from it because of the addiction. I just pray for her every day that she'll find it again (Elder, F20).

Elders mentioned the positive aspects of revitalizing cultural practices. One of the Elders commented that as we take back our culture it's like "new beginnings". Another Elder stated, "Like nowadays I just think it's so nice and you hear people singing and sharing their songs, and it just makes you feel good when you hear it" (Elder, C2). Bringing culture into your life is a way to reclaim pride and increase the spiritual well-being of the Stó:lō people. One of the clear messages is that the Elders find strength in sharing their knowledge, especially when gathering with all community members, from small babies to everyone across the lifespan. As Stó:lō people, intergenerational learning is our primary way of passing knowledge. There is a strong need to bring back these practices: learning in our smokehouse, through our ceremonies and "enlivening our kinship system" (Wright Cardinal et al., 2023) serve as ways to share culture and support the belief that we can all learn together no matter our age.

Story Pole 2: Communities Caring for One Another

The second Story Pole reflects a theme focussed on how we care for one another within family and community. The knowledge brought forth into this theme includes what the Elders learned as children, living within their own family and community, as well as the parts of the "good life" that sustained them through the challenges they experienced throughout their life. Subthemes from this section include familial and communal self-reliance, giving and taking care of one another, and coming together.

Familial and Communal Self-Reliance (Co-Reliance)

Familial and communal self-reliance is a strength of Coast Salish communities. Prior to colonization, multiple families lived together in longhouses as a way to provide for and protect one another. While living in longhouses is not a standard way of life for today's Elders, it was the way of life of their grandparents who traditionally were their first caregivers and teachers. Therefore, the essence of community remained intact in how families connected and took care of one another. When speaking about the teachings that Elders learned as children, there was a joy in what they remembered about living a "good Stó:lō life", for example:

We were happy and well-fed, well looked after, and I think that was the good life. We didn't have to worry that you were going to be starving tomorrow. The parents always made sure that you had enough, and even though they had suffered through what they suffered through, they still fended for us. That's my recollection (Elder, F4).

The Elders recalled that while they were at home they were loved and cared for. There was a sense that while some parents struggled with showing love, the Elders knew that they were loved. One of the Elders added, "I can kind of relate to that, too, because the good life as a child, even though I didn't get loves and hugs and kisses from mom or dad, it was like we were happy. Like, there were six of us in a two-bedroom house, right" (Elder, F4). Thinking about this quote, we gain a sense of the teachings, their meaning and the intergenerational strengths that were passed on by families; a sense of caring and sharing and belonging that the Elders learned from their grandparents and parents which they are now able to pass on today.

Giving and Taking Care of One Another

Within the community, families were both self-reliant and co-reliant; if one family was proficient at hunting, they would share or trade what they caught with other families so that everyone would have something, especially our elderly members.

I came from a community, that the whole community cared about one another... If anybody in the community, there was only five homes, but if anybody in the community was lacking food, the whole community shared. We had two families who smoked fish, and they were just exceptional, so, whenever my mom said, "Oh, we need some smoked fish, go over and ask..." Then we'd run over to ask, "My mom wants some smoked fish." They'd send it or my mom would send food to them. It was just the most wonderful thing. Also, my brother sometimes would bring friends home and they'd live with us for three or four months. My mom never said, "You have to go home now." She just let them stay and fed them, and we were just a big, happy family, but this was prior to residential school (Elder, F3).

These stories about taking care of one another in the community were affirmed by the stories I heard from my own grandmother about my great-grandmother cooking large meals that she would share with families in the community. In this way, people were taught to be generous and sharing was a main part of the Stó:lō belief system. As one Elder stated, "One thing I remember mostly was not to be greedy. With anything you don't take more than your share, more than you need, ever. That was really tough and it was really frowned upon if somebody showed a little bit, you know, taking a little more than they thought they should have" (Elder, F4). This belief in taking care of one another helps to sustain life in the community.

Coming Together

Community togetherness and co-reliance has suffered from the effects of colonization and the desire to restore such togetherness and mutual support continues as a Stó:lō challenge. The Elders explained that this was due to the laws and regulations that were forced upon their own communities, which were intended to create divisions within the community. The Elders noted significant changes due to families living in single family homes and the imposition of religious affiliation that divided the communities. Many of those communities are still divided. There is clear recognition that to achieve a healthier community and a stronger nation, we need to overcome our differences.

I guess the bottom line in saying is that we need to create more positive relationships within our community, because I know that, certainly in Sqwá, would lead to more gathering, more being committed to one another. There are things that have happened in our communities that aren't easy between families. They don't happen in communities, they happen between families, and those are the things that you begin to look at (Elder, C31).

The Elders remind us that relationships are at the core of who we are as Stó:lō people. We are part of families and those families make up community. As we strengthen ourselves and our families, our communities will also be stronger. The values of co-reliance remind us of our strengths and how we come together; co-operation, sustainability, and a sense of belonging all speak to the inherent strengths found in Indigenous communities. When community members can live these values then there is a greater opportunity to promote community capacity and wellbeing.

Part of the discussion focussed on the children and parents already moving forward and coming together because of community based activities, such as canoe clubs, youth groups, and through cultural activities, such as canning. One Elder highlighted the youth involvement in the canoe club as a way of bringing people together, she shared, “...families that would never really hang out before, their kids are hanging out. So, I just want to put that out there because what do our communities do, right? We talk about our communities, but our communities are us” (Elder, C31). The Elders highlight a sense of personal responsibility about our own communities and are in a position to encourage members to move beyond what is comfortable in order to create new relationships. In turn, we can redefine what we want from our community, to redefine community at its best.

Story Pole 3: Families

Central to this discussion is the importance of children, youth, and families. More significantly, stories related to the importance of family and children are central to Story Pole 3 and help to illuminate how Elders might describe the “best interests” of the Stó:lō child. It is clear in an Indigenous context you can’t separate children from family, or separate family from the community. Viewing children within the context of family and community differs from considering the individual, and meeting only the individual’s needs. Subthemes in this section include family strengths, family challenges, parenting and grandparenting, and children and youth today.

Family Strengths

Family is central to the well-being of Stó:lō people. For the Stó:lō people, the term family represents our kinship system where multigenerations of people work and live together.

The Elders highlighted “family” strengths as being found in the responsibility one has to one another, relationships between family members and how family looks after one another. Through maintaining strong ties among family, you are able to support one another, and know your own family’s strengths and limitations. Through the sharing circle discussions, the Elders reflected on the desire to bring up their own children in a “good way”. For some of the Elders, they had success in wanting to bring up their children differently, while others had to go through a “healing journey” before they were able to share what they remembered of a “good life”. It seems that regardless of what path the Elders took, it is their children and grandchildren who are benefitting. As one Elder shared:

Never giving up because, like you were saying, my grandchildren, I have my kids who grew up in the system, now my grandchildren are joining that system. I don't want them to go through that... I don't want them to endure what we did. It has to change somewhere and it is, it is a bit, a little bit (Elder, F35).

The Elders described the process of change as like being on a journey. I believe the Elders are telling us that change takes time and preparation. Before we embark on the journey we need to get to the place where we find the journey worthwhile, for many this was because there was a desire to want something better for their children and grandchildren. Once we start, it is our relationships with our family and those who care for us that will support and sustain us as we travel to a place of change. This is an incredible insight from the Elders, the importance of community readiness, that I will discuss further in Chapter 5.

The Elders are resilient; they have overcome the colonial harms they experienced throughout their lives. Their resilience confronts the colonial harms and replaces the harms

with teachings of love and caring for one another, often learned through relationships with family. Through their journeys the Elders have gained experiences that inform their own perspectives on what is important for children to learn, and how to share the information. The Elders are recognized as the knowledge keepers of their families. Many of them are focussed on preserving the relationships within their families, as well as providing different levels of care for family members. They recognize that, “Even having a good life varies for every family. It doesn't mean everybody gets the same. I think people that know more culture are very fortunate to know that, right, we didn't have any of that” (Elder, C12). It is apparent that the Elders want to continue to rebuild and strengthen ties amongst their families and communities. Many are already invested in being involved in the community as a knowledge keeper, a role that brought them membership to the Elders’ group to which they belong.

Family Challenges

Because of the effects of colonization, Stó:lō families have faced challenges in restoring family structures. Within families there is a wide spectrum of health and wellness ranging from what can be described as the good ways of living a Stó:lō life, to outcomes from the negative effects of colonization, including addictions, violence, mood disorders, homelessness and poverty. Here, an Elder reflects on the impacts of colonization:

There just seems to be so much more cruelty in the world because of the way people are brought up today. Instead of caring for one another, they don't seem to care about one another anymore. They don't even seem to care about their families. They don't even seem to care about their children (Elder, F7).

While this might seem harsh, the Elders have observed lack of care as one of the shifts that has occurred in some families. One Elder continued by saying that this lack of care or cruelty is one of the negative aspects that has been inherited from the residential school system. In fact, many of the challenges that families face can be described as effects of the Indian Act, in particular the residential school system. The value of formal education also came up as part of this discussion, with Elders sharing the importance of formal education in order to be self-reliant, self-caring and self-determining as First Nations communities.

Parenting/Grandparenting

There are clear differences between how the Elders parented their children, and how children are being parented today. The Elders' experience is unique in that they have gone through different stages of being parented: 1) Starting as young children who were rooted in the teachings of their grandparents and parents, acknowledging that some of their parents also went through residential school; 2) For many, this stage involved removal from family to attend residential school, leading to confusion of their teachings and replacing love and connection with abuse and isolation; and 3) Returning home, living with confusion and having to process what happened as they became adults, and eventually becoming parents of their own children. During the conversation, many of the Elders emphasized that they wanted to bring their children up differently than they were brought up, "I wanted to bring my children up differently than we were brought up because mom and dad were both survivors of residential school" (Elder, F2). This affirms the disruption in parenting practices because of residential school across generations. The Elders have the life experience to look across the generations and the

differences in parenting, noting that parents today have their own beliefs and ways of doing things.

What the Elders highlight as important for parents to know today include:

- Involve children in what you do as parents; children love to do things with their parents and it is an important way to pass on knowledge;
- Give children love, so that they can pass it on to their children;
- Raise them to know respect; and
- Speak to children kindly, so that they learn kindness and generosity

As I think about what the Elders highlighted, I see the overlap in the love and care the Elders learned from their parents and what they have learned as being important in the relationships they have now, the core values being to engage children to pass on knowledge, demonstrate love and respect, model kindness and generosity, and to understand your important role in a child's life.

Children and Youth Today

Another highlight for children and youth is that they be raised with love, as one Elder shared, "We need to teach our children about love again, and how love should be in every situation" (Elder, F23). On reflection, this desire for children to know love and to be spoken to kindly likely comes out of the Elders negative experiences as children, something reflected in the following statement:

As far as teaching the children to do this, that and the other, maybe it has been taught, but not in the same way that it used to be taught. It's taught in a more demoralizing fashion. "You go do this or else," "How dare you not finish doing that?" "How dare you

not clean the house?” You know, not only do I see that on reserve, but I see it off reserve too, with parents when they’re walking with their children (Elder, F7).

It is clear from the sharing circles that the Elders care a lot about the children and youth today. They are invested in the children and youth who they describe as the hope for the future and will continue to carry the culture into the future. The Elders want children and youth to be proud of their culture and to know where they are from, to be grounded in who they are as Stó:lō people.

While parents and grandparents will often have different ways of raising children, there is consistency in our cultural teachings and the strengths in our kinship system. Through bringing forth culture as our strength children can know who they are and have a strong identity in being Stó:lō. Our responsibility is ensuring children and youth have access to their culture and community. The Elders share this responsibility and encourage each other in this process.

Story Pole 4: Spirituality and Healing

The root of harm and trauma in our families are the government policies of forced assimilation, which Indigenous people have lived with since the settling of Canada. The forced removal of children from Indigenous families and the conditions that were forced upon children stripped away language, culture, identity, community and the sense of being loved and valued; guilt, shame and embarrassment became commonplace. In speaking with the Elders, it is their connection to family, community and culture that has restored their self-esteem and helped them through the healing process, restoring the ability to love and care for themselves and

those around them. Subthemes in this section include the longhouse, sense of identity, sense of belonging, and ways of healing.

The Longhouse

When asked about teachings regarding living a “good Stó:lō life”, the longhouse was mentioned as an important part of the discussion. While the longhouse was a place for people to reside, it was and continues to be a place of spiritual practice. One Elder shared that her grandfather was one of the leaders who brought the longhouse practice back to their community after the ban was lifted in 1951: “My grandpa, Grandpa A was big in the smokehouse and we started our smokehouse at the hall, and grandpa started that, and that’s when things started coming together. We would follow the smokehouse and get teachings that way” (Elder, F12). The resurgence of the longhouse practice was an important element for Elders to relearn culture and ceremony, as well as a place to heal.

The first time I went to the smokehouse was when my dad passed and F invited our family, and I had never gone. I didn’t know what to expect. Then when I seen the people with the paint it scared me, ‘cause I just didn’t understand, but after it was all done you just felt good inside, and that’s what they said, they were singing for us grieving (Elder, C6).

Another Elder stated that becoming part of the longhouse helped him find family connections:

I was glad when I moved up here because that’s when I went to the longhouse. I learned a lot of stuff there. I learned a lot of who my family was, the connection with the people that was in there. They gave me the history of where my family came from and who they were (Elder, C16).

The literature review supports this notion that the longhouse is an important aspect (or element) of who we are because of our connection to spirit. Our shxwelí (life spirit) is what helps us to feel complete.

Sense of Identity

One of the Elders spoke of being “mixed up” by residential school. When I asked the Elders how they have come to understand this and how they made such significant change in their lives one of the responses was:

Myself, I have to stop and think sometime, you know, the way I was taught and what I went through. So, then I have to choose what I was taught and not be that... the other person. You know, I think we’ve got to be more positive with our culture, what we were taught at home (Elder, C14).

The Elders spoke of identity as a sense of self and knowing who we are within our family, community and nation. Indigenous identity, also referred to as kinship connection by the Elders was eroded because of colonization, but it is an important part of who we are as Indigenous Stó:lō people. The Elders also commented that this is an important aspect for our children and youth to be comfortable with who they are, who they belong to and what they can be.

Sense of Belonging

Through our relationships within our Stó:lō worldview we develop our sense of belonging and connectedness with knowledge of how we live. The term “All My Relations” represents our interconnectedness as family, community, nation and people of the land reinforced through ceremony, a cherished sustaining force in our lives. “The people of the

water, the sky, the land and we learn from that. When we all work together there is that still sense of being First Nations and being a part of who we were meant to be” (Elder, F14).

The Elders also expressed a sense of belonging in their role as Elders and their responsibility in passing information to the future generations:

“After we let those walls down, we can feel that the ancestors communicate with us now, and before we couldn’t because we have these walls” (Elder, F32).

It is important to recognize the role of the Elders and their involvement with children and youth. Elders and children are so valued because they live in the space closest to our ancestors; at birth and at death, there is a thin veil between this world and the world of our ancestors. In taking down the walls, the Elders are opening up the space for all of us to be able to connect with our ancestors. In connection we find life energy and our lifeways, which will continue to bring good health and wellness to our communities.

Reflecting on the Story Poles

“...I read about Chief Joseph, he said, ‘To reconcile, to have this full reconciliation, we need to talk about what’s happened in our pasts and share that in a way, not that we’re bragging or anything, but that we are sharing our lives’” (Elder, F23).

I have been able to focus on the knowledge shared by the Elders through the use of Storywork. In this way, the Elders are sharing their lives with us by “reclaiming and taking on the responsibility of giving direction to those who work at Coqualeetza and the Stó:lō Nation’s offices” (Archibald, 2008, p. 79), although at this time we can extend this role to many other agencies and programs serving Indigenous people. Through reflection on what the Elders have

shared, it is an important reminder to prioritize Elders knowledge in reclaiming our traditional values and ways of being and doing

Through my own relationships as a daughter, niece, community member, social worker, and researcher with the Elders, I can see more clearly the role and importance of wellness in their lives. The Elders are searching for and sharing their knowledge and recognizing the importance of the roles they carry. The four-story poles are the knowledge creation of the Elders values, beliefs and life-experiences. The story poles are placed on the front of the longhouse, the traditional place where stories were told to the people. I hope that by bringing forward new story poles we can revision the longhouse into a place of safety, where our traditional systems can come forward and help us on a path to reclaiming our teachings and self-determination.

CHAPTER 5: Discussion and Recommendations

Tset tse áliyém kweset sq'áleqó.

We have strength together

Introduction

As I reflect on my time with the Elders, I am reminded of the times I spent sitting and listening to my uncles' stories of sas'qets, hunting experiences they shared and things they did with Grandpa. What wonderful ways to learn about being who we are as Stó:lō people! Connecting with the Elders was equally as rich. Such relatedness enhances our kinship, relational trust and pursuit of community wellness with the belief that we are coming together to do good work. I also recognize the strengths in the relationships that the Elders have with one another; the ability to talk openly with one another about what they experienced in life inspired me. In searching for answers to my research question, I turned to our Elders to share their stories about what they want for our children. How do they describe what is in the best interests of a Stó:lō child and to understand how they describe this through the lens of the teachings of living a "good Stó:lō life"?

I will now provide an overview of my thesis through a discussion of the research process and summarize the meaning provided by the four story poles with specific focus on the best interests of the Stó:lō child. I will then provide recommendations for: myself, social work and child and youth care practitioners, the Stó:lō Nation and further community-engaged research, followed by closing words.

Discussion

My research began with one question and a curiosity to learn about how Indigenous communities would begin the process of moving towards jurisdiction of child and family services. The concept of child and family services can be overwhelming, especially when considering a colonial history that attempted to eradicate Indigenous people over the past 150 years. As we turn this page, what remains consistent in the narrative for Indigenous people is the importance of our children being connected to their families, communities and nations; bringing our children home is essential to who we are. It was with this thought that I came to focus on my overarching research question: *How do Stó:lō people define the “best interests of the child” based on the cultural, linguistic and governance structure of their nation?* I aimed to do this through the Elder’s unique worldview and understanding of the teachings of a good Stó:lō life in order to mobilize community-based Indigenous knowledge on Stó:lō child rearing in the past and present and that centers teachings of our ancestors. To begin this process, I reviewed and discussed literature that informs Indigenous child welfare from both a historical and current perspective. This led me to present the literature framed in three distinct areas: cultural disruption, cultural resurgence, and decolonization and reconciliation. The literature review was challenging for me because I had to confront my own history as both an Indigenous woman and a social worker. Through this process, and with the support of my supervisor, I gained a lot of knowledge, but even more so, I gained strength and understanding of my own cultural beliefs and values respecting caring for our children and their caregivers.

To ground my research in Indigenous ways of knowing, I chose to use an Indigenous research methodology. As I reflected on the meaning I attached to academic research within an

Indigenous context, I was challenged through a process of critical self-reflection as I decidedly moved away from the Western-based methodologies that provided the foundations for my earlier academic work. After being introduced to Jo-ann Archibald's (2008) *Indigenous Storywork*, which was based on her work with Elders in Stó:lō Nation, and being encouraged by my supervisory committee to use Indigenous approaches to my study, I decided that applying this methodology to gathering stories with Elders in my nation was truly the only methodology that would support the community-based, cultural research that I wanted to engage in. It was through the works of Indigenous scholars such as Jo-ann Archibald (2008), Kathleen Absolon (2011) and Shawn Wilson (2008), that I understood how to undertake my research, developing my own longhouse theoretical framework within a Stó:lō based methodology of story gathering.

To gather the knowledge that I needed in order to answer the research question, I turned to our beautiful Elders in S'ólh Téméxw (Our World). Being Stó:lō, I had the benefit of being familiar with both the Coqualeetza Cultural Education Centre (CCEC) and the Fraser Valley Aboriginal Child and Family Services Society (FVACFSS). Both the CCEC Elders Group and the FVACFSS Elders Advisory Committee are focussed on gathering and sharing Stó:lō knowledge. While the goals of each group differ, they both recognize the effects of colonization on our families in our communities and are focussed on improving community wellness and child well-being. The Elders provide knowledge and support both through their involvement with the CCEC and FVACFSS, as well as providing guidance to other programs within the territory. Both groups work to prioritize Elders knowledge and their involvement to promote Stó:lō well-being, with a special focus on child welfare. It is because of these groups' interests in child welfare,

culture and child well-being that I wanted to approach them and humbly ask for their involvement with my research.

In November 2022, I was able to hold sharing circles with each Elders' group to facilitate the sharing of their stories and life experiences as they related it to the best interests of the Stó:lō child. Through the use of Indigenous Storywork, life-experience stories are recognized as the knowledge creation. Due to limited time, I could not meaningfully engage the two Elders groups in data analysis. I discussed initial themes with the groups then conducted a thematic analysis of the data because I was familiar with this analysis process and wanted to provide a trustworthy and systematic approach that would lead to insightful findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017) in response to my research question. As part of my responsibility to the Elders, I met with each group to share the transcribed stories and results of the research seeking feedback to ensure accuracy. What the Elders shared is what they learned as children from their parents and grandparents while living in their community. Working with the Elders was a transformative experience for me as I was able to witness how they shared their stories, and how their stories transformed my own vision for the healing and wellness of our children, families and communities.

Through this transformative process, new stories were created to inform what is in the best interest of the Stó:lō child today. This resulted in the creation of four new "story poles" which are being raised in front of the longhouse framework as a visual representation of what was learned in this study. Each of the 11 Elders provided their own unique perspectives and stories to help provide a foundation for what is important for Stó:lō children and their families based on their own life experiences. Through the establishment of four-story poles, we are

telling a new story about what is important for our children and families. Through careful analysis of the information, with feedback from the Elders, and consideration of how the information is relevant to children, families, community and nation, four story poles have been developed that represent the essence of stories and teachings shared by the Elders in regards to what is in the best interests of the Stó:lō child.

Currently, the concept of the “best interests of the child” is used within the legal system and provides a set of principles for evaluating what “best protects your child’s physical, psychological, and emotional safety, security and well-being” (Government of BC, 2023, para.1). As a social worker I learned early in my training that we act in the “best interests of the child” as outlined in the Child, Family and Community Service Act (1996). As Indigenous communities move toward jurisdiction of child and family services it becomes imperative for us to understand this definition within a context of Indigenous knowledges and traditions in order to acknowledge how Indigenous people view the well-being of a child. Being a Stó:lō woman, I was specifically interested in how my own Nation would recreate and apply this concept.

While I agree that the “best interests” should be used as a measure to protect children, it also should be a measure for ensuring that our children live a “good life”. This leads to the question of what we need to teach our children to help them have a “good life”. Through my sharing circle discussion questions, the Elders were given time to reflect on what it means to live a “good Stó:lō life” from both the perspective of how they experienced their own childhoods, and what they have learned as adults. The concept of what is in the best interests of a Stó:lō child today are represented in this Longhouse Framework with the four new story

poles. Each of these stories can serve as the new type of strength-based stories to be told as work towards establishing our community’s governance over our child and family services.

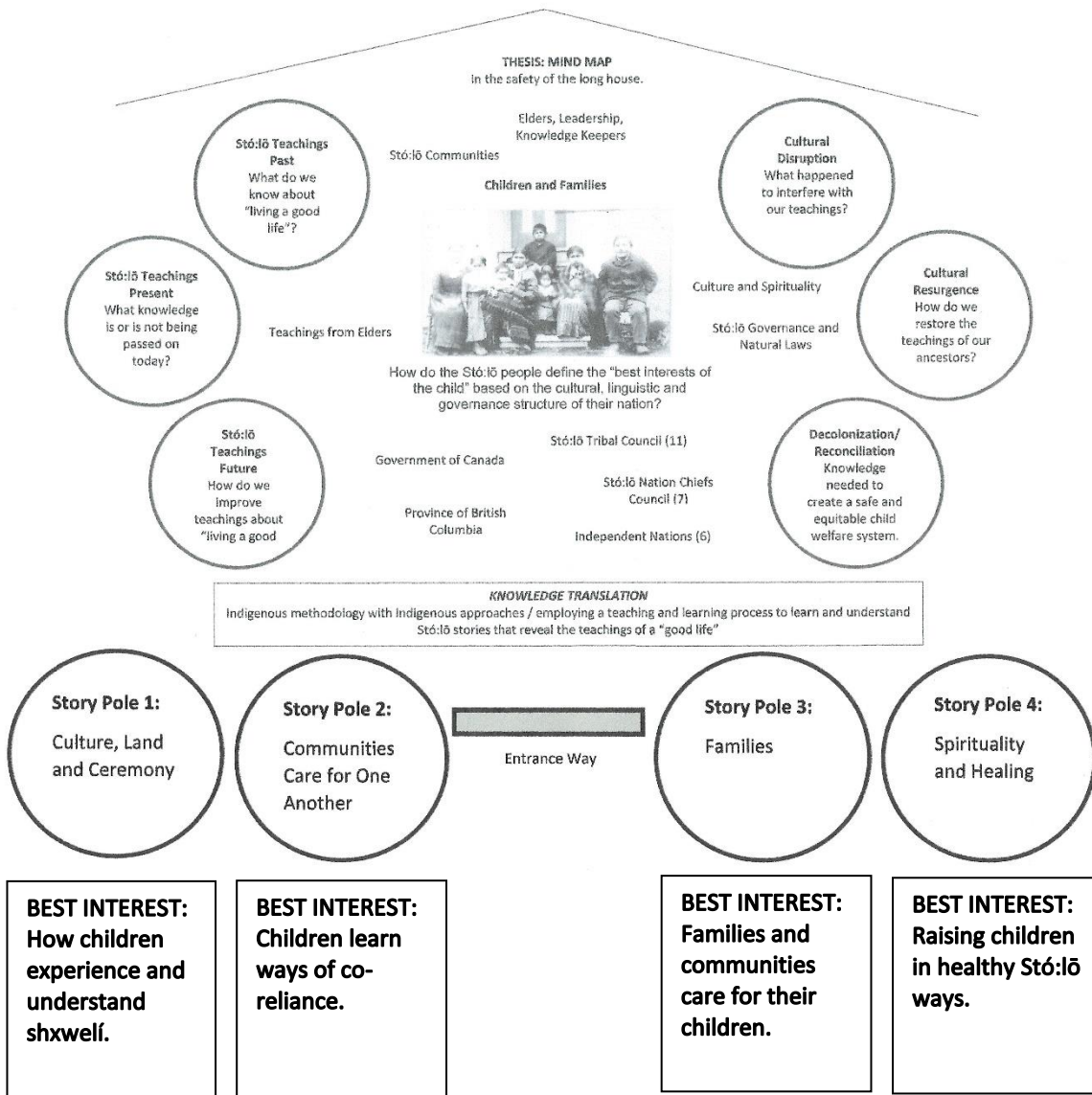


Figure 5: Raising of the New Story Poles

Story Pole 1: Culture, Land and Ceremony

Through the Elders discussions we can assert that culture is the foundation of who we are as Stó:lō people. Our culture can be identified through our worldview, the unique ways that

we practice ceremony, where we situate our physical and spiritual selves, and in our relationships, language and governance systems. As previously shared, culture can be found in every aspect of life, our beliefs, values and our spiritual responsibilities, matters that cannot be separated from our day-to-day experiences. In this way, we can recognize that culture is our foundation.

The importance of ceremony and land was highlighted as an integral part of what it is to be Stó:lō. As I think about ceremony and land, I see how these two components reveal our relational nature. In ceremony we gather together, often to witness special events and to do cultural work. Relationships with one another are acknowledged in ceremony as families generally work together at these times. We are also in relationship with the land. The land represents our connection with the creatures of the earth, air, land, and water. It also reflects the importance of the flowers, plants, and trees. Within these relationships are our shared shxwelí (life spirit).

Within our first story pole is our cultural foundation. The role of ceremony and our connection to the land establishes our connection to culture through our practices and how we are in relationship with all things around us. Our connection to land speaks to our place and the identity we draw from our sacred spaces and landmarks.

What is in the Best Interests of the Child?

How children experience and understand shxwelí.

The first story pole speaks directly to the role that culture, land and ceremony play in the lives of the Stó:lō people. How this speaks to the best interests of the child is through

recognition that our shxwelí (life spirit) is who we are as Stó:lō people, and therefore, culture should become the foundation of care for our children and families.

If we believe that culture is transmitted through day-to-day interactions with those in community, then it is vital that children live in their traditional territories, where they have opportunities to learn their language, stories and their connections to land and spiritual spaces. Through the process of being on the land and in ceremony children can come to understand the concept of “All Our Relations”, which teaches relational understanding and how to care for one another as a community. Through this relationship children will come to know their shxwelí (life spirit). Ideally, children should be with family who care about them and have the ability to pass on this knowledge. Families and communities should also be able to work together to determine appropriate ceremonial practices that ensure children experience who they are and understand their shxwelí (life spirit), leading to a strong cultural identity.

Story Pole 2: Communities Caring for One Another

The Elders expressed a strong interest in the wellness of our communities. For the Elders, a healthy community is one where we care for and provide for one another, described in the findings this is called “co-reliance”, and which to our teaching of méqw’wat memeylhtel (everybody helps one another). Although life in our communities have drastically changed since colonization, there remains a sense of our kinship and how we work together as a community. What I have come to appreciate is that our communities are continuing to grow and change. Through the establishment of health, wellness and educational programs, and strong leadership, the nation is striving to increase the wellness of its members.

At this time, because of the legislative shifts in Indigenous child welfare, there is increased funding to our communities and a strong focus on community wellness. In my own community, we are focused on developing prevention programs to help families who are at risk of becoming involved in the child welfare system. While the Elders did not specifically speak to programs and supports, they spoke to the importance of taking care of one another. The values of co-operation, sustainability and a sense of belonging can be recognized as part of the inherent strengths of Indigenous communities. Communities can increase their capacity, which in turn contributes to our healing and wellness. By having meals together and rebuilding our relationships we are restoring the teachings of our ancestors.

In healthy Indigenous communities' members relate with one another as gifts. A healthy community is a community that honours and protects Mother Earth. The Elders' stories verify that there has always been a sense of Stó:lō identity and values in child rearing, despite the negative effects we have had to navigate. Hopefully we are in a place to advance our community wellness; to do so we need communities of people who care for one another because it takes a healthy community to raise a healthy child.

What is in the Best Interests of the Child?

Children learn the ways of co-reliance.

A strong sense of identity that is tied to our community and kinship systems will help our children and youth experience a better sense of self. Co-reliance is key because it speaks to how we can create sustainable societies through living in a mutually beneficial way where values of helping one another and sharing with one another are upheld. The Elders spoke of a sense of personal responsibility to care for our community. When we are reliant on one

another, we learn to care about one other because our wellness is not contingent on ourselves alone. How we get there is to create opportunities for children and youth to gather and spend time with extended family members, especially Elders and Grandparents. Learning to care for our Elders and Grandparents as they, in turn, care for us is one of the first steps toward learning how to care for the greater community.

Story Pole 3: Families

Through the sharing circles, the Elders spoke of their healing journeys. In two stories the Elders shared that they were not in a good place when they were raising their own children. During the years they parented, they didn't realize that they could provide a better life for their children. Due to their own traumas, they were not able to support their children with a "good Stó:lō life" and in turn, some of those children learned unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as self-medicating to cope with trauma and angry ways to express emotions. As the Elders went through their own healing journeys, they were provided cultural and ceremonial ways and decided they wanted to provide a better life for their grandchildren. These Elders are now recognized as the matriarchs and leaders of their family.

As Stó:lō people, we are reminded *xólhmet te mekw' stam s'íwes te selsila:lh chet* (take care of everything our great-grandparents taught us) which speaks to the value of our relationships and interactions with one another. Core values of Sto:lo families that were shared by the Elders are: 1) we engage children to pass on knowledge; 2) we demonstrate *stl'et'í* (love) and *ólhet* (respect); 3) we model kindness and generosity - *lexw'éy* (generous, kind, good-hearted); and 4) to respect and value your important role in a child's life or *xóxelhmet* (taking care of someone). To truly understand the concept of a family we turn to our kinship

system, which also reflects teachings of co-reliance. Our children are taught that they have a responsibility to their family and community. In turn, family and community also have a responsibility to their children. It is through these relationships that children learn who they are connected to and how to care about one another.

What is in the Best Interests of the Child?

Families and communities care for their children.

A focus on supporting parents is important to help parents learn how to bring up their children in a “good way”. Supporting parents to learn the skills to bring up their children with love and strong attachment is in everybody’s best interest. The Elders have an important role in supporting parents; many of our Elders have gone on healing journeys and are able to share their experiences as a way to mentor our parents today. They do this through traditional healing practices and the teachings they remember.

As I reflect on how we support parents I also think about the importance of grandparents as “parents”. In our Stó:lō traditions, grandparents often raised the oldest grandchildren in order to ensure cultural knowledge and teachings were passed on in the most complete form. This was also strengthened by living in kinship systems where multiple generations of families lived together. The Elders recognize that while parents today raise their children differently, we are still responsible to each other in contributing to each others wellness. The beliefs and values we share about caring for one another should be consistent among our families to ensure this is happening in a good way.

Story Pole 4: Spirituality and Healing

While the role of spirituality in healing is not well acknowledged in mainstream society, it plays an important role in Indigenous wellness. The longhouse and spiritual practices were identified by the Elders as a positive part of healing and coming back to the culture. The Elders' stories spoke of the longhouse as a place of healing, a place where the drumming, singing and ceremony speak to their spirit. I also feel it is a place of healing because it is where we come together as family and community.

Telling of personal life stories also provides insight regarding our healing process of healing. Jo-ann Archibald (2008) shares the story of Frank Brown, highlighting the process of sharing life-experience stories as teaching tools, with the hopes that people will not go through the same experience that the Elders went through (p. 113). The Elders' desire to share also speaks to their relational well-being and love for family and community members. Many of our Elders are involved in various Elders groups and community programs because they are our knowledge keepers. Traditionally, Elders were our counsellors and advisors and today many Elders also fill that same role in the community and within family. In listening to the Elders, the knowledge is in what they are sharing, what they know, practice and experience. Talking with the Elders is often like spending time with a good friend, which represents that relational nature of our sharing and caring.

Some stories the Elders share speak to the wellness of our children and the actualization of their highest self. Children raised in healthy Stó:lō ways, will know they are loved and are a gift from the Creator. They will have a healthy identity and a strong sense of belonging; they will know their ancestral homelands and stories that tell of the time and place of their nation;

and they will have a spirit-based identity and be familiar with ceremonial practice and its meaning. Children will be able to keep their communities strong and continue to reclaim and revitalize our culture.

What is in the Best Interests of the Child?

Raising children in healthy Stó:lō ways.

A focus on the “best interests of the child” can be a somewhat idealized notion when looking at our communities and some of the struggles that our families are facing. The focus of the fourth pole on spirituality and healing suggests over time, with access and ongoing practice, families can and do maintain wellness. Children would have opportunities to grow up with access to our teachings and develop a strong Stó:lō identity that includes an understanding of our kinship relationships and interconnectedness with all living things. To help children develop a strong spirit-based identity, children need to recognize and develop their shxwelí (life spirit). Opportunities for children to learn and participate in the longhouse, which include learning songs and traditional dances will help connect them to their spirituality. If children have a strong identity and sense of self they have a basis for holistic health that is rooted in culture.

Recommendations

I hope is that communities that are in the process of establishing jurisdiction of child and family services, or who are considering starting this process can use this information to inspire them. While this thesis is centered on Stó:lō worldviews and beliefs, I also hope that it can be a useful guide to other Indigenous nations which are in a similar place on this journey. In the following section, I outline recommendations that I have developed based on my learning from the research process and the wisdom shared by the Elders. I have organized the

recommendations into four categories to reflect recommendations for myself, Social Workers and Child and Youth Care Practitioners, for Stó:lō Nation communities and for community-engaged research.

Recommendations for Self

Throughout this process, I have been piecing together the story of my own family. In clarifying and unpacking my family story, I have greater awareness about who we are and how we have come to be the way we are. I have gained confidence in my knowledge as an Indigenous woman from both the Stó:lō and Oneida Nations. To be a lifelong learner of our cultural ways; to remain confident in the knowledge I carry; and to be positive in sharing parts of our cultural knowledge with others is my first recommendation.

Since beginning my thesis, I have left my position as a social worker at a Delegated Aboriginal Agency (DAA), now known as Indigenous Child and Family Service Agencies (ICFSA). This decision to leave my position was not an easy one. At the time I returned to university to complete my master's degree, I was committed to working in Indigenous child protection and moving into a position where I could create change through policy and governance work. Significant change took place in my life, including impacts from the global pandemic, ongoing change in child welfare work, and my own involvement in our Stó:lō culture and language that refocused my energy into the people and community that I am responsible to. It is because of this that I remain involved with Indigenous child welfare. I am an active member of the Sqwá Child and Family Services Committee, working towards the creation of our own child and family services. We are at the beginning stages and I can already see progressive change taking place and the leadership required to ensure we stay close to our Stó:lō values and teachings. I also

am currently working as a therapist, specifically with children and youth who have experienced complex trauma and abuse. I am a child and youth care worker at heart, so creating and maintaining therapeutic relationships with children and youth is work that is true to my heart. In this way, I remain committed to helping children and families, at a community level that is meaningful and relies on positive relationships to create therapeutic change.

Recommendations for Social Workers and Child and Youth Care Practitioners

Many people working in the fields of social work and child and youth care are aware that “health and social services delivered using a Western approach have limited success in responding to the needs of Indigenous people, in part because of the complex interactions between the various dimensions of wellness” (Viscogliosi et al., 2020, p. 668). Elders can play a strong role in contributing to the wellness of children, youth and families by bringing forward and affirming traditional knowledge, practices and values. The Stó:lō Elders specifically fill this role at FVACFSS, as they sit in family meetings and work with families and social workers to provide guidance on child rearing practices

For social workers and child and youth care practitioners to work successfully with Indigenous children, youth and families, our praxis must include an understanding of Indigenous histories and their intergenerational effects. Social workers and child and youth care practitioners can take initiative to build relationships with children and their extended families. From an individual perspective, these relationships should include an understanding of an Indigenous worldview, with the recognition that each nation has their own teachings and unique identities.

Agencies or organizations undertaking responsibility for the safety and well-being of Indigenous children and youth should have a basic understanding of Indigenous child health and wellbeing in order to provide culturally safe and respectful services. As professionals working with Indigenous peoples and/or in Indigenous communities, we need to avoid a misstep into pan-Indigenism, and focus on learning the unique beliefs and customs of the nations we work with. The Elders spoke extensively about culture and how it is a foundation for wellness. As professionals we can work to improve supports by being able to offer Indigenous-based services with cultural understanding and humility.

For children to have the greatest success they need to remain in their communities, where they can maintain their ties to land, language, culture and ceremony which can satisfy what the literature refers to as critical needs of belonging and cultural identity. By remaining in community, children are provided the greatest chance of success. The creation of IGBs should support children remaining connected to their community. It is the hope of many nations that through taking jurisdiction of child welfare services, outcomes will improve for our children in care.

Looking to extended family and community for direction in the care and well-being of their children can support better outcomes for those children. This speaks to the collaboration needed when planning for children and families. Child protection social workers should never be making decisions for children and families in isolation. The Designated Band Representative (DBR) is the appointed person for social workers to contact. DBRs can speak on behalf of the community and their interests and desires for children they are responsible for. Opportunities for children to remain in community, or at minimum have strong connections to their family,

will benefit both the child and the community by creating and supporting relationships and a sense of belonging. These relationships, if practiced in a good way, will help the spirit grow and overcome the devastating effects of intergenerational trauma.

Recommendations for Stó:lō Nation Communities

My hope is that communities that are in the process of establishing jurisdiction of child and family services, or are considering starting this process can use this information to assist them. The Elders of the CCEC and FVACFSS endorse this thesis work, the themes generated, and the re-visioned Longhouse Framework as materials to assist us with articulating Stó:lō child welfare law.

My recommendations in this area focus on using culture and spirit-based teachings as the basis for establishing systems of care for our children and families. In this study, four new story poles have been created and within each pole, the best interests of the Stó:lō child identified:

1. Culture, Land and Ceremony

Subthemes: Ceremony, Connection to Land, Language and Cultural Renewal

Best Interest: *How children experience and understand shxwelí.*

2. Communities Caring for One Another

Subthemes: Familial and Communal Self-Reliance, Giving and Taking Care of One

Another and Coming Together

Best Interest: *Children learn the ways of co-reliance.*

3. Families

Subthemes: Family Strengths, Family Challenges, Parenting / Grandparenting and Children and Youth Today

Best Interest: *Families and communities care for their children.*

4. Spirituality and Healing

Subthemes: The Longhouse, Sense of Identity and Sense of Belonging

Best Interest: *Raising children in healthy Stó:lō ways.*

Although this thesis is centered on Stó:lō worldview and beliefs, I also hope it can be a useful guide to other Indigenous nations who are in a similar places on this journey. I believe the first step would be to determine how the community or nation would create their own definition of the “best interests of the child” as shared in my thesis research process. I would strongly encourage finding researchers and knowledge keepers from the community or nation who can ground the research in Indigenous ways with care for nation specific worldviews and understandings. This also encourages self-determination and the realization of Indigenous rights.

Recommendations for Community-Engaged Research

As I have moved through the process of gathering Elders’ stories in order to inform and affirm our cultural knowledge, my recommendation for other nations either considering or in the process of moving towards jurisdiction of child welfare services would be to articulate your nations culture and spirit-based teachings as the basis for establishing systems of care for children and families. Each community or nation may take a different approach to how this should be conducted based on their own governance structure, so it is primary to identify who

your partners are; who are those invested in the care and wellbeing of your children. For some groups this can start with political leadership at a community or territorial level, or it could start by approaching community care committees, or other community agencies.

For researchers seeking ethical approaches through partnership with Indigenous communities:

- A focus on collaboration with partners, if you are a non-Indigenous researcher ask yourself who are your Indigenous partners who can work alongside you through the research process;
- Learn about Indigenous worldviews and belief systems so research can align with Indigenous ways of being and doing;
- Recognize culture as the foundation for change; and
- Include the value of connection of Indigenous peoples to their ancestral homelands and territories.

My future direction and involvement in research

As I move towards completing my research to articulate how we, as Stó:lō people, define the “best interests of the child”, I am much more invested in our traditional ways of child-rearing and how we understand Indigenous child well-being. I also am more focussed on looking at how children are impacted by trauma, which also speaks to the need for establishing child welfare systems that create wellness for Indigenous people. One of these systems are Indigenous Governing Bodies (IGBs).

Indigenous peoples have always carried the knowledge that our wellness lies in our cultural beliefs, traditions and laws. The Canadian nation state stripped us of these systems

through the forced assimilation of our people, specifically by targeting our children. Forcibly removing children from families and communities, stripping parents of their rights and banning child-rearing practices were ways of invalidating and interfering with Indigenous knowledge systems. After decades of political and legal opposition and acts of resistance by Indigenous people, the federal government is taking steps to address some of the challenges of child welfare through the establishment of IGBs.

As I complete my master's thesis, I am looking ahead to our Indigenous Governing Bodies in British Columbia, which have established jurisdiction and are working on setting cultural practices and protocols in their re-visioning of child welfare. Proposed future research questions include: "What are the cultural components within the re-visioning of Indigenous child and family care systems in Indigenous Governing Bodies in British Columbia?"; "What are the ways that communities are taking back the inherent right to keep their children and families safe in front line practice?"; and "How will this inform child welfare practice in non-Indigenous communities?". The more I consider child wellness and what I have discovered about the "best interests of the child", the more questions that are unveiled. I have learned much from the process I undertook to gather the knowledge that is held within this thesis. I recognize that good Indigenous research takes time; time to develop and maintain respectful relationships, time to sit and gather stories from the Elders, time to be with the Elders' life-experience stories to ensure accuracy, and time to write, reflect and honour what is being gathered so it can be shared in a "good way". I admit that I faced challenges due to the pandemic, life situations and my own struggles with time. I wasn't able to complete the Storywork process as closely as I would have liked. Fortunately, I was able to connect with six Elders who gave feedback and

supported the themes and the vision of the new Longhouse. For those Elders I am especially grateful.

I remember Archibald (2008) writing that the creation of Storywork, which she described as creating a “storybasket”, was also “not perfect.” (p. 153). My own journey and the information I gathered may not be perfect, and I recognize there is more work to come. I will continue to work with the Elders’ groups as a way to bring the knowledge gathered in this thesis forward for use in discussions about child welfare and how we revision our own systems of care for our children and families.

Closing Words

From the earliest days of the Canadian nation state, the forced removal of Indigenous children from their families has been a common practice. The establishment of residential schools became the earliest form of the child welfare system simply because it was intended to separate Indigenous children from their families, abolishing family relationships and the transmission of traditional knowledge. While we are living with the effects of this system, we now have the opportunity to write a new story for ourselves based on our own understandings of what is in the best interests of our children within our own ways of being and doing.

Indigenous communities now have the opportunity to reinstate their own ways of caring for children. As I reflect on this, I hesitate to say traditional child welfare systems because as Indigenous people we never had a child welfare system. We had no need for such an agency. The current child welfare system is a colonial construct, which we must now look at re-envisioning. The only way we are going to succeed in this is to use our Indigenous worldviews: our thinking, our languages, our ceremonies and our relationships with the land. In our own

wisdom, we should be turning to our Elders for guidance for they can promote the sharing of knowledge. Within this research study, the Elders gifted us an understanding of the best interests of a Stó:lō child and what it means to be living a “good Stó:lō life”. Through the use of thematic analysis, I identified themes within the stories shared by the Elders that informed the development of four new story poles used to raise a re-envisioned Longhouse. At the time of preparing my thesis, six of 11 Elders have reviewed and offered feedback to support my analysis. This alone is a starting point for positive change on many levels. I therefore raise these story poles to honour the Stó:lō Elders who shared their stories and for the future generations, may they enjoy a good life.

References

- Absolon, K. (2011). *Kaandossiwin: How we come to know*. Fernwood Publishing.
- Absolon, K., & Tabobondung, C. (2017). Child Welfare Policies. In J.D. Ned & C.J. Frost (Eds.), *Contemporary Issues in Child Welfare: American Indian and Canadian Aboriginal Contexts* (pp. 45-69). JCharltonPublishing.
- Archibald, J. (2008). *Indigenous storywork: Educating the heart, mind, body and spirit*. UBC Press.
- Barrera, J., & Stefanovich, O. (2019, November 24). Ottawa in court this week over First Nations child-welfare compensation order. *CBC*. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/human-rights-tribunal-child-welfare-compensation-hearings-1.5367810>
- Battiste, M. (2013). *Decolonizing education, nourishing the learning spirit*. UBC Press, Purich Publishing.
- Blackstock, C. (2009). The occasional evil of angels: Learning from the experiences of aboriginal people and social work. *First Peoples Child & Family Review*, 4(1), 28-37.
<https://www.erudit.org/en/journals/fpcfr/1900-v1-n1-fpcfr05284/1069347ar.pdf>
- Blackstock, C. (2010). The Canadian Human Rights Tribunal on First Nations Child Welfare: Why if Canada wins, equality and justice lose. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33(1), pp. 187-194. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2010.09.002>
- Blackstock, C. & Trocmé, N. (2005). Community-based child welfare: Supporting resilience for structural change. *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand*, (24), 12-33.
- Blackstock, C., Prakash, T., Loxley, J., & Wien, F. (2005). *Wen:de – We are coming to the light of*

- day. The First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada. <https://cwrp.ca/sites/default/files/publications/WendeReport.pdf>
- Borrows, J. (2006) *Indigenous legal traditions in Canada*. The Law Commission of Canada. https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2008/lcc-cdc/JL2-66-2006E.pdf
- Brant Castellano, M. "Ethics of Research Involving First Nations, Inuit and Metis Peoples." 16 April 2014, Nipissing University, North Bay, ON. Speech.
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77-101.
- British Columbia Government and Service Employees' Union. (2015). *Closing the circle: A case for reinvesting in Aboriginal child, youth and family services in British Columbia*. <http://former.bcgeu.ca/sites/default/files/publications/attachments/Closing%20the%20Circle%20Report%20FINAL.pdf>
- Bruyere, G. (2005). A Spallumcheen Foster Child. In D. Purvey & C. Walmsley (Eds.), *Child and family welfare in British Columbia: A history* (pp. 283-293). Detselig Enterprises Ltd.
- Callahan, M., & Walmsley, C. (2007). Rethinking child welfare reform in British Columbia, 1900-60. In L.T. Foster & B. Wharf (Eds.), *People, politics, and child welfare in British Columbia* (pp. 10-33). UBC Press.
- Canadian Bar Association (2023, May 31). *Best Interests of the child*. Retrieved from [https://www.cba.org/Publications-Resources/Practice-Tools/Child-Rights-Toolkit/theChild/Best-Interests-of-the-Child#:~:text="Best%20Interests%20of%20the%20child,14%2C%20paras](https://www.cba.org/Publications-Resources/Practice-Tools/Child-Rights-Toolkit/theChild/Best-Interests-of-the-Child#:~:text=).
- Cardinal, H. (1999). *The unjust society*. Douglas & McIntyre.

- Carlson, K.T. (Ed.). (1997) *You are asked to witness: The Stó:lō in Canada's pacific coast history*. Stó:lō Heritage Trust.
- Carlson, K.T. (2010). *The power of place, the problem of time*. University of Toronto Press.
- Child, Family and Community Service Act, RSBC 1996, c 46. https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/96046_01
- Coqualeetza Cultural Education Centre. (2023, July 14). *Programs*.
<http://www.coqualeetza.com>
- Coqualeetza Cultural Education Centre. (2023, July 14) *Qw'oqw'elith'a: About us*.
<http://www.coqualeetza.com>
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989(1), 139-167. <https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=uclf>
- Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, SBC 2019, C 44. <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/19044>
- Denzin, N.K., & Lincoln, Y.S. (2003). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The landscape of qualitative research: Theories and issues*, (pp. 1-45). Sage Publications Ltd.
- Dussault, R. (2007). Indigenous peoples and child welfare: The path to reconciliation. *First Peoples Child & Family Review*, 3(35), 8-11. <https://fpcfr.com/index.php/FPCFR/article/view/45/83>
- Feinberg, J. (2018, October 19). Sto:lo leaders look at reclaiming jurisdiction for children and

families. <https://www.theprogress.com/news/stolo-leaders-look-at-reclaiming-jurisdiction-for-children-and-families/>

First Nations Centre. (2007). *OCAP: Ownership, Control, Access and Possession*. First Nations Information Governance Committee, Assembly of First Nations. <https://icwrn.uvic.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/FNC-OCAP.pdf>

First Nations Studies Program. (2009). *The Indian Act*. https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/the_indian_act/#:~:text=By%201869%2C%20the%20federal%20government,extreme%20control%20over%20status%20Indians.

Government of British Columbia. (2023, November 21). *What does the law mean by “best interests of the child”?* Basics of Family Law. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/life-events/divorce/family-justice/family-law/parenting-apart/best-interests>

Government of Canada. (2021, May 05). *INAN – Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982 – Background – Jan 28, 2021*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/transparency/committees/inan-jan-2021/inan-section-35-constitution-act-1982-background-jan-28-2021.html>

Government of Canada. (2022, December 03). *Department of Indigenous services act*. Justice Laws Website. <https://laws.justice.gc.ca/PDF/I-7.88.pdf>

Government of Canada. (2023, June 03). *Reducing the number of Indigenous children in care*. <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1541187352297/1541187392851?wbdisable=true>

Haight, W., Waubanasum, C., Glesener, D., & Marsalis, S. (2018). A scoping study of Indigenous child welfare: The long emergency and preparations for the next seven generations. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 93 (2018), 397-410.

- Hall, K. & Cusack, E. (2018). Healing and transformative learning through Indigenous methodologies. In D. McGregor, J.P. Restoule & R. Johnston (Eds.), *Indigenous research: Theories, practices, and relationships* (pp. 98–111). Canadian Scholars.
- Hall, W. (2012). *X̱ex̱a:ls and the power of transformation: The Stó:lō, good governance and self-determination*. [Doctoral dissertation, Simon Fraser University]. SFU Theses.
- Holyk, T. & Harder, H.G. (2016). Aboriginal child welfare in British Columbia: A critical discourse analysis. *Canadian Review of Social Policy / Revue Canadienne de Politique Sociale*, 74, 82-108. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1799208640/fulltextPDF/EED0CB72B46F4910PQ/2?accountid=14846>
- Hudson, P. (1997). First Nations child & family services: Breaking the silence. *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 29(1), 161-172. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1293219484?pq-origsite=gscholar&fromopenview=true&imgSeq=1>
- John, E. (Grand Chief). (2016). *Indigenous Resilience, Connectedness and Reunification - From Root Causes to Root Solutions*. MCFD. https://www.llbc.leg.bc.ca/public/pubdocs/bcdocs2016_2/603932/final-report-of-grand-chief-ed-john-re-indig-child-welfare-in-bc-november-2016.pdf
- Johnson, P. (1983). *Native children and the child welfare system*. The Canadian Council on Social Development.
- Knickerbocker, M.R. & Nickel, S. (2016). Negotiating sovereignty: Indigenous perspectives on the patriation of a settler colonial constitution, 1975-83. *BC Studies*, 190, 67-87. https://search.library.uvic.ca/discovery/fulldisplay?docid=cdi_proquest_miscellaneous_

1847482307&context=PC&vid=01VIC_INST:01UVIC&lang=en&search_scope=MyInst_and_CI&adaptor=Primo%20Central&tab=LIBALL&query=any,contains,Knickerbocker%20and%20Nickel&offset=0

- Kovach, M. (2009). *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristic, conversations and contexts*. University of Toronto Press.
- Kovach, M., Thomas, R., Montgomery, M., Green, J. & Brown, L. (2007). Witnessing wild woman: Resistance and resilience in Aboriginal child welfare. In L.T. Foster & B. Wharf (Eds.), *People, Politics and Child Welfare in British Columbia* (pp. 97-116). UBC Press.
- Langellier, K.M. & Peterson, E.E. (2004). *Storytelling in daily life: Performing narrative*. Temple University Press.
- Leon, S. & Syrette, S. (2020). *Courage to speak: Honouring ancestors voices*. Printorium Bookworks.
- Lincoln, Y.S., Lynham, S.A., & Guba, E.G. (2011). *Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences*. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (p. 97-128). Sage Publications Ltd.
- Long, M. & Sephton, R. (2011). Rethinking the “Best Interests” of the Child: Voices from Aboriginal Child and Family Welfare Practitioners. *Australian Social Work*, 64(1), 96-112.
<https://ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/login?&URL=https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/0312407X.2010.535544?needAccess=true>
- Loppie Reading, C. & Wiens, F. (2009). *Health inequalities and social determinants of Aboriginal peoples health*. National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health. www.nccah-ccnsa.ca/docs/social%20determinates/NCCAH-loppie-Wein_report.pdf

- Major, D. & Stefanovich, O. (2023, October 24). Judge approves historic \$23B First Nations child welfare compensation agreement. *CBC Politics*. <https://www.cbc.ca/amp/1.7006351>
- Manuel, A. & Derrickson, R.M. (Grand Chief). (2015). *Unsettling Canada: A national wake-up call*. Between the Lines.
- MacDonald, J.A. (1985). Child welfare and the Native Indian peoples of Canada. *Windsor Yearbook of Access to Justice, Vol. 5*, 284-305. https://heinonline-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/HOL/Page?collection=journals&handle=hein.journals/windyrbaj5&id=288&men_tab=srchresults
- McDaniel, Z. (2022, September 7). *What are Indian day schools? 3 things you might not know*. Beyond. <https://beyond.ubc.ca/what-are-indian-day-schools-3-things-you-might-not-know/#:~:text=Like%20residential%20schools%2C%20Indian%20day,community%20connection%20in%20the%20process>.
- McDonald, R., & Ladd, P. (2000). *Joint national policy review of First Nations child and family services*. Assembly of First Nations and Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2018/aanc-inac/R5-727-2000-eng.pdf
- McFarlene, P. & Manuel, D. (2020). *Brotherhood to nationhood: George Manuel and the making of the modern Indian movement*. Between the Lines.
- Milloy, J. (1999). *A national crime: The Canadian government and the residential school system, 1879 to 1986*. University of Manitoba Press.
- Milloy, J. (2008). *Indian Act Colonialism: A Century of Dishonour, 1869-1969*. National Centre for First Nations Governance. <https://fngovernance.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/>

milloy.pdf

Ministry of Children and Family Development. (2010). *Aboriginal Policy and Practice Framework in British Columbia*. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/family-and-social-supports/indigenous-cfd/abframework.pdf>

Ministry of Children and Family Development. (2022, November 25). *B.C. passes historic legislation to uphold Indigenous jurisdiction over child welfare*. <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2022CFD0027-001784>

Ministry of Children and Family Development. (2023, May 06). *Indigenous child and family service agencies / delegated aboriginal agencies in BC*. Government of British Columbia. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/data-monitoring-quality-assurance/reporting-monitoring/accountability/indigenous-child-and-family-service-agencies>

Ministry of Children and Family Development. (2023, July 17). *Children and youth in care (CYIC)*. <https://mcfcd.gov.bc.ca/reporting/services/child-protection/permanency-for-children-and-youth/performance-indicators/children-in-care>

Napoleon, V. (2016, October 28). *What is Indigenous law? A small discussion*. UVIC. <https://www.uvic.ca/law/assets/docs/ilru/What%20is%20Indigenous%20Law%20Oct%2028%202016.pdf>

National Association of Independent Schools. (June 28, 2018). *Kimberlé Crenshaw: What is Intersectionality?* [Video]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ViDtnfQ9Fhc>

National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Woman and Girls (MMIWG). (2019).

- Reclaiming power and place: The final report of the National Inquiry into Mission and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.* <https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/final-report>
- Naxaxalhts'i [McHalsie, A.] (2007). We have to take care of everything that belongs to us. In B.G. Miller (Ed.), *Be of good mind* (pp. 82-130). UBCPress.
- Needham, F. (2022, September 21). 'The bond is broken': Data shows number of Indigenous kids in foster care is going up: StatCan. APTN News. <https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/statistics-canada-indigenous-people-housing-issues-child-welfare/>
- Nowell, L.S., Norris, J.M., White, D.E., & Moules, N.J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* (16), 1-13.
- Province of British Columbia. (2022, December 03). *B.C. passes historic legislation to uphold Indigenous jurisdiction over child welfare.* <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2022CFD0027-001784>
- Province of British Columbia. (2023, June 03). *Indigenous governing bodies.* <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/indigenous-people/supporting-communities/child-family-development/indigenous-governing-bodies>
- Reading, J., Loppie, C. & O'Neil, J. (2016). Indigenous health systems governance: From the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) to Truth and Reconciliation (TRC). *International Journal of Health Governance*, 21(2), 222-228.
- Rindfleisch, B. (2011). "Slaying the Sun Woman": The legacy of Annie Mae Aquash. *The Graduate History Review*, 3(1), 89-102. <https://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/ghr/article/view/5995>
- Representative for Children and Youth. (2017). *Delegated aboriginal agencies: How resourcing*

affects service delivery. <https://rcybc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/rcy-delegated-aboriginal-agencies-2017.pdf>

Ricketts, R. (2021). *Do better: Spiritual activism for fighting and healing from white supremacy.* ATRIA Books.

Rousseau, J. (2018). *Struggling Towards Indigenous representation and service improvement within the BC Ministry of Children and Family Development.*

Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. (1996). *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Vol. 1: Looking Forward, Looking Back.* Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Retrieved from <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/aboriginal-heritage/royal-commission-aboriginal-peoples/Pages/final-report.aspx>

Simard, E. (2019). Culturally Restorative Child Welfare Practice: A Special Emphasis on Cultural Attachment Theory. *First Peoples Child & Family Review, 14*(1), 56-80.

Simard, E. & Blight, S. (2011). Developing a culturally restorative approach to aboriginal child and youth development: Transitions to adulthood. *First Peoples Child & Family Review, 6*(1), 28-55.

Sinha, V. (2017). Child Protective Services. In J.D. Ned & C.J. Frost (Eds.), *Contemporary Issues in Child Welfare: American Indian and Canadian Aboriginal Contexts* (pp. 45-69). JCharltonPublishing.

Sqwá First Nation. (2023). *Comprehensive Community Plan.* [Unpublished document]. Squwá First Nation, Chilliwack, Canada.

Stanbury, W. (1975). *Success and failure: Indians in urban society.* UBC Press.

Starblanket, T. (2018). *Suffer the little children: Genocide, Indigenous nations and the Canadian*

state. Clarity Press, Inc.

Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Centre. (n.d.). *Sq'ewlets: A Stó:lō Coast Salish community in the Fraser River Valley*. <http://digitalsqewlets.ca/sqwelqwel/voices-voix/video/doc-cheam-eng.php>

Tesarek, A. (2021). Making the “best” better: Transferring best interests determinations to tribes as a solution to the ongoing post-colonial Indigenous child welfare crisis.

Minnesota Journal of International Law, 30(2), 395-425. <https://heinonline-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/mjgt30&id=405&collection=journals&index=>

Thomas, J. (1993). *Doing critical ethnography*. Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications Ltd.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2012). *They came for the children: Canada, Aboriginal peoples, and residential schools*. https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2012/cvrc-trcc/IR4-4-2012-eng.pdf

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). *The final report of the truth and reconciliation commission of Canada Volume 1: Summary*. James Lorimer & Company.

Viscogliosi, C., Asselin, H., Basile, S., Borwick, K., Couturier, Y., Drolet, M., Gagnon, D., Obradovic, N., Torrie, J., Zhou, D., & Levasseur, M. (2020). Important of Indigenous elder’s contributions to individual and community wellness: results from a scoping review on social participation and intergenerational solidarity. *Canadian Journal of Public Health* (2020)111, 667-681. <https://doi.org/10.17269/s41997-019-3>

Williams, L. (2019). Ti wa7 szwatenem. What we know: Indigenous knowledge and learning. *BC Studies*, (200), 31-44. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2213033931?parent>

SessionId=zFjtna%2FruA3INCW2t8LT3ak%2BIac%2BxV%2Fpl16AHKH84Tw%3D&pq-origsite=primo&accountid=14846

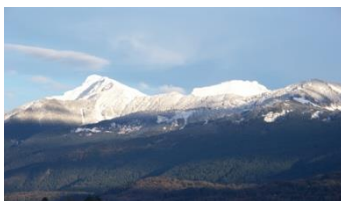
- Wilson, R. (2007). To honour our ancestors we become visible again. In B.G. Miller (Ed.), *Be of good mind: Essays on the Salish* (pp. 131-137). UBC Press.
- Wilson, S. (2001). What is an Indigenous research methodology? *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 25(2), 175-179, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/230307399/fulltextPDF/6037C319AB714277PQ/1?accountid=14846>
- Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods*. Fernwood Publishing.
- Wolfe, P. (2006). Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 8(4), 387-409, https://search.library.uvic.ca/discovery/fulldisplay?docid=cdi_proquest_miscellaneous_61662755&context=PC&vid=01VIC_INST:01UVIC&lang=en&search_scope=MyInst_and_CI&adaptor=Primo%20Central&tab=LIBALL&query=any,contains,settler%20colonialism%20and%20the%20elimination%20of%20the%20native
- Wright Cardinal, S. (2016). A framework for Indigenous adoptee reconnection: Reclaiming language and identity. *Canadian Journal for New Scholars in Education*, 7(1), 84-93. <https://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/cjnse/article/view/30693>
- Wright Cardinal, S. (2017). *Beyond the sixties scoop: Reclaiming Indigenous identity, reconnection to place, and reframing understandings of being Indigenous*. [Doctoral dissertation, University of Victoria]. EDT (Electronic Theses and Dissertations).

Appendix A: Participant Consent Form



**University
of Victoria**

Participant Consent Form



Stó:lō People and the Best Interests of the Child

Lhílheqey (Mt. Cheam), *Watching over the territory.*

You are invited to participate in a study entitled “Stó:lō People and the Best Interests of the Child” that is being conducted by Dayna Mussell, Masters Student in the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria. You may contact her if you have further questions at dmussell@uvic.ca or 604-316-1961.

As a Graduate student, Dayna is required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in Masters of Arts in Child and Youth Care. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Sarah Wright Cardinal. You may contact her supervisor at swcardinal@uvic.ca or 250-893-4890.

Purpose and Objectives

It has been recognized that a community-based model of service created by Indigenous people and focused on traditional models of children’s safety, family support and cultural revitalization may promote more positive strategies in addressing the current issues faced by Indigenous people today. In order to support this process, there is a need to define the best interests of the child according to the cultural group that is the receiver of those services. The purpose of this study is to examine how the Stó:lō people define the “best interests of the child” according to their traditions, language and governance structure.

Importance of this Research

Research of this type is important based on recent changes to both Federal and Provincial legislation, Indigenous communities are looking at using traditional knowledge to affirm its important in creating renewed systems to care for their children and families. This is particularly important work that is taking place within Stó:lō territory. Outcomes from this study will contribute to the transformation of the current child welfare system.

Participants Selection & What is involved

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a recognized Elder and Knowledge Keeper who holds valued knowledge and teachings that support our children, families and communities. If you consent to voluntarily participate in this study, your participation will include participating in two to three Circle Groups. The Circle Groups will be up to 4 hours. You will be asked questions about what you know about the teachings of living a good Stó:lō life based on our traditions and community knowledge. You have the right to refuse to answer part or all of any questions asked.

Inconvenience, Risks & Benefits

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including the time commitment. There are some potential risks to you by participating in this research and they include emotional triggers and fatigue. The potential benefits of your participation in this study include engaging in sharing knowledge about living a good Stó:lō life and how that informs the best interest of the child. This will inform nations as they look at taking back jurisdiction over the care of their children and families.

Contact Tracing

Participants will be advised if they (or researchers) have or may have come into contact with an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19. Contact information will be stored in a separate file from the research data in the event that follow up is needed.

Compensation

Following Indigenous protocols, an honorarium and small gift will be offered as appreciation for sharing your knowledge and time.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this project must be completely voluntary. There is no obligation to participate. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data will not be used unless you provide written permission to include your data in the study. Any items that have been gifted to you are yours to keep.

Researcher's Relationship with Participants

The researcher may have a relationship to potential participants as a family or community member. To help prevent this relationship from influencing your decision to participate, the following steps to prevent coercion have been taken: a) participants will be reminded that their participation is voluntary and they can withdraw at any time. It is important to remember that in this situation the participants are Elders and Knowledge Keepers, the researcher is there as a learner.

On-going Consent and Anonymity

To make sure that you continue to consent to participate in the project, the researcher will check in with you at each stage of the project to ensure that you would like to continue participating in the study. In terms of protecting your anonymity, you can choose a pseudonym or your first name in the research document.

Confidentiality & Disposal of Data

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by storing papers in a locked cabinet in Dayna Mussell's home, and storing computer files in an encrypted password protected computer. Data from this study will be disposed of after seven years. Electronic data will be erased and paper copies will be shredded.

Dissemination of Results

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in a thesis format, and potential presentations at scholarly meetings. The thesis will be publicly posted online at the UVic Library's Website (UVicSpace). Each participant will receive a copy of the completed thesis as a thank you for their involvement.

Appendix B: Circle Group Discussion Questions

Stó:lō Worldview and the Best Interests of the Child Circle Group Questions

The questions that will be asked during the discussion are:

1. Let's talk about what we know about our Stó:lō teachings regarding "living a good life". What are these teachings? These are the ones you learned as a child.
2. Which of these teachings are being taught by today's parents? Which of these teachings are not being taught by today's parents?
3. What do you believe happened in our lives to interfere with teachings of our next generation about "how to live a good life"? Describe the main differences between what you learned as a child and what today's parents are teaching.
4. In your view, what do you think we can do in the next few years to improve the parental teachings to prepare their children to enjoy "living a good Stó:lō life" as young adults?
5. Let's share our "best thinking" about what we need to do to restore teachings of our ancestors about living a good Stó:lō life. Think about the resources we have within our home community as a whole and desired outcome (non-community) resources to help us make desired changes as we move into the future.
6. Let's also share our feelings and thoughts about the need for safe and equitable child and family services and how such conditions would be best satisfied?