

Mòht'a Gòehk'q

I Made Camp Fire

Tłchq Worldview: The Role of Language in Tłchq Puberty Camp

by

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Mòht' a Gòehk'ò

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By Rosa Mantla

Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

Tɔ̀chɔ̀ people have lived in the Tɔ̀chɔ̀ region for hundreds of years. *Gokecho du nek'e nàgɔ̀dè gots'ɔ̀*. Since our Ancestor's time our Forefathers have lived on Tɔ̀chɔ̀ Land. Our Elders believed that our land is the foundation for our way of life, our *Tɔ̀chɔ̀ Yatù, nàowo* - Tɔ̀chɔ̀ language and culture, and Tɔ̀chɔ̀ Worldview. It is said by our Elders, our Tɔ̀chɔ̀ history has records of how animals spoke Tɔ̀chɔ̀ to connect with the people. It is a land-based language and in existence to this very day. To continue teaching our traditional taboos and beliefs to our children is to preserve and transmit knowledge to the future generations. We use the Tɔ̀chɔ̀ language to do this.

This project on Tɔ̀chɔ̀ puberty rites exemplifies the relationship between language, culture and land: the people are the girls becoming women; they need to be on the land to learn; they learn through the Tɔ̀chɔ̀ oral language and through traditional activities connected to the language. The Elders tell us that our language is essential to be taught in the content of passage of rites for the girls, *Mɔ̀ht'a Gòehk'ɔ̀* (I Made Camp Fire). When I went through my puberty rites, I gained so much insights on all aspects of sacred knowledge; it was an overwhelming but incredibly rich experience. Over the years, I have passed on my teachings related to puberty rites. In this paper, I document how I have done this through the school curriculum, and through the Grade 7 puberty camps.

In the paper, I start by providing context for my work: I start by situating myself, and then introduce the Tɔ̀chɔ̀ worldview, the link between language and health, and the health of language (Section 2). Then I talk about traditional puberty rites of passage, illustrating them through my own story and a short version of my mother's story (Section 3), and I discuss how they are taught in the schools (Section 4). After that, I document the puberty camps that I have

been involved with for many years, through the Dogrib Divisional Board of Education, now the Tłı̨chǫ Community Services Agency (TCSA), including the language used at the camps (Section 5). I end by reflecting on the importance of language in the camps, and providing recommendations for continuing to bring language into the camps (Section 6).

Like my colleagues in the educational system, I really want the puberty camps to be taught, including all aspects of Traditional Knowledge of how our people have practised the rites of passage for girls. It's very important that the girls understand the rites of passage, and are able to practice them and acknowledge that they have to respect these teachings and the Traditional Knowledge, to honour the teachings of the Elders.

Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee	ii
Abstract	iii
Table of Contents	v
Acknowledgements	vii
Dedication	ix
1. Introduction	10
2. Background	11
2.1 Situating myself	11
2.2 T̩ichọ Nàowoò - T̩ichọ Worldview.	16
2.3 Yati eyits'ọ hotiè ts'eadaa - Language and health.....	21
2.3.1 Kòta hotiè ts'eadaa eyits'ọ yati - Community health and language.....	23
2.3.2 Yati hotiè edaa - Health of language.....	27
3. Ts'èko zohdaà ts'ihlèe nàowoò – The Teachings of our Puberty Rites	31
3.1 Gogodì - Our stories.....	32
3.2 T̩ichọ protocols during a girl's menstrual stages.....	42
4. Ts'èko Ẁohdaà Ts'ihlèe Nàowoò Hoghàgetq̄ –The Teaching of Puberty Rites.....	48
4.1 Language and culture education in the schools: Dọ Nàke Lanì Nàts'etso - Strong Like Two People.....	48

4.2	Dene Kede curriculum and the role of our Elders.....	50
4.3	Chekaghàhtqò hoghàgeetqò - Teaching our teachers.....	53
4.4	Puberty rights in the schools.....	55
5.	Current Puberty Camps	59
6.	Mòht'a Gots'eèhk'qò Yatì – Learning Tìchqò Language to Thrive.....	65
7.	Conclusion.....	68
	References.....	70
	Appendix: List of words and phrases that go with puberty rites	73

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values to completion of being isolated, giving me names: m̀òht'a goèhk'ò, she made camp fire; ts'aht'ɰ, the hooded one; xàhtò, visitor; ts'èko zòhdaà whelɰ, she became a woman. I accepted the teachings that I have received and it is my intention to impart this teaching to our young people.

I'm not very vocal when it comes to thank people but it is fully said in my heart.
I will never forget the people who came forward to help me to edit my papers.

Masi T'à Masi

Dedication

To my parents Elizabeth (Gon) Ts'èka, and Abo Rabesca. My husband, Henri Mantla, my children and grandchildren, Elder Elizabeth Mackenzie and all the people who have taught me the knowledge of Mòht'a Gòehk'ò (I Made Camp Fire) and my friends who were there for me.

1. Introduction

In the Tłchq worldview there is a strong relationship between people, land, and language. This project on Tłchq puberty rites exemplifies this relationship: the people are the girls becoming women; they need to be on the land to learn; they learn through the Tłchq oral language and through traditional activities connected to the language.

The aim of my paper is twofold: The first is to document the use of language in the puberty rites of passage, in particular in the context of the puberty camps that I have been involved with for many years. The second is to highlight the value and importance of puberty camps. The Tłchq Community Service Agency has been offering the puberty camps so that we can continue to offer our teachings, through the educational system. Like my colleagues in the educational system, I really want the puberty camps to be taught, including all aspects of Traditional Knowledge of how our people have practised the rites of passage for girls. It's very important that the girls understand the rites of passage, and are able to practice them and acknowledge that they have to respect these teachings and the Traditional Knowledge, to honour the teachings of the Elders.

In this paper, I start by providing context for my work: I start by situating myself, and then introduce the Tłchq worldview, the link between language and health, and the health of language (Section 2). Then I talk about traditional puberty rites of passage, illustrating them through my own story and a short version of my mother's story (Section 3), and I discuss how they are taught in the schools (Section 4). After that, I document the puberty camps that I have been involved with for many years, through the Dogrib Divisional Board of Education, now the Tłchq Community Services Agency (TCSA), including the language used at the camps (Section

5). I end by reflecting on the importance of language in the camps, and providing recommendations for continuing to bring language into the camps (Section 6).

2. Background

2.1 Situating myself.

Rosa Mantla siye. My name is Rosa Mantla. Tsɪk'edàà Tɪchɔ nèk'e segòhɪ. I was born close to ʔelèèdlɪ godoo,¹ Mòwhì Gogha Dè Nɪtlèè,² Northwest Territories.

Sèot'ɪ aats'òò dechɪnì nàgedè hɔt'e. Xàelɪ ɪdoo dehgà segòhɪ, ʔelèèdlɪ godoo, Ehts'ok'eyatɪzàà k'e. Sèot'ɪ xok'e gha edègeetɪ, ekòò hɪwe gɪhtsɪ ekò. Lòhdɪ seghoò ts'ò dechɪnì dehsɔ. Eytɪ'axòò chekaa elenɪ nàts'edè gɪxè ɪdàà nɪhtɪ'èkò ts'ò ahdzà. Nɪmbalà elà nàke t'à gots'àgòhdì t'à nɪgogɪwa. Sòòmbanàlèe wetseekeè nàke eyts'ò etahtɪ wexè. Ekɪryeè Tɪchɔ zɔ t'à gots'ede ɪlè, lenɪ nàts'edèe dɔne kwet'ɪ k'èè gogede-le ɪlè. ɪzhɪ dehgà ts'eèzeh, hotèh nàke wetets'ɪde. Xàelɪ tɪ netsàa k'e xàts'ɪzeh. Ekòò nɪhtɪ'èk'et'aa gok'enaèhɪ nòò.

My family has always lived on the land. I was born out on the land, up the Marion River, in October, while my parents were harvesting fish and getting ready for winter. I grew up on the land until I was about seven years old. Then I went to residential school with the other kids who lived in the same area as us. We were picked up in two canvas boats by Indian Affairs agents and an interpreter. At that time, we only spoke Tɪchɔ and the people at the camp did not know any English. We rode down the river and walked over two portages. Down the river we got to the big lake- Xàelɪ. There, a plane was waiting for us.

¹ ʔelèèdlɪ is at the point where the two rivers flow together. One is Tsòtìdeè (Lac La Martre River) and the other Hozìdeè (Emile River) that flows from the barrenland. They then flow as one river, Xàelɪ (Marion River), into Great Slave Lake.

² Tɪchɔ traditional lands.

Nahoèhɔɪ-le-èt'ì, hazòò nɪhtl'èk'et'aa yìts'ùde. Tsekaa taɪ goda nɪhtl'èk'et'aa yìgeèhk'w'ì nòò, asì nàgedèe ts'ò aget'ì tahkò. Nɪhtl'èk'et'aa nìt'ò, eyìts'ò asì nèk'e dèht'ò, ekòò nɪhtl'èkò gòzò hɔt'e. Edlàwàà t'aa wegòhɔ, Kwebaatsoà hɔt'e nòò. Akwelòò ìlè xoo ghàà nɪhtl'èkò ihdà t'axòò Sòòmbanàzèezaà eyìts'ò Degaimaàdzèzàà gha sekò ts'ò anahdzà. Dì xok'e ts'ò hàeht'ì t'axòò nàke xok'e ts'ò detsɪnì nàehdè, ekòò hɔt'e k'akwelòò mòht'a gòehk'ò.

Ts'aaze kò asì nezì lɔq weghàts'ùdà. T'eekoa ehì kò sìghaɪwàà ehtsì gixè nàhdè ìlè, sèot'ì asì detsɪnì ts'ò eghàlageeda nìdè. Semò ezaelì kò xì ehtsì sek'èdì gha wexè nàihdè. Asì netlò wet'àat'aa wek'èehsòò ahdzà. Ehtsì ìlè ìk'òò elì, setà wemò hɔt'e. Abo wemò gùhdi. Eyit'à t'aa dani dɔ ts'àdì wek'èhoehsà. Ehtsì eyìts'ò ehtsèe eghàlageeda nìdè Tɪchɔ zò t'à gots'ede: mɪh kòòdageetl'ìh, tso agehɔ gà tso eghàgele, zoo agehɔ, gah xòò agehɔ, eyìts'ò semò ewò yehwhe weghàehda. Ìhk'è ìmbè ghàà Xàelì setsì wexè nàhdè. ʔòhk'èa tsekaa sexè nàgozee while nìdè ehtsì asì ghàlajda sèhdi.

Without wasting time, we all got into the plane. There were three other kids sitting in the plane, probably from another community. The plane flew away, and then we landed in another place, where the school was. Later on, I found out it was in Fort Smith. After the first year of residential school, I went back home for July and August. I did this for four years. After that I stayed home on the land for two years, and it was during this time that I went through my puberty rites of passage (I describe these below).

When we were growing up, we were exposed to so many good things. When I was very young, I lived with my grandparents often, while my parents were working on the land. Also, when my mother was sick, I spent time with my grandmother so that she could take care of me. I gained knowledge and acquired many on-the-land skills from her. One of my grandmothers was a medicine woman, she was my dad's mom. She was called Abo wemò. Through her I learned a lot about what she did to help people. We only spoke Tɪchɔ, while my grandparents were doing their daily work: mending the fishnets, hauling and gathering wood, spruce boughs, snaring rabbits and watching my mom tan

Ehtsı ıle Ts'eko Sqòhıı giıhdı, eyı semq wemq ne. Eyı ehtsı hotiè nıwq xè wewà while hanikò eghàlaeda nıde sıq whàèh?q ghaewı. Detsımi nàts'edè nıde asıi ghàts'eeda xè asıa ghàlats'eeda t'à nàowo lq ts'itsıh, dıı lani: mıh k'aàts'eehta, toò tıı daegè nıde wets'q hàts'etla, beh t'à detsı k'et'iıts'ehdlà. Nqdeè hoòwo kò nıhtı'èkq aeht'ı t'axqò sèot'ı gıxè detsımi ts'q ahdzà, 1963 ekò ahdzà, ekqò xò detsımi asıi wek'èehsq-le ıleè sıi segha wègaat'ıı adzà. Sedaà hàts'ewà ladzà. Haàtq xok'e asıi hanı wek'èehsq-le ıleè k'oonı wègaat'ı adzà. Dèèyeh xè k'qonı de wèdaat'ı, de asıi wedzıı wek'e gòhı-le. Hoteh ts'eedè taat'e, nàts'eete taat'e de gotsı lekq ledı t'à sıdets'eewıh. George Blondin wenıhtı'èè godıı (1990) weghq nàniıwho, “Dè Gogòdò kò,” Sahtik'eet'ı gıgodıı, ayıı ghq godee sıi eyıts'q yeghq dani deedi ıleè sıi wexèehdih hot'e.

hides. Some summers I stayed with my grandmother all summer in Xàelıı. Sometimes I had no one to play with so she would tell me to do some work.

My other grandmother was called Good-mannered woman, my mom's mother. She was very gentle and soft spoken but she likes to hum when she worked. Living out on the land, I gathered a lot of information from observing and hearing and the little chores that I did everyday, for example the risks you have to take going out and checking nets, looking for dogs at night when they got loose, peeling tree bark with a knife). Later on, going through residential school and then coming back to the land with my parents in 1963, that's when everything opened up for me: during our trip back to the land, I started to really see all the things that I hadn't seen in years. The land was calm and very beautiful, clean. Every stop to portage and to camp for the night the fragrance of the earth fills your nostrils. When I think about George Blondin's book *When the World was New – Stories of The Sahtu Dene* (1990), all it contained and the expressions he used about his feelings for the land, was what I felt.

T'eeko whihlì kò dọxaakò gozọą eghàlaehdaà ahdzà. Dọ ezaelì ịọ kwet'ị k'èè gogede-le ts'ọhṛò gịgha etaahṛì. Dọ ezagìlì eyits'ọ nurse gixè eghàlaehdaa t'à asì ịọ k'èhoehsọọ ahdzà. Ịọ xoo-le-èt'ì họnìehdza, 1975 ekò Edzo nìhtl'èkò eghàlaehda gha la sọt'ọh. Tsekaghàehtọ ts'àhṛì xè chekaa gixè eghàlaehdaà aseglà. Tsekaghàehtọ wexè eghàlaehdaa sì wedzeè eteèṛh xè nezì chekaa ts'àṛì. Dze taat'e nìhtl'èkò naxòt'e t'axọọ nìdè ek'èdaedzeè gha dànì tsekaa hoghàgeetọ ha sì sets'àṛì. Dedi t'aa hasèhṛì, Tḥchọ yatì t'à gots'ede wet'aaṛàh ne hadì, eyits'ọ Tḥchọ nàowò godì tsekaa hoghàgìhtọ sèhṛì ts'ọhṛò tsekaa Tḥchọ nàowò hoghàgeetọ gha sìnìhoèhṛàh. Tsekaghàehtọ ts'àhṛì ehṛì gha hoghàseetọ nàowò hoghàseetọ gha tai ịmbè k'e Kwebatsoa ts'ọ ahdzà. K'akwelòò nàke dzeahṛaa ts'ọ, eyitl'axọọ dì dzeahṛaa ts'ọ, eyitl'axọọ ek'etai dzeahṛaa ts'ọ. Tai ịmbè k'e ts'ọ chekaa xè eghàlaehdaa gha hoghàseetọ, eyì gha nìhtl'è sọtìsì. 1989-1991 Kwebaatsoa chekaghàehtọ gha hoghàseetọ ha nìhtl'èkò ts'ọ ahdzà. 1991 Behchokò Yabè Mackenzie nìhtl'èkò tsekaa hoghàehtọ gha la sọt'ọh.

When I was a teenager, I started to work at the old hospital. A lot of patients didn't speak English so we had to interpret for them. I learned a lot from working there, from the nurses and the patients. A few years after I got married, in 1975, I started to work at the school in Edzo. I worked with the children as a classroom assistant. The teacher I worked with was really caring and encouraging. She sat with me every day after school to teach me how to teach the next day's lessons. She was the one who told me that speaking Tḥchọ was important; she asked me to do some teachings about our Tḥchọ history in social studies so I planned to teach the lesson. To further my skills in helping the children in the school, I attended Classroom Assistant courses in Fort Smith for three summers. First summer for two weeks, second summer for four weeks and six weeks for the third summer, to earn the certified Classroom Assistant certificate. In 1989-1991, I entered the Teacher Education Program in Fort Smith. In 1991, I was offered a teaching job at the new school in Behchokò, the Elizabeth Mackenzie Elementary School.

Njhtf'èkò tsekaa hoghàehtò, detsita x1, làmèhkò goyì x1, tsekaghàehtò gits'ò x1 gohde, eyits'ò amì Tjchò yatì, nàowo njhtf'èè hohlèè k'e eghàlageedaa x1. Haàtlo xok'e ts'ò dànì detsita dehsò sù t'à gixè gohdo. Eyits'ò seyati t'à gohde t'à tsekaa hoghàegehtò.

I have taught in the schools, on the land, also in church, offered presentations to teachers and interested groups. I also developed Tjchò language materials for our regional schools and our communities. All these years, I have been using my experiences on the land and from growing up to tell my stories. I have been teaching lessons using the oral language with the children.

Through processing the experiences of the people that I have talked to (teachers, staff members, youth), I was able to “study how humans make meaning of experience by endlessly telling and retelling stories about themselves that both refigure the past and create purpose in the future” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 24). I have been able to study how the audiences I have told my stories to have been able to process them, as part of becoming capable people.

Elek'eèk'e dànì detsini dehsò wet'à gixè gohdo, jhk'è haehwhò, jdaà njdè asjì segodì t'à hogeehwhì ha sòòmì dehwhò. Duidzèè dànì nàts'edèè ghàà, Mòht'a gòehk'ò gigha ayì awèts'edì sòòmì dehwhò.

When I retold my experiences and my stories there were times that I wondered if it would benefit the audience for their future. Due to today's lifestyle I worry if Mòht'a gòehk'ò means anything to them.

“Good storytelling technique transcends both language and culture. For thousands of years, this has been the practice of the Dene Elders – telling to teach, to entertain and to share their life's wisdom” (Scott, 2012, p. 225).

2.2 Ṭḥcḥq Nàowò - Ṭḥcḥq Worldview.

Ṭḥcḥq Yatì, nàowo, dè - Language, culture and land

Ṭḥcḥq Nàowò k'èè, dè eyits'q Ṭḥcḥq yatì elexè nànj̣htso ḥot'e.

In the Ṭḥcḥq worldview there is a strong relationship between people, land, and language.

The term worldview is nicely defined by Beck, Walters and Francisco. They say:

world view denotes a distinctive vision of reality which not only interprets and orders the places and events of a people, but lends form, direction and continuity to life as well.

World view provides people with a distinctive set of values, identity, a feeling of rootedness, of belonging to a time and a place and a felt sense of continuity with tradition which transcends the experience of a single lifetime, a tradition which may be said to transcend even time. (1977, p. 29)

There is a clear connection between health, language and land, if we consider the following: Turner (2006, pp. 18–22) states that caring for the land and species is seen as a responsibility of First Peoples. She quotes Dawn Smith, a Nuu-chah-nulth woman working at the University of Victoria, who says that “if our environment is not healthy, how can we be healthy?” And if the environment is not healthy, languages are not healthy.

Goketso ḍi n̄k'e geeda kò ts'q, dè sinìgòqhsq ḥot'e, ḍq dezq̣q ts'ìl̄l̄ s̄i. Goz̄ì hazq̣q dè wek'e asì hazq̣q dehsee xè

Since our ancestors' time the land has always shaped our lives as Aboriginal people. Our whole being is truly bonded with the

edaxàdèe sù ehkw'ı ne, dè wexè dọ ts'ıı ne
t'à. Gọnàà xè dè k'e hotiè ts'eeda ııè. Kọta
dlò t'à wexè nàzeek'è!

earth and everything that grows and survives
on earth. Life was healthy in a free happy
environment. Laughter echoed through the
camp.

An Iglulik Inuit is quoted in the section “All Things are Dependent on Each Other” by
Beck et al. (1977) explaining the retributive nature of creatures: “The greatest peril in life lies in
the fact that human food consists entirely of souls. All the creatures that we have to kill and eat,
all those that we have to strike” (p. 12).

Dıı ʔohdaa adı sù ehkw'ı adı, dedı sù
denàowoò t'à ıdàa xè dani tıts'aadiıkwò
wet'à ts'eeda ghọ goıde hot'e.

This is very true, coming as it does from an
Elder who has seen and lived his culture, and
who expresses that the natural wildlife is
taken for food and other needy sources.

Yabè Mackenzie gọotıọ hani goıde ııè.

Elizabeth Mackenzie (a Tıchọ Elder) has
said so many times.

“Dıdzeè k'e sù kwet'ı ts'ọ asıı wedè ts'eeda
ha diı.”

“We cannot live without other materials
nowadays.”

Edani ts'eedaa sù ıadı adzà, asıı wèhdaa
neı, diı gha nıdè asıı wèhdaa sù dani wet'à
ats'et'ı gha hòʔọ k'è wet'à eghàlats'eeda zọ
t'à ha ne.”

Life has changed, some changes are good and
some we have to adapt to using what is
necessary in our modern life.

Dè k'e asii dehsee sii wet'à nits'eèhʔà ne!
It'òà kàʔaa, jìe eyits'ò tits'aàdii, asii hazòò
wègaat'ii sii ełeghàts'eedi xè dànì wet'à
ats'et'ı ha weghàdets'eetò.

We depend on natural growth, plants, berries
and animals, everything that we see is to
share and learn how to use the new things.”

However, as Smith (2008) points out, “[...] it will certainly not be easy for youth to visualize the stories within this present topography and environment without knowing what existed previously. The stories somehow seem to belong to another time and it is only the older generations who retain knowledge of this Tsìnlhqút'ín³ past.” (pp. 17–18). And she further says that:

With adaptation to lifestyles in communities rather than on land and adjustment to changes to their landscapes, Tsìnlhqút'ín traditional teachings have become more challenging to pass on to younger generations. Current lifestyles and modern institutions have displaced many of the old traditions to the point where younger Tsìnlhqút'ín individuals must learn about their culture in words rather than through practices, but this can change quickly at this point in time. Knowledgeable Elders are accessible and willing to pass on what they know (Smith, 2008, pp. 17–18).

K'òqni ehkw'ı adı, Tıçqò Nèk'e hani
wègoèht'ii agòhdzà, dò, chekaa gıxè. Eyı
ts'òhʔò detsıni tsekaa hoghàetò ha ne. Tıçqò
nàowòò k'èhogeezòò agede-a xè Tıçqò yatıı
t'à gogede gha yatı t'à aats'òò gıts'ò gots'ede
ha ne! Mòht'a goèhk'ò, ts'èko ʔòhdaà whelıı

This is very true. Linda Smith's point
about individuals having to learn about their
culture in words rather than through practices
is absolutely true; we have evidence of this
happening in our Tıçqò region among young
adults, youth and children. This is one of the

³ This language is also spelled Tsilhqut'in and in the past has been anglicized as Chilcotin. It is a Dene language spoken in the Interior of British Columbia.

nàowoò gha hoghàgeetq̄ gha dets̄ini aget'ı
hqt'e. Yatı zq̄ t'à-le, ası̄ ghàlageeda T̄hçq̄
nàowoò nàgehts̄ı̄ welī gha xèht'e-èt'ı̄
hoghàgeetq̄ hqt'e. Dets̄ini hoghàgeetq̄ nı̄dè
yatı t'à gogedee nàtsoò ade-a.

main reasons why we need to have puberty
camps on the land: these camps allow us to
recapture these practices in T̄hçq̄ schools
and the communities through practising and
not just through words. The camps also allow
us to create new speakers because the camps
involve oral teachings.

Linda R. Smith also points out that there is documented knowledge of the cultural ways. She says “It is fortunate that writers have documented so much knowledge about this early era and have preserved the discussions and agreements between animals and people. It seems that this early knowledge, for some reason or another, was not shared with Ìnkél⁴. This does not mean that all Tsìnlhqút'ın are uninformed about such things. There may be Tsìnlhqút'ın Elders who are fully aware about these ancient events” (Smith, 2008, p. 60). Documentation and data collection are very important to have for our youth and children in our T̄hçq̄ region as well, because documentation will be used for our teachings on the land and in the schools.

I have experienced spiritual healing with my people when we were young. Even today we all get together to grieve, talk, eat and share stories. We accept our losses and we build our humour to continue living. The message we know is that everything was created for a reason. So, we live through the years to work vigorously, rest when we can. Hunters and trappers have been my heroes because they hunt and trap for days and nights. They don't get upset or angry because this is their way of life, their livelihood for their family. There are rules and laws that they don't always talk about or think about to follow; they just live it. In the midst of calmness,

⁴ Linda Smith uses Ìnkél to mean her mother.

peacefulness, quietly doing their chores daily during their physical work, they meditate and heal with nature.

Our ceremonies were celebrated in the past, and we still live in a spiritual world. Our spirituality is still practised; as Indigenous people, we make offerings to the land, to water and to the graves. The reason we make these offerings is that our ancestors had always made offerings to the land, animals and people who had died, to ask for good health, to be able to make safe journeys, and to have peace. During special events, we give thanks with drums and offer prayer songs. Our people accepted and still accept what was gifted for them to pass on, including their language and culture. Our Indigenous language and culture cannot be separated; they are bonded to strengthen our way of life. Our domains of living are practised with love and sharing. We respect the Creator for all creation and we don't expect to have too many material things in life. What needs to be repaired, we repair. Food was always shared and still is; no one says, "no, it's mine".

Our languages and cultures were very strong until changes took over. In the past, if people did not follow their traditional Tłıchǫ protocol of protecting themselves, they would get sick. We had medicine men and women who took the time to heal and care for them. Medicine people had such powers that they were respected and they used their power only when they accepted to help the person. They were trusted and reliable. People that needed care for themselves or family would go far to find the medicine power person. Medicine people were given special and different gifts. If they could not help the person, the person would go and seek another healer even though they had to travel far. Medicine-powered people were the only source for helping the sick. They could predict the future of the people. They could see in their vision to

find lost people and they could visualize where the caribou are, when asked during their time of chanting their medicine song.

Indigenous language was so pure and strong when the people owned the language without anybody interfering in their lives and how they communicate. Medicine people used the language in all the work they did. So, the language was strong. Medicine people heal and cure people with songs and chants, they also help when women have difficulty during labour. Today we have very few medicine people. This is one example of a domain in which language use is shrinking.

I talked to a professor recently about how helpful it would be if language advocates could go to many communities and talk to the people about how unsafe and shrinking Indigenous languages are in the provinces of Canada. I know that many Indigenous people are not really aware of how languages are studied over the years. The real truth about endangered languages should be presented to the people as strongly as can be. And the important thing that people need to know is how the language, land and health are all connected to each other.

2.3 Yati eyits'q hotiè ts'eedaa - Language and health.

The *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* links reconciliation to language. Sabrina Williams, an intergenerational survivor of residential schools from British Columbia, says:

I didn't realize until taking this language class how much we have lost—all the things that are attached to language: it's family connections, it's oral history, it's traditions, it's ways of being, it's ways of knowing, it's medicine, it's song, it's dance, it's memory. It's everything, including the land. [...] And unless we inspire our kids to

love our culture, to love our language [...] our languages are continually going to be eroded over time. So, that is daunting. Yeah. So, to me that's part of what reconciliation looks like. (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015, p. 157)

I was very fortunate to experience the relationship between land, language and health from a young age: For weeks of travelling on the land through rivers, streams, bushy trails, long and rough terrain portages, I found myself working along with my people. The work was hard, and we struggled to reach our destination. Everyday, I listened to the people speaking to each other. They talked to the dogs when dogs and people were hushing, running loose, paddling, and going over the portage. The people looked after each other on the lake and land. What little food we had was shared among the people. When children got sick, they collected various traditional medicines. They prepared the medicine and give it to the child.

We lived on the land when we were growing up, all year-round with other families. People lived together in harmony and their livelihood was so important to them that every aspect of work was valued. Aboriginal people were nomadic. They moved from one island to another during the summer. In preparation for winter in the fall season, we moved to an area where there was fishing and a great amount of firewood. Families worked together from morning until nightfall, in the camp we could see and hear them talking in their language. Women got together to go for berries, spruce boughs, firewood and moss. The male youth went to check fishnets, having fun teasing each other all in their language. The feeling of belonging was there as a small camp. The people socialized together on Sundays. The women got together, some packing their children on their backs and watching traditional games of checkers. It was a very happy

atmosphere, the children were happy, no sense of danger to fear. They helped each other harvesting fish, meat and store berries for the winter. Families built a ground cache and some built caches standing up on four logs as a support. When the boat came, we all helped make fish sticks that would go either in the ground cache or the four-wooden leg cache. Gathering wood was daily because if the snow came with the cold it would be hard to collect wood. The women and some young ladies worked on cleaning fish or meat. Some tanned moose or caribou hides. I was fortunate to gain more of my language because I was immersed in speaking my language daily.

There are two ways in which language, healing and health are connected to each other. We can't separate these three if we want to increase wellness in our communities. First of all, people need to be healed and language can help with that (2.3.1). And second, Indigenous languages themselves need to be healed (2.3.2). We can't use our languages unless they are healed; we need to heal our languages. Language needs to be healed and then revised through our daily contact with each other. We have to revise it through oral traditions, not through reading and writing, in order to pass it on to future generations.

2.3.1 Kòta hotiè ts'eedaa eyits'ò yatı - Community health and language.

Research is increasingly showing a link between wellness in Indigenous communities in Canada and language vitality (McIvor, Napoleon, & Dickie, 2009). People and children from Indigenous communities in Canada are identified as having mental and physical disabilities and other increasingly unhealthy factors. These are due to poverty, smoking, drugs, alcohol, violence, child neglect, mental illness, increasing crime rate, and poor shelter and lack of housing. Indigenous people did not start out with these challenges; they came from outside, starting with

the first explorers. Outsiders brought unhealthy goods like alcohol, tobacco and sugar. Our people did not understand the negative effects of these things, and accepted them without challenging them. These have contributed to the poor health of our people.

Outsiders also brought their way of living, and they influenced the way we worked as a community. Our people had always cared for disabled people who could not look after themselves (e.g., blind); they trained them to function on the land and to contribute to the community. There was a man and his sister that were blind. The parents raised them mainly on the land. They both were trained to work along with their families to collect wood and clean around the camp all by feeling. When we were travelling on the land the woman asked me if she can help me to pack my baby so I put my baby on her back and she packed her until we were done hauling supplies over the portage. To this day she still does mending, sewing while she lives in the seniors' home. Despite disability or other dysfunctional habits that people have, when there's strong positive support, they will become capable persons. Orphans were also taken into homes by the people as a community before Indian Affairs took them. Because of this structure, the communities were healthy and functional.

Now, our people are living in dysfunctional environments and people are still not getting education about substance abuse and other unhealthy habits. Housing challenges compound the issues. We are short of housing units. Also, our people still have to live under the laws and policies of the Canadian government, which hurts them. For example, we have always lived together with extended families, but the federal housing units do not allow this many people in one unit. This disrupts families and adds to other challenges, including for our Elders. We make a mistake by putting our Elders in senior homes when some can still be kept in family homes. In the past families were all cramped in one tent or small shack but grandparents or any seniors

were never put in a home as we do now. This creates a lack of responsibility for families. Our people are labelled as dysfunctional, not capable or reliable; this sets them up for failure in life. Their self-esteem goes down and they don't feel that they are able to do the things that they are in fact capable of. As McIvor et al. (2009) point out, unhealthy lifestyles, which prevent the learning of languages, is of great concern all over the world.

McIvor et al. (2009) talk about how our communities are dysfunctional, but as long as we have our oral traditions and our language, we are still able to live in healthy ways. Research shows that strong languages are associated with healthier communities. Chandler and Lalonde (1998) provide evidence suggesting that suicide rates among young people are lower in communities with stronger language use (see also Whalen, Moss & Baldwin, 2016; Oster, Grier, Lightning, Mayan, & Toth, 2014; McIvor, 2013). In the Tłchq worldview, the relationship between people, land and language is connected to health and well-being because working on the land, and learning the discipline of land-based work and lifestyle helps to create people who are healthy physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. It doesn't just help them, but it creates their sense of belonging to their ancestors' beliefs, which in turn helps them to understand the Tłchq worldview.

The Elders keep saying: the land is the language; the language is part of our worldview; if you don't understand our land, you don't learn our language; what we say about the land has to be true; you can't criticize it or accuse it about the way it is shaped. You can never label any landforms for the way they are because the land enables you to be healthy. You can't say the trail is too bumpy or too rough; it forms your feet and muscles. The earth is alive and it hears and heals; whatever we say about the land can come back to us in a positive or negative way. The land itself is so rich and nourishing and it helps to expand our minds and thinking because

when we are out on the land it gives us a lot of exposure to wellness of ourselves, to reflect on who we are as a person, and to deal with issues that need healing. This comes with spirituality and cultural connectedness. And these in turn are expressed appropriately in the Tłıchǝ Yatı̀ language. That is one reason why language is so important, and why we need to keep our languages living. As quoted in Blair, Rice, Wood, and Janvier (2002), O. McIvor says, “Every time a language dies, unique and irrecoverable knowledge is lost.” (McIvor 2009, p. 2).

To this day I hear my mother talk to the ravens and seagulls to go away when she works outside. As soon as she makes dry fish or meat outside, or works on caribou hides, the birds come in flocks. Mom waves her cloth or her hands and says loudly, “Ası̀ aaht'ı̀, hǝt'a haget'ı̀. Naxıghǝ ası̀ hats'eehǝ ha dì.” (Go somewhere. We can't do any work because of you.) Today, in our Dene world, human relationship with animals and birds is still common; because of this relationship, what we have is a unique knowledge and understanding. When the people go on the land, they would call the raven, “Gogha nǝtsı̀.” (Predict for us.) They say this to animals because they know the animals know where to find caribou. They even ask the bear for healing, “Tıts'aadı̀ wı̀nı̀ nǝtsoo anet'e ne! Hotı̀e goda hǝnınewo, goxǝ k'aat'ı̀ gha.” (You are a strong-minded animal, help us in our healing/wellness.)

The reason puberty camps and the puberty rites of passage, which they teach, are so important is because they make sure that young women are connected to their culture and to the land, and learn about the importance of the land from their Elders. Learning from the Elders, especially in Tłıchǝ Yatı̀, also supports a strong relationship between the Elders and the younger generation. This relationship is what keeps our communities healthy and mitigates against negative influences like substance abuse.

2.3.2 *Yati hotè edaa - Health of language.*

Like humans, languages themselves also need healing. Languages are living words, a cycle in any form. Languages come from all sources and directions, north, south, west, and east, and even from space. For hundreds of years our language has been spoken verbally; it is an oral language. It is a living and spiritual flotation of words. Language usage and language development was born with our ancestors and ingrained in their daily lives. From sunrise to sunset, weather, animals and the movement of nature and humans have developed the sound of our language. The description and expressive vocabularies of nature brightened the natural horizon of our living Ṭḥcḥ. Knowledge of language terms increased the wisdom of using the words from birth until passing from earth, body of mind. The words of language were intertwined in the sentences naturally, without speakers having to learn and know how to speak them. People formed vocabulary based on natural settings and words were understood because the context was understood. Language made sense because speakers connected with the daily words. They were entangled with their physical work, even among little children.

Old traditional words were spoken at all times so generation-to-generation, people had developed more words that were spoken from the ancestors. The wealth of our language was so powerful and the richness of language spoken every day was valued. The land and animals related together even though animals and other wildlife sources were used for survival for food and clothing. All of their parts developed our vocabulary. Aboriginal languages and culture practices have to be embedded as one, language and culture cannot be separated (Government of the Northwest Territories, 1993; McIvor, Napoleon & Dickie, 2009). Language and culture together make up our identity, which creates speakers of languages. Our spoken languages identify us; they are part of our identity, through which other tribes know where we come from.

When the Elders describe their feelings, their pain, it's all in the language. The young people need to understand: The land, and the work and their tiredness all build up their vocabulary and their ability to speak their language. The kind of relationship between language and worldview expressed by the Elders reflects what Fishman (1991) describes; he says that a language associated with a particular culture "is at any time during which that linkage is still intact, best able to name the artifacts and to formulate or express the interests, values and world views of that culture.... No language but the one that has been most historically and intimately associated with a given culture is as well able to express the particular artifacts and concerns of that culture" (pp. 20–21).

Since our ancestors' time, language shift has been occurring all over the world, and many community languages are at risk every day. As a living symbol, tool or object, these words of languages have been abused and changed by all of us, people from years back and people now at the present time. Illnesses and disabilities can damage learning languages. These are natural and we can accept them. There are also unnatural factors that damage language learning, like the social challenges described above (substance abuse, housing issues, etc.). These factors we need to address. Residential schools and institutions have denigrated our languages greatly. The explorers and other non-aboriginals that came to our land confused our people with trades that created huge language barrier and loss. Languages have been shamed, blamed, accused guilty, neglected, trampled, avoided, or interpreted untruthfully. Languages turned from beauty to dullness, with no flavour or taste, no expressiveness and no descriptive detail of speaking the language. Languages have been damaged, hurt, slaughtered; all of these things have acted as a weapon that has been instrumental in killing most of the Indigenous languages. Now we are struggling and fighting to take them back. We are trying, but there are all kinds of obstacles in

the way. We are currently gathering pieces of our languages and searching for resources to support their survival.

Aside from these factors mentioned above, there are also more concrete challenges to our language's health. Our language has been shifting: sometimes words are cut or shortened; sometimes extra vowels are added; sometimes language from other dialects is used. We argue and debate on the sounds, pronounced, written, read and how we make up words when there's no words in the languages. For example, Tł̓ch̓q̓ to English – terms: satellite dish is named after a person's hat, we say "kw'əhtl'a", flat dish; many of our young people speak using slang words which they created in either language – Tł̓ch̓q̓ or English. Our ancestors would have had beautiful descriptive words.

Some challenges to our language's health are related to literacy: improper interpretations, translations, transcriptions, and descriptions of things and concepts. Sometimes the language is recorded and documented improperly. If people learn the language through these resources instead of through the oral tradition, they can learn the errors that the resources contain. Then, they speak the language, in public and in some homes, the way they have learnt it. The home is particularly important for transmitting the language, so if a word is mispronounced in the home, for example, we can't correct this because we'd be going against the family teachings.

We need to heal our languages. Our language needs to be healed and then revised through our daily contact with each other. We have to revise it through oral traditions, not through reading and writing, in order to pass it on to future generations. Some children are learning to read and write in school already, so this makes it even more important to learn the language orally by speaking Tł̓ch̓q̓ with each other.

How can we change our languages from being unhealthy to healthy, so our languages can be healthy and strong without any negative feeling? We have to create huge amounts of positive thinking among our language speakers. I hear it all the time; the youth are changing our language. But our languages are alive, and can say everything; they don't need that much change. Those who know and use the language, the language keepers, know that our languages are used for all purposes. We all came together because of languages.

To have a healthy language, we need to have our Elders support programs in our communities, like the health programs and community literacy programs, so that we can improve our oral language with all the young people, plus with the staff in various workplaces. That is the only way they are going to continue to speak the language in the workplace and to improve the language. One place where it is particularly important to speak and use language is in health centres. In these types of places, the language has to be well-spoken and well-interpreted so that there is no confusion about where people need to go or what they need to do. Of course, health issues will arise if health and wellness terminologies are at stake. For example, in pre-natal programs young mothers need to have lots of information so that they can look after their children properly. Another example where language is important is related to puberty changes, because it is very important for parents to be able to talk to their children about the changes they are going through. In the past, we did not talk a lot about our bodies, but we need to have respect for our bodies and we need to be able to discuss them so we can look after them properly. When we have puberty camps, it is important that one of the health staff comes to do a presentation about body changes and why the body has to be changed and what the stages of puberty are. Being able to talk about these changes in our language helps to ensure that there is no confusion.

To be successful and to create speakers, readers and writers in the future, we have to have full-time on-going Indigenous language and culture programs for many years. Adult immersion programs are the necessary next step to take back the Indigenous languages and cultures in the revitalization process. In speaking of language revitalization, Hinton (2013) says that “the most important locus of language revitalization is not in the schools, but rather the home, the last bastion from which language was lost, and the primary place where first language acquisition occurs” (pp. xiv). However, in Ṭḥcḥ communities, language is being spoken less and less in the home. Therefore, the schools and school-based programs play a significant role in supporting language revitalization among young people. One program, which is connected to language and health and to having healthy language, is the puberty camps program, which is described in more detail later in this paper. The next section sets the stage for discussion of the puberty camps by describing Ṭḥcḥ puberty rites.

3. Ts'èko zohdaà ts'ihlee nàowò – The Teachings of our Puberty Rites

World view for our young girls today can be very sensitive and delicate and one must be cautious in teaching to learn on the land. Some of the young girls are not interested to know about their culture and language. Learning Indigenous language and culture is competing with technology and the changes in their appearance. Some prefer to be in a building rather than be outside on the open land. So many times I tell myself how grateful I am today for having had my family take me on the land for all those years. And to live by myself during my passage of rites, it was meant to happen. For three months, I celebrated my journey into maturity, into a young adult. I was told so many times that I have to use what I learned.

When a young girl starts her first menstrual cycle, she is taken away from the home and camp. The people in the camp are made aware that there is a visitor among them. The mother or Elderly woman yells out in the camp, “There’s a visitor among us, *Xàhtq̄q̄ gon̄i gòle-e-e-e!*” (see also Government of the Northwest Territories, 2002,). The whole camp will know that there is someone that became, *Ts’ah̄t’ū*, the hooded one. Traditional puberty shelters are made for young girls when they first get their period. The women at the camp help to build the shelter with the girl’s family, female only. The shelter is made of trees, spruce boughs and wooden poles. She cannot sit still as this is the period in which she is to gain skills and maturity.

3.1 Gogod̄ī - Our stories.

My story

K’omq̄q̄d̄q̄q̄ ìl̄aà sa hàʔa-le-èt’ì xàhtq̄ ayì ne wek’èhoehsà. Goyidahkq̄q̄, hoiz̄l̄, setà, semq̄, sezeh, wets’èke lexè sègeze. Tl̄eèhk’q̄q̄ dèk’q̄q̄ t’à n̄hmbàa goyì dzeh. Setà eyts’q̄ sezeh nàgezèe ghq̄ lexè gogedo. Haeht’e xok’e n̄dè ìl̄aà togòètl’oh ne. Semq̄ m̄q̄ht’a kàehtl̄a wèehs̄l̄, ayì awèehs̄l̄ yek’èezq̄. Ts’ò yì hàehtl̄a kwe-èt’ì edeghq̄ xor̄ʔa lanì, segoht’q̄q̄ l̄ad̄m̄ ne t’à weghq̄ dehdz̄l̄, neèhtl̄a ha d̄ī. Nq̄dea t’aa kàehtl̄a, n̄hmbàa ts’q̄ naehtl̄a. ìl̄aà gogede geèhk̄w’q̄, n̄hmbàa ts’q̄ n̄wà-lea nièhtl̄a gà semq̄ ts’q̄ gohde. Sets’q̄ hàehtl̄a, ts’èko ʔq̄hdaà whìh̄l̄ wèehs̄l̄. As̄j̄ì haq̄dz̄a ìl̄è nq̄q̄? sèhd̄i. D̄ī k’q̄q̄t’aa hahdz̄a ne wèehs̄l̄ t’à segoht’q̄q̄

I experienced what a ‘visitor’ is, early in the morning I woke up to a nice cozy warm feeling, to see my parents and my uncle and his wife eating. The lantern was lit so it was quite bright in the tent. My dad and my uncle were talking about hunting. That time of the year it is still dark. I told my mom I am going to go out, she knew what I meant. Before I got out of my blanket I felt awkward, different with my clothes that I was scared to get up. Later when I went out, I walked back to the tent. I can still hear them talking so I got close to the tent and I called my mother. She came to see me and I told her that I think I started my menstrual cycle. She asked me if

niwa gha goyièhtla. Emòq goyi ts'ò nàdahohwhoò ne weehkw'ò. Edza dii, sinàehtla. Mòht'a dzè agode kwe-èt'ì semòq hòta nàedzeè, "Xàhtq goni gòle-e-e-e."

Semq, emòq sexè idoo detsini gòqwa ts'ò ts'eède. Ilaà togoit'òo. Semq tso aale sèhdi. Edza hanikò k'ezaehbe xè tso eyits'ò ts'ia datsiehkà.

Edza xè zah dezì nì nàhwò xè tso eyits'ò ts'ia eghàehle, semq emòq tso agehzi ts'ò. Ekiyèè t'aa ts'èko wòhdaa t'òhbàawò nàts'ekwì gots'àgedì gha nigide. T'òhbàawò xihtso ts'ò zah hàgewò. Segha edza, eki nàawo-le, nàda nìdè negha gòkòò ade-a ne sègedì. Ilaà tso eyits'ò ts'ia hàhtla gedì agedì hòt'e. Naàke eht'aà tso eyits'ò ts'ia naihwha. K'qonì tì ehwhò. Semq t'òhbàawò yì kò dèhk'ò nòò, naihwì gha kò gà nàhwho. Semq wet'à sèhtì gha kw'àh, beh, libò, etsìlìlì nìyìwa. Dì wet'à sèetì gha ne sèhdi. Edlaàtq dzè ts'ò t'òhbàawò yì nàade t'axòò nìdè nìhmbàa netsàa negha nàts'ehge ha ne. Sets'òò siniehwha ha sets'adi eyits'ò tseèghà hàgoèàa ts'ia, ʔoo netq eniyìwa. ʔoo det'oo netq eniyìwa t'à tseèghà hàgoèàa gòqtsà-le adzà, hòzì adzà,

I had it before. I told her this was the first time so she went to get my winter clothes. I can hear a big commotion from my aunt in the tent. I started to dress up, it was very cold. Before daylight my aunt called out in the camp, we have a visitor among us".

My mom and aunt went with me into the bush, far from the camp. It was still dark. My mom told me to get firewood. I was cold but I shuffled in the deep snow and started chopping wood and trees.

Struggling in the deep cold snow I carried the wood and trees to where my mom and my aunt were. By then some women had joined them to set up the tepee. They were digging snow big enough for a tepee. I felt cold but they told me not to stand around, you will get warm if you move around they said, meaning I have to get more wood and trees. I made two trips hauling firewood and trees. I was so thirsty. My mom had the fire going in the tepee so I stood by the open fire to warm up. My mom had brought utensils, plate, cup, knife and a spoon. You will be using these to eat and drink. You will stay in the tepee for a couple of days and we will set up a bigger tent for you. She helped me set up my sleeping gear and she closed in the entrance of the tepee adding more trees and boughs. The

n̄h̄ts'ı̄ wh̄ek'òo zah x̄e goyìw̄hehts'ı̄ı̄ ha-le. D̄o ts'ò̄ ḡōw̄à n̄àh̄de ts'ò̄h̄z̄ò̄ s̄eet'ı̄ segà n̄àit̄e ḡı̄h̄d̄ı̄. Toò agode kwe-èt'ı̄ı̄ s̄eet'ı̄ dets'òò teı̄wa. D̄ı̄ite-a hodiidzà kò edza x̄e dediidzı̄, d̄ı̄ga tseeghoò ne. İ̄doò tı̄'ò̄h̄mbàawòà hàgòèz̄àa k'è k'ediit'ı̄, wh̄ò ghàd̄ı̄da. D̄ı̄ite s̄on̄ı̄à! K'om̄ò̄d̄ò̄ ı̄l̄aà too-èt'ı̄ı̄ sem̄o sets'ò̄ gode n̄ò̄ ts'ı̄h̄who. K̄ò n̄àts'ı̄h̄t̄l̄a, sem̄o l̄ı̄h̄t̄o segh̄àı̄hx̄e, satsòx̄àa netsà-lea nezı̄ı̄, t̄oht̄sea eyits'ò̄ kw'àht̄s̄e. Hadı̄, l̄ı̄d̄ı̄ nehtsı̄ hanikò l̄ı̄d̄ı̄ ı̄o ned̄o-le n̄ò̄! Tı̄ ı̄o ned̄o-le eyits'ò̄ hòt̄ı̄'ò̄ s̄ènet̄ı̄-le. Bò eyits'ò̄ ı̄w̄el̄ı̄ı̄ nez̄àh̄ ha n̄ı̄le ne! Eyit'à l̄èt'è, t̄ı̄tsod̄ı̄, eyits'ò̄ b̄òḡò̄ hòt̄ı̄'ò̄ wh̄eḡò̄ s̄àı̄d̄ı̄.

K'atsı̄ tı̄'ò̄h̄mbàawòà yı̄ı̄ n̄àehtı̄, edza d̄ı̄ı̄. Ek'èdaedz̄ē ts'èko eyits'ò̄ sem̄o n̄ı̄mbalà n̄ı̄h̄mbàa netsà-lea segh̄a n̄àḡı̄ı̄hḡe. N̄ı̄h̄mbàa yı̄ı̄ hòı̄zı̄ x̄e ḡòk̄ò. Seàgı̄ı̄ sets'àged̄e ḡà ı̄oo ḡòò n̄ı̄t̄ets'ewa ḡha sets'àged̄ı̄. Nezı̄ı̄ egh̄alats'ı̄d̄à, mòht'a tseèhḡà xı̄ı̄ zah t'à goyì ts'eed̄e ha-le ı̄oo ı̄o dats'ı̄h̄k̄à. Sats̄o t'aa sem̄ò̄ gokwı̄ netsà-lea eyits'ò̄ z̄òht̄sı̄ x̄e segà goyìèht̄l̄a.

entrance was nicely placed with thick branches and boughs which applied a small opening so the cold wind won't blow in the snow. My cousin was told to sleep beside me because it was quite a distance from the camp. Before nightfall my cousin came with her sleeping gear. We tried to sleep but it was cold and we were scared because we can hear the wolves howling. We stared at the stars through the top opening of the tepee. We must have fallen asleep. My mom was calling me while it was still dark in the morning. We started the fire and my mom handed me over a tea kettle, a nice little grill, a pot and a pan. She said, make tea but don't drink too much. Don't drink too much water and don't eat too much. You cannot eat fresh meat and fish. So, she gave me some bannock, oatmeal and very dried meat.

I stayed another night in the tepee, it was cold. Next day the women with my mom and aunt set up a little canvas tent. It was so nice and cozy inside the tent. My friends came over and they helped me to place fresh spruce boughs on the inside of the tent. We did a good job because the outside entrance was all covered with spruce boughs so we don't bring in the snow. My aunt came with

her packing bag and her little axe the next day.

Dora Migwi says that “[...] in the past all of the children were raised in moss diapers; all of my younger brothers were raised in moss diapers. Mom used to put moss in a moss bag and she used it to diaper all my younger brothers; she raised them that way. So, moss is really good natural thing that our ancestors raised their children in” (Tłıchq Research and Training Institute, 2017, p.19).

Hadı, kw’ah hàhıtłá! Hàehsı, kw’ah, whelı ne! Hadı, kw’ah wet’à sedııŕı gha neęwq ne! Edıı ts’oh gòhıı sı ts’ò hıtłá, semòq hadı, zah hàdııge gá kw’ah hàts’ekwı́-a ne. Gozaà t’à zah hàdııgeh, zah tł’a kw’ah wègoèht’ıı ts’ò. Semòq ekwı́, ekwı́. Kw’ah whelı hazòq nàdııhtsı gá goŕqhtsıı yıdııwa. Emòq ŕqhtsı náke dagòeŕq nadayèezà. Kwıt’a k’elee wet’à ŕqhtsı wedzıı eııızà sèhdı. Eyıtł’axòq seŕqhtsıı senqkw’òq k’eniyeètsı, kwıt’a sekwı k’e nıyııwa. Nedàa xè senqkw’òq eya wexèehdı. Seŕqhtsıı nezıı senqkw’òq k’e whehtòq ŕayehŕı kò, semòq seŕahtł’ıı nıt’ıı ayıłà. İdaà naıtleh sèhdı. ŕah t’à ehkw’ı naehtleh hoèhdzà ts’òdaà ıłats’ò ŕqhtsı wedzıı naıhtò. Senòhmbàà gá nàdııtla-èt’ıı ŕqhtsı goyııehxè. Nıehtsq hanıkò semòq hadı, kw’ahlıı hàıwa gá satsò moq wheláà

She said that I have to go with her to collect moss. I said, moss, it’s frozen. She said, you need to get moss for cleansing. We started to shovel the snow with our snowshoes until we saw moss underneath the snow. My aunt chopped and chopped. We gathered all the frozen pieces of moss into our packsacks. She bundled two sacks with frozen moss. She has tumplines so she told me to tie each end on the sack. Then she put my sack on my back and placed the tumpline on my head. It was heavy and hard on my back. While I straightened my back sack, my aunt tightened my snowshoe laces. Go ahead she said. I kept trying to balance my pace walking with snowshoes and snuggling tight with both hands on each end of the strap on the tumpline. We got back to the tent and I

aale, hani-le de wha k'e dawhwa eggo gha. Hahlà gà asia ihàh. Kw'ah satsò mọ̀ò whelaa weghàehda. Tso goyièhwha gha hòzò, dekw'ih dehsì xì ha, wet'à k'omọ̀dọ̀dọ̀ nagots'iìhk'ò gha. Zah xì zàhle gha hòzò. Mòht'a ɬàà yeàzea dzẹ, semọ̀ semọ̀ xè goyiètla. Hagedi, kw'ah whegọ̀ nìdè senele ha ne. Detsì, ts'ikw'ọ̀, ehtl'è weta nàh̄tsì, weghàt̄tsì eyitl'axọ̀ k'atsì nàhsàa ne. Kw'ah t'à sed̄ɬzì eyits'ò hòt̄'ò ts'èko nelì nìdè wet'à anet'ì gha ne. Semọ̀ ehtl'ì k'ele nọ̀. Ehtl'ì kàh̄t'a gà d̄i hani elexèd̄iìlì sèhdì. Hanì nàèhd̄iìlì k'ele nọ̀. D̄i wet'à anet'ì gha ne sèhdì, kw'ah sen̄ihwhò ha ne. Negoht'ò xì sìhwhò ha ne. Kw'ah ehtl'ìtò yìwa gà d̄i hani wet'à zanet'ì-a ne sèhdì. Kw'ahk'ih t'à zàht'ì-a dehwhò-le. Ek'èdaedzè seàḡià sets'àhtla, kw'ah hazò s̄id̄idla gà yìwò yìdiwa. Nàzed̄iìlì k'e n̄h̄itla. Sedèa eyits'ò setsia ḡighak'eehwho ahdzà, hanikò ɬàà sèot'ì ḡits'ò goyièhtla-le.

threw in the sack. I was tired but my aunt told me to unpack the frozen moss and place it around the stove or on top of the poles so it would dry. I did that and had a bit to eat. I stared at the moss around the stove. Firewood needed to be brought in. Dry twigs needed to be collected for making fire in the morning. Snow needed to be brought in for water. It was still a bit light outside when my aunt came in with my mom. They told me that when the pieces of moss dry you have to clean them. Take out twigs, dirt and make sure you rinse the moss and dry it again. You will use the moss to clean your body and use the moss when you flow heavy. So, my aunt had brought strips of materials. She cut them and said you need to sew this together like this one. She had a piece that she had done. You will use this when you still flow, the moss will purify your body. It will protect your clothing. She put some dried moss in the pad and told me that's what I have to do. I didn't want to use the moss bag. The next day my friend came to visit so we cleaned all the moss pieces and put them in a bag. We started sewing. I was getting lonely for my little sister and brother but I was not ready to go back to my parent's tent.

Mòht'a gòehk'q, ts'aht'ł zaht'e, xàhtq ehł, ts'èko zohdaà whihł. Making fire outside, being the hooded one, I am a visitor, I have become a woman. I questioned myself. What am I? Where and how do I separate the three terms? Mòht'a gòehk'q⁵ refers to me having made fire outside. Ts'aht'ł references isolation from people into the unknown Spiritual rituals.⁶ Xàhtq, the term used to greet me when I returned to the camp from my isolation as a visitor. Ts'èko zohdaà references my transformation into the stages of womanhood. I will understand why these terms have been given to young women for many years if I have succeeded in my time to endure my puberty rites. It is all part of the Tłchq worldview as I strongly connected myself to the land which nourished me with all sources of expanding my knowledge to increase my language as I struggle with the terms of stages of puberty.

Each day the weather got warmer and the days got longer. Weeks went by, when my friends come to visit I hear what's going on at the camp. Who came from another camp or from Rae, as Behchokò used to be called. It was a long time for me to live alone. It started at the end of January and it was now, the beginning of April, almost Easter.

We went for fire wood, gathered more spruce boughs and fire poker sticks to peel. My mom said she couldn't come to see me all the time because I had to learn how to live by myself and be dependable. So, she advised me to sew embroidery. She showed me by starting how to use the needle and she did the first stitching and I looked at how she did it and then I started sewing. She said, it's ok if you don't do well first but if you sew

⁵ *Mòht'a gòehk'q* translates as 'I made fire outside'. The phrase referring to another person is *mòht'a gòehk'q* 'she made fire outside'. Note the tone difference in the two verbs.

⁶ In my day, as a *ts'aht'ł* I didn't wear a hood but actually a kerchief tied under the chin and shielding the eyes.

every day your sewing will get better. If you leave it and there are breaks between the work that you do, that will be who you become, that becomes your habit for life. You have to complete what you start. This is a lifetime skill.

I had a routine each day so I was busy. During the next few days my mom came with another visitor, an older woman. The woman and her family were on their way to hunt for caribou. She gave snowshoes to my mom and told her I should use them. She also asked my mom if I had been sitting on a little bench or a swing. She told us that when she went through her puberty stages she was told to sit on a bench in the tepee for two days. That's why she's not heavy; she can walk on the snow with her snowshoes without sinking in the snow. She gave me advice, "Be strong and don't hesitate to do work, and you can become a dependable person."

I continued to gather firewood, spruce boughs every day and to peel bark on narrow short spruce poles that the women take to use for little drying racks or pokers for the stove. I piled firewood, spruce boughs, peeled spruce sticks and dried twigs. The women and my friends take them to use at home. Some women brought torn clothing, mitts and moccasins for me to mend for them. In a small camp people talk so I was always careful not to do things that would bring any misdeeds to my family or to our camp. Every female visitor told me, "don't talk too much, eat only dry food, don't drink too much water, don't sleep in the day and don't sleep too long. Keep your home tidy, change spruce boughs every two or three days. Take care of your body and clothing. Keep your hands busy, you will become a good worker."

Finally, my mom came and said, your dad said you can come back home but you have to live like how you live here. You are not to look at people, especially the hunters.

Because there are many caribou and you have to watch everything. I was so happy. But I hoped that my younger brother and baby sister wouldn't be afraid of me. A week after coming back to my parent's home, my parents and most of the families were planning to go to Rae for Easter. My cousin and I were told to stay behind until they came back from their trip. A couple with a child came to stay so they were able to stay in our tent and to look after us. It was a nice break. My cousin and I gathered firewood every day and spruce boughs. The woman made us sew. We mended our clothing and she showed us how to make skirts for ourselves, which I really enjoyed sewing because they would be ours to keep. I felt like I was still under probation, which made me upset. My friends were there but I couldn't visit them.

Some people came back a week later, and then my parents came back. When all the people came back from Rae, it was time to move to another location for spring. Because I was still within my puberty stage my family had to be the last to leave the camp. When we were leaving my dad said, you can't sit on the sled. You have to walk alongside of the trail. Every time we get to a lake you have to make an offering to the lake and the land. You need to collect spruce boughs and plants for offerings. You have to shout out to nature. "Give us good health and a good year." The journey started, I walked after them. It was all right for me because the dogs were slow in the slushy snow. I did what my dad told me to do every time I approached a lake. I made an offering and talked to the land loudly. I was happy that we were last to travel.

Late in the day we stopped at a family camp. My parents went to see the people, maybe to have tea and a snack. I waited by the sled. Later my mom gave me a bit of food and water. We continued our travel until the sun was out of sight. Finally, we arrived

and my parents set up the tent, we ate and went to sleep. Sometime later we moved again, this time close to a big lake. Spring hunt! All through spring and summer I was known to be called the hooded one, Ts'ah't', or Xàhtq, visitor. I still continued to live and follow my passage of rites. I was observed at all times. I was happy that every time we moved to another location, my parents pitched the tent away from the people; my aunt and uncle lived close by. I really enjoyed having them around because they accepted me.

My family had the patience to abide by our traditional ways and to let me learn them. They accepted how I had to be isolated because this was our culture and a way of teaching the rules of puberty rites of passage. I am so fortunate and very grateful for the teaching experience I had endured living away from my family and the camp. I craved so much for fresh food but I knew there were protocols associated with it that I had to respect. The people who lived there at that time, were challenging my emotions. They were truly my teachers. I know my parents were given words to be strict with me because the people believed in our medicine power during our puberty rites and the laws that have been practised ever since our Tḥchq ancestors' time. I had entered the true journey of accepting the Tḥchq perspective.

Tḥchq Elders don't often share their personal stories and experiences. Just two years ago, my mother shared her own puberty passage of rites story with me in 2015: my mother's name is Elizabeth Rabesca:

Semq wegodi - My Mom's Story

My family moved to the treeline area on the barrenland. My brothers travelled with three dogteams. There were lots of caribou. It was winter so they helped and set up a huge tent. There wasn't much wood because we were on the barrenland. My brothers gathered as much trees and firewood as they could. Soon after we were settled in the tent, I made a camp fire. Mòht'a gòehk'q. My mom took me away from our family tent and she made a spruce hut for me. It was cold and I helped her. The hut wasn't big and it was nice with the fire in the middle. My mom was careful not to have a big opening at the entrance and where the fire's smoke would release from the hut. She told me to gather wood, spruce boughs and lots of little willows so I keep the fire going in the evening. We were the only family out there so my family watched over me from a distance so I wouldn't be afraid of animals. Every night I hear the wolves so my mom checks on me early in the morning. Sometimes she stays with me at night and goes back to my family tent. Weeks later I can hear people running their dogteam. I was very scared. We were very close to an Inuit territory so I was afraid they might be coming to visit. I was thinking and hoping the dogs don't smell the fire smoke. I stayed awake until daylight came. Every day I do outside work and sew as much as I can. My mom keeps telling me to work fast and walk fast when I follow her on the trail. After a month or so my mom said we have to travel down river. I packed my stuff and I walked after them beside the trail. There was work to do all the time when I moved back to the tent with my parents. I have eight brothers, so when they hunt, my mom and I have a huge load of work. But I learned to survive through hardship and to this day I appreciate the skills that I had gained through my puberty rites.

Elders like my mother who were taught their traditional rituals are respected in our Tłıchǫ region; her knowledge and skills are recognized for spiritual advice and she visits and stays with dying people. She is called for advice when the people don't know the signs of human life. They also understand how to relate with other people, themselves, the land and the spiritual world. These are the teachings we want for our future generations. Land-based oral language is heard at all times in the day and evenings.

3.2 Tłıchǫ protocols during a girl's menstrual stages.

I have gained a lot of teachings and inherited all the richness of language which is now considered a resource of great wealth. When I was still alone in my puberty tent, women, including elderly women, came to visit me regularly. They would just come in when I wasn't expecting them. They observed what I was doing and they also looked at how my tent was managed, and would make comments and give me advice about how to take care of myself and my clothing. Some of them would talk about what I should do when I would go to the outhouse and how to cover blood; hiding it and covering it up helped to keep animals away. I was also taught about how to keep myself and my sleeping gear tidy. Self-care was important; I needed to learn how to keep myself clean, to keep my hair clean and combed. I collect my loose hair and put it in the fire to protect my mind. The women also showed me how to clean around the stove, because it was all dirty. I had to learn to put extra dirt around the stove to protect the ground from burning. And the women reminded me that I had to use my own eating utensils and to keep all my utensils together in a bag because it would be around a year before I could use utensils from other people, including my family. But I was to keep my personal items for my future use and pass them on to my female friends or families. I learnt so many words from the depth of the

snow to the blossoming of wild forces of nature all summer. Touching, feeling, smelling, tasting, and seeing increased the language, and the words that I did not use before started to fit in my sentences naturally.

Unexpectedly a woman came in one day. I had my feet stretched out to the stove because my feet were cold. She said “you can’t stretch your feet out like that when you are in your stages; you have to sit on your feet all the time.” She saw that I was drinking tea, and she took my cup and poured the tea out. She said “if you drink tea now, you are going to get the habit of drinking tea too much. If you are used to putting sugar in it, you have to remember that you don’t have access to things like sugar all the time.” So even then, there was an awareness of addiction and of how to be healthy in every way: not to drink tea with sugar, not to smoke. Living out on the land you run out of dry goods all the time. Endurance is taught.

My family group has a solid richness of vocabularies in the Tł̥ch̥ language and culture and hundreds of words that I can still hear today. I am currently using them when I talk in Tł̥ch̥. The people that I lived among all these years have given me such knowledge of words and that makes me proud to this day. The purpose of the puberty camp is to increase the oral language in all aspects of the girls’ time away from the community. The rituals that they will bond with is all part of creating and building oral language skills in Tł̥ch̥. The people in the camp were very strict in that I was not allowed to do certain things even when I moved back to my parents’ tent. I was observed at all times, so I was careful. I’m glad that I was evaluated by observers because there were positive compliments made from the Elders later on. I owe them for caring about how I learnt my traditional values. Sometimes I wonder how hard it must have been for the young women before me that went through their passage of rites in the early years. We heard of many stories and versions of how the girls were put miles away from their families.

Some were at risk as their lives were in danger from animals and bushmen. It was a survival task for them.

During the spring time, when we moved to another island and my dad brought back some fish from the fishnet that he had checked; he told me to clean the fish because my mom was busy. An old man was observing; as soon as he saw me, he started yelling at me not to clean the fish. My mom heard him and told me to stop. The old man said “you are not ready to clean the fish; you cannot cut the gill of the fish because we won’t have plenty of fish in the lake.” I was also not allowed to go with other women in a boat on the lake or to collect berries with other women. I had to respect the water in the lake that provided food and water for our nourishments. I had to respect other people’s boats. Boats are working equipment for various animal food and the men haul boats over portage, they put the boat over their head so equipment that are used for hunting, fishing and trapping are labelled as sacred.

Another important aspect of this time of puberty involves the relationship between animals and humans.⁷ The teachings for young girls therefore including teachings about menstrual cycles and the fear of the bear and other animals. During the menstrual cycle the young girls and women that still have monthly periods are not allowed to be near any animal. Young girls that are still very young are protected from any contact with animals. Bears, wolves and wolverine are considered dangerous to their health. Especially common are grizzly bears; they are sacred, powerful animals. Young girls, before their bodies develop, are taught these beliefs and the associated taboos that can harm them. Animals can scent them. They can get sick

⁷ Many of the Tłı̄ch̄ practices, rites, and beliefs about puberty and menstruation, as well as about animals like bears, that are described here are also found in similar form in other Dene communities (see, for example, Smith (2008) about Tsìnlh̄q̄t’ín. In her thesis, Smith also refers to work by McClellan (1970), Loucks (1985), Goulet (1998)).

from being careless from the scent of the animal. Only medicine power men or women can heal them from the medicine curse.

Our people don't hunt the bears for food or for the skin/hide. The Elders say we cannot go to their den or habitat. They are spiritual animals with medicine power. Years ago, smaller bears were hunted for food if there was a great need for food. Now a bear can be hunted for medicine. Animals that are not food sources, they are butchered and cleaned by men. Animals that are food sources, and whose skin and hide will be used for clothing, these are cleaned by the older women and men.

Animal bones are not burned after they are skinned. Animals that are used for food, their bones are part of nutrients when preparing the meat. Animal bones can be used for tools to tan hides and men make tools for their equipment. Some bones, fish, ducks, muskrat and beaver, go back to the lake. Small game animals, their parts go back to the land, in the tree trunk or where people don't go. We do have ceremonies on/for animals, by giving thanks to the land. We make an offering at the area where the animal was cleaned. It can be done before cleaning the animal, fish and ducks. Elders or any participant can yell out saying, *Masi-e-e-e-e*, thank you to our ancestors. They sense our presence and hear us.

Sacred knowledge leads to cultural requirements and prohibitions in T̄chq homes. The Elders say that it is powerful in the lives of young girls to go through the hardship alone but they stress the need for the protection that is provided by our Creator and our medicine women. The young girl will be allowed to overcome her fear of the unknown. Being isolated she will be challenged, spiritually, emotionally, physically, mentally and environmentally. She will also need to be culturally strong to complete the tasks and to accept life for herself. *Nàowo nàtsoo k'ùdaa nè!* She has to challenge and match her strong cultural values. The ability for the young

girl to complete her rites of passage instills in her a great sense of accomplishment that is recognized by her family, her people and her camp.

Language skills development during her time can be boring when she's isolated. The important role would be of her mother and friends who come to visit, enabling her to converse in their language. The richness of nature and wildlife will nourish her to expand her vocabulary as she relates with the environment. Challenges are meant to develop and test her stamina, her strength, her courage, and her resourcefulness and still be able to survive. All teachings and observation can be a year long or longer. Perseverance is expected and challenging herself to be holistic in her way of life.

Ṭḥcḥo have beliefs of the bears in our territory that are similar to others' beliefs (Smith, 2008). We are not to mention the term, *sahcho* - big bear (grizzly bear) in our language on the barren land. We say, *ṭts'aàḍi ṇetsàa* - big animal, when the big animals are spotted and when we talk about safety. Animals, especially the big animals, are known to be very spiritually powerful, they are aware of everything. We had our education orientation in the early fall on the barren land with teaching staff, Elders and youth. The big animals started to come close to the camp. At times like this, we rely on our Elders who are knowledgeable and wise to calm the group. When the big animal comes close to the camp, the Elder stands up and talks to the animal.

“Dẓọ edegha eghàlats'eedaà ʔats'et'ɿ,
ts'èwḥị ts'ɿẉọ xè hotiè ts'ɿẉọ. Ṇi ṣèneṭi
gha ṇànezè, gox̣i x̣i goza g̣iɣha ṇàts'ezè.
Sẹkw'q̣ ṇidè ts'èwḥị gots'q̣ò ṇaɿṭleh.
Masi.”

“We are here for our own purpose, we ask
for peace and safety. You hunt for your food
and we hunt for our families too. If you hear
me, go in peace.”

When a young girl is in her stages of her first menstruation cycle, it is believed that she is in a special place and she is on a journey of her time and needs to understand that she is on a journey which will be very intense training into adulthood. That journey can bring her power or negative atmosphere to herself and to the people or it can bring her positive energy. Smith (2008, p. 74) describes the definition of having energy in the Tsìnlhqút'ín language (*Nímính* – dangerous, powerful with medicine power). We describe the young girl during her time using the same definition in Tḥchḡ. It is said, that the medicine power might be given to her if there's conflict with wild animals.

If a young girl doesn't have respect for the protocols, then that can create sickness and the people and the camp won't be happy with her. So, in that case, there would be negative atmosphere from the camp. For people at the camp it would be negative protocol that she brings, so they won't be happy with her and will be afraid that she will be given more power and negative energy, especially if she does not challenge her fears against that conflict. They fear that she might bring bad luck, create sickness if she doesn't respect herself and her surroundings. She can bring negative protocol to the camp. Medicine power that provides energy can be given to her at that time. To dispel those fears, she follows the rules very carefully and she has to follow advice and carefully manage through that.

I tried to gather information from other cultures about puberty rites but I found it difficult to find a written story from other regions in the north. As any Indigenous people, we protect some of our stories that we haven't been allowed to publicize in the past. I understand when other cultures can't share their ancestors' history, especially puberty rites of passage, because it's personal for many of us and the teachings were taught and talked about from close family

members. Keeping their views from the public. Stories and traditional practices should be shared before they are at risk of being lost.

When we are very young, we are taught all these protocols and beliefs by our families. As young girls, we were not allowed to go over or walk over animal blood, food, or men's clothing or any of men's belongings so as not to show disrespect. That teaching still continues during our puberty stages, all during our adolescence and as young women; we practice the teachings and have to pass them to the younger generations. So, it is all related to teaching, but with language: we have to use our language to teach and demonstrate.

4. Ts'èko ?qhdaà Ts'ihlèe Nàowoò Hoghàgetqò –The Teaching of Puberty Rites

4.1 Language and culture education in the schools: Dq Nàke Lanì Nàts'etso - Strong Like Two People.

I hear that Indigenous languages are endangered due to many people, families, parents and children not speaking their language. The children and young people are not taught as much in the homes and communities. I know and see that in our communities. We have been planning programs in Aboriginal language, culture, drumming, ancestors' songs and passage of rites for boys and girls in the schools. In many communities and schools, reclaiming languages has taken many forms with projects on the land within the educational organizations.

In 1991, the Dogrib Divisional Board of Education in Rae-Edzo developed a Mission Statement for the Dogrib schools. In the book that includes the Mission Statement, there is a quote from Kw'ahtideè Bìnò - Chief Jimmy Bruneau:

I have asked for a school to be built ...on my land...and that school will be run by my people, and my people will work at that school and our children will learn both ways, our way and the Whiteman's' way.... Chief Jimmy Bruneau (1881-1975)

The Mission Statement is very powerful, *Dq Nàke Lanì Nàts'etso* "Strong Like Two People". The late Elder, Elizabeth Mackenzie, was a very respected Elder in our Tł̓ch̓q region. She often came to visit our school when she was still able to walk and was a bit strong, with the mind of a young woman. She came around to all the classes to watch the children. She would tell a child in the class, "I know your family." To some children as she patted them on the shoulder or head, she would say, "*Amù weza anet'e?* Whose child are you? *Amù nèt'ł̓ agt'e?* Who are your family?" Elizabeth taught me about being a woman and a leader. I valued her wisdom, and knowledge and I will always hold her when I voice my ways of learning. Talking about Chief Jimmy Bruneau's words, she said:

So if children are taught in both cultures equally, they would be strong like two people...

What the Old Chief talked about is for some good time in the future. Today he didn't talk about everything, but it is good to reflect upon what he did say. He spoke as if, though we are only one person, we can be two persons. He looked far ahead for us, and we gain from it. (Mackenzie, 1990)

Since those days, our people have worked in the schools focused on the fruition of that statement. People that visit the schools sense a strong presence of Tł̓ch̓q culture in the environment inside and outside. They recognize that they are in Tł̓ch̓q schools. The Tł̓ch̓q region continues to offer Indigenous language and culture programs in all Tł̓ch̓q schools. We have had high numbers of healthy resources in our communities. The men and women, who

contributed years as our professors, have laid down the foundation for the future so that all will benefit from learning the *Dq Nàke Lanì Nàts'etso* programs. Our people have benefited from years of contribution from the whole community as well.

4.2 Dene Kede curriculum and the role of our Elders.

The curriculum for Indigenous language and culture education in the Northwest Territories is called Dene Kede (Government of the Northwest Territories, 1993 & 2002). It includes curriculum for grades K-9, and covers all subjects integrated with Dene perspectives on them: it incorporates the concepts of land, people, self, and spirituality into all units that are taught in the school, for example math, sciences, social studies, health, and arts. These concepts are also important ones in other modules of Indigenous education so that the children will have major cultural understanding. Whitinui, in a presentation at UVic (2017), talked about the pillars of Indigenous knowledge that are taught in New Zealand – these were similar to the concepts that are the foundation of our Dene Kede curriculum.

The Elders encouraged us to teach our children Indigenous knowledge. The Dene Kede curriculum for grades K-6 started to be developed in 1993 (Government of the Northwest Territories, 1993) by Elders from all the regions included in the Northwest Territories, with the help of the education administrators in Yellowknife and other cultural experts. In every culture group there is wealth of knowledge and stories to help our children. The Tłıchǫ Elders and culture support developers had great Indigenous knowledge and wisdom; teaching the curriculum is done with their help and support. In the past few years, since 2010, we have Tłıchǫ immersion K-3 programs in our schools. We also have Tłıchǫ Yatıı classes in our Tłıchǫ schools. So, we are reclaiming our language and culture through programs on the land and in the schools.

We Indigenous people have similar teachings for rites of passage, which we are aware of from sharing together (Government of the Northwest Territories, 1999: 21-26). The unit on puberty rites “Passage to Womanhood” is Module 1 in the Dene Kede Grade 7 Curriculum (Government of the Northwest Territories, 2002). The Elders’ words and vision related to the rites of passage have been documented in the *Dene Kede: Passage to Womanhood* (Government of the Northwest Territories, 2002):

“Whatever trail they took at this time would be the trail they would follow in their life. Thus, much guidance was given the young girls to help them stay on the right trail” (Adele Hardisty, Wrigley, NWT; Government of the Northwest Territories, 2002, p. 9).

“Gifts from our Creator need to be developed, cherished and shared. It is up to us as individuals and collectively as a community to help nurture the gift. We need to help those who have doubts as to their fits, and help them to grow” (Lucy Lafferty, Rae-Edzo, NWT; Government of the Northwest Territories, 2002, p. 15).

“We are the weakest of all creatures and hence survival is difficult. We must be humble and respectful in our relationship with the land” (Fibbie Tatti, Deline, NWT; Government of the Northwest Territories, 2002, p. 17).

“When you learn from Elders everything doesn’t come at once. It teaches you patience and builds character to build your knowledge slowly” (John B. Zoe, Rae-Edzo, NWT; Government of the Northwest Territories, 2002, p. 19).

“Everyone born is a miracle. The child has everything and will have everything if he is respected and respects” (Elizabeth Mackenzie, Rae-Edzo, NWT; Government of the Northwest Territories, 2002, p. 13).

“The Creator gave us medicine power to us, so we could survive and live on this land as long as we use it right” (George Blondin, Deline, NWT; Government of the Northwest Territories, 2002, p. 13).

“Our language is like a song given to each bird. How would you feel if you heard a seagull singing the song of a raven?” (Dene Elders; Government of the Northwest Territories, 2002, p. 21).

“When Elders give instructions, they could tell when the individual took their words seriously, and clung to them. These individuals had not only the talent but self-discipline to learn from what was offered” (Dehcho Elders, Fort Simpson, NWT; Government of the Northwest Territories, 2002, p. 19).

Many of our Elders have worked and travelled long distances from home, on the land. Some travelled with their families in winter and in summer. They experienced the struggle of working hard and travelling on harsh cold land. As Legat (2012,) describes, “to know is to maintain proper, respectful relationship with all that is part of dè (land)” (p. 18). Because they

know the land and the culture and language associated with it, Elders are the key resource people for the programs in the schools.

4.3 Chekaghàehtq̄q hoghàgeetq̄q - Teaching our teachers.

I support teacher training but teachers have to be fluent and to understand their Aboriginal language first. Aboriginal Language instructors/teachers need to be trained and to have teaching skills to teach Aboriginal language in all grade levels. I feel that to retain and to revitalize our language and culture we need trained, qualified Indigenous language teachers, instructors that understand the needs of the children, staff and parents. Some communities train Indigenous language teachers as a strategy for language retention and revitalization (Johns & Mazurkewich, 2001; Suina, 2004).

One thing that the Elders do is teach the teachers about land, culture, and language so that the teachers can then teach the students. To achieve and brighten language development with knowledgeable Elders and middle-aged Elders, the teaching staff participate in an on-the-land orientation. The fall annual teacher orientation offers great opportunities for educators to expand their oral T̄h̄ch̄q̄ by working with and listening to conversations from our Elders. During their time on the land, some participants can experience culture shock, but they have to overcome what they don't expect to do and to see. The food that they have to eat can be very different from what they are used to and even the way it is prepared. While observing the Elders work, the participants need to listen to the spoken language. Every little hands-on work or activity has language and a purpose for it. Participants are always students when the Elders demonstrate the work. They have to do what the Elders have presented to them; it has to be well done, completed and neat. T̄h̄ch̄q̄ is spoken at all times and they get together to listen to stories of the past in the

evenings, which end with prayer. If a person really wants to learn the skills, this is the time and place because all demonstrations and stories are translated from Tłıchǫ to English.

There's a great need to strengthen our knowledge in Indigenous language and culture. Teachers are taught and trained to teach and to use the curriculum. Teachers have to be committed to learn from our Indigenous Elders who teach in their Indigenous languages, orally, to fulfill their work. Programs are successful when we have compassionate teachers to teach compassionate learners. We all need to work as a team to deliver oral traditions and cultural programs, and to strengthen our Tłıchǫ way of life. Our belief is that when teachers are out on land where they have never been before, they need to meditate and connect with the land. The land will provide them with the knowledge and strength to help them to move forward with healthy, positive body and mind to help the children.

It is very, very important to us to have our young people graduate. Our language is also very important thing, ask an Elder or person in the community, it is the way we keep in tact with ourselves (parent comment during a public presentation:

Davison, 2007, p. 255).

The language and culture of our people is rooted on the land. If you lift up a rock, you'll see crawly insects; they too have language to survive. Safety planning with all participants (teachers) is very important; they have to pair up with someone to go away from the camp. Landforms need to be described because landforms can look the same far in the distance at night. Precautions are very important due to various types of wildlife animals that you have to be cognizant of while out on the land. With all the work that is done together as a group, the teachers have to learn through stories and physical work that this can create mixed feelings. One has to learn how people preserved themselves through hard life and work to maintain such

knowledge and skills and usually this is done through observation. It is through reflecting on those times, that many educators succeed in collecting some Aboriginal knowledge teachings, their spirituality, traditions and culture (James, 2016, p. 14–15).

The hope is that the teachers and all those involved with on-the-land teachings will benefit from the cultural experience and exposure as well as from the language teachings. We expect the educators to pass on their experiences to the students that they teach. Some of us Indigenous people learn a lot more on every trip because we have been living our culture and we have been entwined with our traditional way of life. The ones that have the courage to learn and demonstrate the cultural practices with the skills that they have learned will pass on the teachings to the students. A person needs to be very compassionate and not be afraid to learn the knowledge of Indigenous language and culture. Many teachers in the schools are non-Indigenous. It's important for them to learn the Tłıchǫ way of life, and so they need to participate in our cultural practices year-round. Fortunately, some have been learning and can speak some Tłıchǫ words but have yet to form sentences. Elders are very keen; they watch who does well and who is determined to learn. Elders sense our strength and weakness.

4.4 Puberty rights in the schools.

When a girl comes of age, the parents are supposed to prepare them for puberty rites. Some parents do go through the stages of teachings, as we can tell by how their daughters present themselves. However, many families are not practising the ritual. Some young mothers did not experience the passage of puberty rites themselves, so they don't know how to pass on those teachings and practices to their girls and children. A young mother said, "As a mother, I was not given the teachings of puberty stages, rites of passage and I cannot pass that teaching to

my children. I want my daughters and sons to participate at culture camps”. Some of the parents said, “we are not able to teach our children Tłchq because we don’t speak our language; we understand some of the words but we are not able to speak in Tłchq”.

One day in 1993, when Elder Elizabeth Mackenzie was at the school, she came and joined the staff at recess and observed the children. Elizabeth saw many changes among the children and the staff. While she observed the intermediate students at recess, she saw that the girls were more active and hyper than the boys. She described that the girls were behaving unmannerly toward the boys. The girls were trying to get attention from the boys by throwing off their hats, caps and jumping on them. Elizabeth was very disturbed and upset to see how the traditional behaviour had changed among our young students. She told us that the girls were very naughty. They were missing something in their life. Their Spirituality was weak; they were not taught at home how to behave as girls. So, their minds were weak and this could cause them to be disrespectful. She thought that needed to be changed!

We met with Elders, parents and education administrators to talk about how we could put a program together for the Girls Puberty Camp. It took several meetings with the parents, Elders, school board members and the Director of Education. The Elders and parents supported the puberty program, which would be offered to grades 5-12. The puberty camp program was approved by the Director of Education at the TCSA to be offered and delivered annually in the Tłchq schools. The Dene Kede program became mandatory to be taught in the schools and on the land.

Later at the school, the school administrator started to notice a lot of changes among young families. She knew that something was missing, from noticing how the children were behaving when they came to school. They didn’t really know how to talk to each other and

communicate. She started to set up programs to help children to communicate. These included land-based programs. She hired some local people who only spoke Tł̥ch̥q and they were very knowledgeable about land-based activities. They were hired to do activities with the children out in the camps; she and planned with them how best to set up the camp, including how she wanted the children to socialize with each other.

The program ran in January and February. K-3 children went to day camps, the older kids stayed overnight. The camp leaders helped the kids to communicate and socialize with each other. The hired workers talked about different types of wood, how deep the snow was, animal tracks, and to be with a buddy when they walk on the trails and when they use the outhouse. The cultural people were helpful when students played together. They were so concerned for the children's safety that they talked to the children as they watched them play. Slide hill⁸ was a long way down so the men would follow them. They tell the children to hold on to the front of the sled or hold on to each other. To have helpers with Traditional Knowledge and skills was important while being out on the land. The helpers would talk only Tł̥ch̥q. The workers noticed that not all teachers had the same skills on the land, so they helped to teach the teachers as well (see Section 4.3 above).

The whole program went on for about six weeks, and the kids were exposed to these on-the-land experiences. They shared with each other their thoughts and feelings. It was noticed that while out on the land, the children felt free, while in the classroom they had to follow rules and routines, and so had less time to express themselves and develop their language and communication skills, which included their emotions.

⁸ Slide hill is a place on top Mosquito Creek know as Tam̥k'aw̥da deh.

It was Ms. Lucy Lafferty who organized the puberty camps that I was involved with. This was a unit we implemented adhering to the Dene Kede curriculum (Government of the Northwest Territories, 2002). We started the camps for girls in grades 5-6 and continued in junior and senior high school. During the camps, I spend about a week on the land with high school girls. Together with the assistance of an Elder, I pass on the knowledge about the puberty rites to our students (the curriculum is described in Section 5 below). The teachings and practice of puberty rites of passage are as vital for supporting the girls as they become women today as they were in the past. The Elders also expressed and taught very important aspects of Tłı̨chǫ world view, one that can only be expressed through the use of Tłı̨chǫ language especially out on the land.

The puberty rites of passage teaching is a very delicate lesson; some people might not be comfortable teaching it, and some people are uncomfortable learning it. However, today it is taught through the curriculum incorporating the teachings of health and safety. For the girls, they are challenged by having to go through the rites of passage. This program helps them to learn about self-confidence and not to be afraid to participate in the teachings, because it is all about learning about oneself. It enables them to deal with their own healing and to take risks to challenge how they can become a woman. To become a woman is to understand what the role of a woman is. Learning through healing and learning the language of healing and lifestyle is all connected to becoming strong mature women and mature adults. The program has to be very well-structured and the teaching has to be authentic so that the girls learn how to become strong women.

One important aspect of these teachings is related to the goal, discussed in James (2016), of having the NWT education system based on Indigenous research, drawing from lived

experiences of Indigenous educators and Indigenist allies (Wilson, 2008) and applying the Indigenous pedagogies that show the ways for Aboriginal children, youth and families to find their trails to becoming capable people that are uniquely their own (James, 2016, p. 9).

In the case of the puberty camps, the priority would be teaching Tłıchǫ while the students are on the land. Land-based vocabulary related to language on puberty lessons needs to be taught. The Elders expressed that our Tłıchǫ culture had been taken away from our children over the years; it had gotten to the point that our language had to be taken back and children had to gain the knowledge to speak our language. Our children were to be taught all the words that they would need on the land to participate in the puberty camps. The Elders, instructors and camp helpers would have to be fluent in Tłıchǫ when they are helping at the camp.

5. Current Puberty Camps

The current puberty camps were started in the mid-1990s to teach girls skills, the Tłıchǫ language, and to build a strong character that will enable women to persevere in the future. In the beginning, the camps were located far from the community so that girls could not contact their parents or friends. The camps were also scheduled in the winter, so that they would learn to work in the cold and deep snow. Over the years, this has changed. Currently the schedule for the camps is based on the school calendar, and the camps are now located closer to the community.

On-the-land teachings provide basic skills and associated oral Tłıchǫ language through daily activities with the Elders. From early morning until late evening the girls are speaking Tłıchǫ. The goal for the girls is to listen and learn while doing physical work. As young girls learn to connect with the land, they will thrive by doing the basic tasks like gathering *dehkw'ıt*—dried twigs— for

starting fire, and *k'àhdzàa*—red dried willow—for smoking fish, meat and hides. These activities will help young girls to become responsible while they are learning the Tłchq language.

Often as young women go through puberty rites, their concentration is more on electronics than the transition their bodies are going through. I have observed two problems with this. First, they are not intertwined with the language of their own body. This makes it difficult for them to express and communicate what they are going through. Second, when they are not ready to share, they choose to have relationships with their electronics rather than with the others.

Another serious problem is that many young girls cannot communicate in Tłchq with others due to many barriers of vocabulary and dialect differences. Also, there are no terms in Tłchq for some modern pieces of equipment, items and objects, such as ‘cell phone’ or ‘satellite dish’. Nevertheless, we do our best to always speak in our language while explaining lessons.

In the past, Elders and language/culture teachers came to the camps ready to teach the girls. Now, preparation is completed before leaving the school. The teaching team stays at the camp. Once at the puberty camp, the schedule and list of activities are explained to the teaching team: Tłchq teachers and Elders. Each day, the teams are assigned hands-on-activities and associated language to teach the group of girls. Prior to the team working with the girls, the language and cultural coordinators go over the daily activities and language with them. In this way the team will understand what they are teaching the girls. They are also prepared in how to answer the girls’ questions. At the end of each day, the girls, Tłchq teachers, and Elders share their experiences. At this time, the girls can ask questions of the teaching team. In answering, Elders usually tell stories based on their experiential knowledge. As the girls ask about how they should behave on the land,

members of the team are sure to explain appropriate behaviour. For example, laughing loudly at night is taboo. If you do, nature will be upset causing the spirits to curse you.

Before the school can take the students on the land, instruction is given to the students and to their parents. Permission slips are sent home with a list of things for students to take on the land. Signed permission slips are returned to the school. Elders visit the classroom and take part in preparing the students by telling about their experiences. Tł̄chq stories are shared to teach young girls. Some girls expressed that they were afraid of going through puberty stages, for example their body changing, the flow of blood when they got their period, and preparing and protecting themselves when they are going to have relationships with boys. To assist in the puberty camp experience, the nurse from the community is invited to talk about the stages of puberty: how and why the body changes; how to take care of their body; and who they can talk to if they need to talk. The addition of the nurse and her role has become an important component of the puberty camp.

Once everyone has arrived at the site of the puberty camp, brainstorming the daily lesson schedule starts after supper with the whole group. The daily activities schedule is reviewed and explained to the girls and participants. Everyone is included to do the work. Roles and responsibilities are explained and the girls have to do the work. Safety is important. Demonstration of how they squat down to relieve themselves, if there is no outhouse, is also given. The girls are made aware that they have their own trail for walking to the outhouse, and to go into the area to collect firewood and spruce boughs. The Elder explains how they have to cover the ground after relieving themselves, during their time of the month. Exposing menstrual blood is taboo and disrespectful. Its power can affect guns, fishing nets, food and some people, and can attract animals to the area.

On the land, everyone helps to set up the camp. The main work of the day is to collect poles from trees and spruce boughs to make a teepee and line the ground as a floor.

Setting up the teepee – The teepee is used for outdoor cooking and, in the springtime, also to sit and share and do demonstrations. The Elder women repeat how many trees and poles are needed to support the teepee. The camp helpers show the girls that they will go and help get poles. They will need gloves, proper clothing and footwear, mosquito/bug jacket and hat. The camp helpers lead the way and describe what type of trees they need to look for. When they identify a long straight fresh spruce tree, they chop it down. The helpers and the Elder show the girls how to cut off the barks and the branches. Twenty long poles are collected and all the branches are chopped off. Peeling the bark off the tree is demonstrated. Spruce trees are sticky when they're fresh so gloves are needed to be worn. They need to start peeling the bark from the top of the pole, it's easy when the tree is fresh because the tree bark rips off all the way into a long strip. The poles are hauled setting on the shoulder of each person; they lean the poles against trees to dry at the camp for the day.

During that time the cooks are cooking so the group can rest and watch. The girls freshen up and take a lunch break. After lunch they gather firewood and dry willows for outside cooking. By mid-afternoon, they all come together on the ground around the fire. The Elder talks to them about protocols at the campsite: safety at the camp when they go to washroom; not to wander off; not to take or use sharp working tools and equipment; natural sharp objects, rocks, tree trunks, insects, pointed wood and willows; not to take any types of berries and eat them; not to pick plants unless you know about plants.

Setting up the spruce hut – The spruce hut is built of trees, it is traditionally used as the shelter for young girls during their first menstrual cycle. A frame is built from three or more

spruce poles, and then spruce trees are laid against it to make the walls in a circular form. When the spruce hut is ready, the girls cover the ground with spruce boughs for thick flooring and to insulate it. The Elder tells them they will collect spruce boughs. She shows the girls what kind of boughs they will collect. *Du hanu ʔoo aahle ha ne gòhdi*. She says to them, this is the kind of boughs you will collect, spruce boughs that are full of nice green needles. Hold the branch and break it off like this. *ʔoo nezʔi xè detl'oo sù du hanì wetsʔi k'eahsì gòhdi*. Off they follow the Elder and watch how she looks for spruce tree and breaks off spruce branches. She fills the branches in her arm and places the branches in a canvas bag or on an 8x10 flat canvas sheet. The Elder woman repeats to them that they need a clear centre in the middle of the hut for fire. Lastly, they put an entrance log in the opening. The Elderly woman observes the hut; when she sees a gap, she tells them to cover more with branches because if it's in winter they'll be cold or they can freeze. She tells the girls to try sitting in the hut or they can sleep in there to test how brave they are and how brave they will become. The Elder, culture coordinator and the teacher test the girls' skills. They can tell if the girls have listened, and followed instructions in Tłı̨ch̨o to do the work.

Setting up the big tents – This is one or more canvas tents that are used for cultural activities. Often, one is used for materials and to store food, and another is used for daily activities. The girls clear off all the branches away from the tents and on the trail. The next task is to gather kindling for the fire for the cultural tents and the teepee. When the tents are all ready, the flooring with the spruce boughs is put together and the wood stove and stovepipes well set up and heated. Poles are set over the fire for hanging or drying things. To make a floor for the tent, the Elder, and the assistant demonstrate how to pin the branches in the ground in the shape of the

tent. They leave the middle opening for the fire. The Elder and helpers see if there's enough boughs, the girls bring their gear into the tent. They select their spots to set their bedding.

Supper is ready – it was prepared outside. The cooks and helpers let us serve ourselves; they answer questions from the students in T̄h̄ch̄q̄ when students ask, pointing to food: What is this? *Aȳi ne?* The cook says the word in T̄h̄ch̄q̄. *Kwetsàa ne* - it is porridge. *Bò ne* - it is meat. Everyone sits on the ground in front of the oilcloth (tablecloth). The Elder says grace in T̄h̄ch̄q̄ before they eat. Next, the girls are taught to sew, and taught the name of the fabric, thread, needle, scissors and the little bag for storing their sewing supplies. The Elder teaches about the materials and tools that will be used for sewing.

Feeding the fire – is making an offering to the fire. Anywhere that we camp and travel we make an offering to the land, water and graves. The Elder explains why we practice this custom. The earth is created by God who created everything. We have to appreciate all creation and have respect for that. Everything that is made for us, God gave that to all people to survive and to use for their livelihood. We have to say *masi* to N̄h̄ts̄l̄, our Creator, and our ancestors who have been on this land to watch over us. The Elder says to the girls to take a bit of tobacco, tea, sugar, salt, piece of bannock. After we all take our offering the Elder asks us to stand. She puts a big bowl by the fire and tells the girls to watch her as she puts her offering in the bowl. As she puts in her offering in the bowl, she kneels on the ground and makes the sign of the cross twice. Before the girls follow her instructions, she tells them to pray in their thoughts for their needs, also to say *masi* for good health and their families. Once they all have put their offerings in the bowl, the Elder takes the bowl and starts talking to the fire loudly so nature can hear her, then she pours the offering into the fire calling to our ancestors to accept the food and to protect us

from negative things, especially the girls. *Ts'èko ʔq̄hdaà k̄ò ghàʔeedi k̄ò, k̄ò ts'ò hòt̄l'ò gode, dè yùhkw'o gha. Naxìghàʔets'ùdù sù wet'à gots'àahdi, asù wedzu ts'à gok'èahdi, t'eeka ḡl̄l̄ x̄l.*

When the girls are out on the land, the language is embedded in nature. When they are out on the land, they hear a lot of language that is related to their passage of rites and to the land. While they work on building the shelters, the Elderly women give instructions in T̄h̄ch̄q̄. *Wha n̄àhwhah* - take the poles. *Wha tai n̄àhwhah ḡà el̄ihsà* - use three poles and tie them together. *Ts'iahkwia l̄q̄ wem̄q̄ n̄àʔaà ʔaahle* - use lots of trees and put them around the poles. *X̄àḡq̄ʔàa sù ʔoo l̄q̄ en̄idaahwhah, x̄àḡq̄ʔà-le aahle*-fill in the gaps with lots of spruce boughs, there should be no gaps or holes. The Elders also always repeat to them to watch themselves, to continue to work and learn. At this time, the young women must always be aware of “self” and how their actions and words affect their surroundings.

6. M̄òht'a Gots'eèhk'q̄q̄ Yatù – Learning T̄h̄ch̄q̄ Language to Thrive

During the puberty ritual that has varied over time, young women learn language that enriches their knowledge and understanding of themselves and the world around them. Everything they learn is tied to our T̄h̄ch̄q̄ language; the terms show them that even the smallest particles such as spruce needles are relevant to observing their surrounding and gaining the knowledge to use what they see. Without the language, it would be impossible to understand from a T̄h̄ch̄q̄ perspective. In this section, I will provide examples of the importance of the T̄h̄ch̄q̄ language to thrive as women.

When sitting alone in the tent during my menarche, I thought a lot about the terms the older women were teaching me. I considered *T̄h̄ch̄q̄ n̄èk'e⁹* and how to use our language to

⁹ Translates as ‘the place the T̄h̄ch̄q̄ belong’.

describe it. One term I will never forget is *anihots'èehwhù*. This concept is about developing character. To do this I had to eat just a little, gather wood for my fire and spruce boughs for my floor, keep my tent clean and tidy, sew, and prepare for everything such as getting the kindling ready for the next day's fire and getting snow for water. This term in particular shows how powerful language is when learning to accept daily happenings and skills that will lead to a healthy life.

The term *anihots'èehwhù* is rarely used. For this reason, one of the goals of the Elders is for young women to learn these abstract concepts for critical thinking and life skills. This classic language it is about knowing your character through Tłı̨ch̓ language and activities in town as well as on the land. It is about taking care of yourself, family, community and the land that allows women to thrive.

Another term is *wexè eghàlats'eeda*. While sitting in the tent during menarche, I thought about this term a lot as I worked for or with older women, who gave me instruction and direction, so I would learn to keep busy. *Wexè eghàlats'eeda* is still used on a daily basis, and continues to be important as it helps you to think about working with other people and materials, and also with nature. The term expresses the Dene law to help others and it is a sign of respect to be called upon to assist in tasks or sharing food and knowledge.

Wexè eghàlats'eeda is important because it is always challenging to do what they tell you to do. This is true when it is something new and when you have to figure out how to follow their instructions, but it also prepares young women to face new challenges throughout their life. To do sewing for women who are already skilled means that often you have to do it again.

Understanding this concept teaches young women to build relationships with other women, other

people and the land that includes all beings.¹⁰ It is about communicating with language and learning to understand that criticism is not harmful to a person's character. One example I will never forget is when my auntie Dzıdı, said *Goèhzoò nàzıılı dıı* meaning that my stitches were so far apart that the snow would get inside the *dzıhke* – wrap-around moccasins.

Another term I thought a lot about was *mòht'a goèhk'ò*. It is how the people in our camp referred to me from the time they put the kerchief on my head to the time when they removed it and I became a visitor in my family's camp. This concept is big and it refers to the whole of me during the time I was going through the *ts'èko zòhdaà* (transition) to become a woman. It impacts the whole female person because it forces the young girl to be an adult: think like an adult, work like an adult, and overcome fears related to body changes, how to be safe after becoming a woman, going for wood and water, noises in the bush, and of behaving incorrectly around food and other people. It also teaches how to observe yourself and others.

During the time of *Mòht'a Goèhk'ò* the young girls realize they don't know what will happen including what type of dreams they may have. It is during this time that they learn about their own power and gifts that can be spiritual. If a young girl does not understand the gift of power that is given her, they can become afraid because they do not know how to relate to their power. *ʔık'òò* (medicine power) is given to them if they are to be a healer, which comes later in life.

While *gowhatsòò nàhdè* (being isolated), I wanted to join my parents and the people, but I was worried about how people would think about me if I didn't succeed. Like women before me, I stuck with it and in doing that I learned to love my language and what it means to be a

¹⁰ Dene believe that everything has spirit including wind, rocks, water as well as plants and trees.

Tłchq woman. Like other women, I learned to be a reliable and a capable person. I learned to live on my own and find my own solutions, and to respect the personal autonomy of others.

After four and a half months in isolation, I was taken back to my parents' tent where I was referred to as a *xàhtq* (visitor) by those in the camp. Once again I was thinking about the language. Why were the people calling me *xàhtq*? Until then I thought it referred to people visiting from other places, yet even my close relatives called me *xàhtq*. My uncle and an older friend explained that they called me *xàhtq* because I had been separated completely from the men and boys, and some women, especially the older ones. I had become a different person and they - including my siblings - had to get used to me again.

7. Conclusion

As I reflect back of my experience to accept my passage of rites on the land, I had not realized this practise can be taught in the schools and out on the land. It took me so many years to share how I had learned being in isolation during my rituals in my puberty camp. I am so fortunate to have been there at the right time otherwise I would never had learnt what it means to make campfire. If I was not given this opportunity to understand the roles of becoming a woman, transitioning and changes, I would never have thought of using the tools to teach the young girls. Using my story was a very valuable teaching tool. To have the proper objectives of the following key points is important. To train the teachers and young mothers is a huge repetitive lesson but it is needed for them to learn the oral tradition, the main goal is to learn the oral language through puberty camps. Students can and will learn language in a natural environment. We learn by listening, understanding as we go with the flow of sounds. The camps have passed on the teachings on the land, Tłchq oral traditions, Tłchq history, beliefs, survival skills, Spirituality,

traditional practices from one generation to another. Camps are set up away from the community for the young and old people to meet and to converse in order to learn the oral traditions by observing, doing and speaking the Tł̓ch̓q̓ language. Tł̓ch̓q̓ is required to be practised in order to acquire new knowledge and new skills. All these practices are substantiated by the rich language of the Tł̓ch̓q̓ Nation.

Languages are spiritual and powerful. They are sacred, beautiful, pretty and cute, especially when they are spoken from the heart. Languages are amusing. Language can be a habit of speaking, entertaining whether loud or whispering. Languages are colourful and very lively. The joyful sounds of various languages fill the air with jokes and teasing. Let's go forward with the gift of languages. Let's embrace our world with languages and pass them on to all those who will fill up their *ʔq̓htsi* (packing bag). We have to love all languages from the heart and body to respect, cherish and speak our mother tongue every day. We have to accept all languages because they are all creations of mother earth that gave us the words from the soil. Every season, various types of languages develop through birth of nature. We have to live and work with new arrivals. All new and old forms of languages empower us as humans. We look forward to face new challenges with languages. This is how we have to heal the wounds of languages. Some people that come to live in our region have been very encouraging in telling us to speak our language and practice our culture. I thank and praise those people. They never gave up on helping us to shape who we are as Indigenous worthy people. They knew that our language and culture is important and we were born to hold on to what was given to us. There is hope for building capacity and creating speakers. I have witnessed many non-speakers become fluent speakers and revive their Indigenous language back to the fullest.

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Appendix: List of words and phrases that go with puberty rites

People



Tłıchǫ	English	Meaning of the word
ꜱǫhdaa	Elder	Elders are our resources when taking young girls out on the land. They provide knowledge, wisdom and instruction in all things and are spiritual advisors.
mǫht'a gǫehk'ǫ	I made fire outside.	A girl is at her time to make fire, meaning she is at the puberty stage.
ts'aht'ıı	hooded one	An Elder woman called out to the people that there is a ts'aht'ıı among us. The girl is to keep her head covered all the time during her time at her first menstruation. In my day, I wore a kerchief. The girl's forehead is covered so she cannot see far and she is told not to look at men and hunters. Her eyes can create sickness, bad luck and confused thought among men.
xàhtǫ	visitor	Xàhtǫ refers to a girl as a visitor before transitioning into womanhood. It is her transition into a young woman. She will go through different physical transformations. When the young girl moves back to the family tent, the people identify her as a visitor because she was away for a length of time.

Food


Tɬchɔ	English	Meaning of the word
Bò eyts'q asì wedoò gòhłı sì yezà ha-le.	She will not eat fresh meat or any wild food that has blood.	It is a conflict with the animals; you cannot mix animal blood with your menstrual flow. It shows respect for all wildlife/animals. Eating fresh meat or fish will cause menstrual flow to be heavy. It could create sickness for the hunter and family.


Sleeping Gear

Tɬchɔ	English	Meaning of the word
ʔqtsì	packing bag	ʔqtsì is used for packing personal gear.
kwizah	pillow	The girl uses only her own pillow during her puberty stages. Her family will ask to burn her pillow when they approve of her well-being.
tè	ground blanket	To sleep or sit on when it's placed on the ground, a seating mat.
ts'òh	blanket	The girl has to have her own blanket and only she uses the blanket.
wet'à nats'eetee	sleeping gear	The blanket and covers that we sleep in.
t'òhmbàa dzeè nàzaa	day tent, camp tent during the day	The girl moves and lives in the tent after her first experience living in a tepee or spruce hut. It might be small. To live in a tent will help the girl to maintain her skills. She has to be up early to tidy up the tent. She has to change the spruce boughs and clear off the entrance. In different season she has to keep up with the day to fulfill her chores.

<p>tł'qmbàawòa or nìhbàawòa</p>	<p>tepee</p>	<p>Tepees have been our family homes for many years. In earlier times they were made of caribou hides. A tepee was used for the girl when she enters her home during her stages of her menstrual cycle. Tepees are still used as a smoke house to work on our traditional food and also to cook and eat in the tepee. We also use the tepee for cleaning fish and meat and to dry them in the smoke. They are also used for having friends to mingle and meet, to relax and meditate. Now tepees are made with canvas or plastic tarps.</p>
<p>to tł'qmbàa nàɹaa or to nìhbàa nàɹaa</p>	<p>camp tent at night</p>	<p>It is a very calming sight. It has to be so the girls will be calm before they go to sleep.</p> 
<p>ts'imqòkò</p>	<p>spruce hut Ts'ı is tree, mqò is a circle, kò is shelter/house.</p>	<p>At the beginning of isolation, a spruce hut was used as a shelter in the old days for a young girl during her puberty rites. In the puberty camp, the girls help build the hut with spruce trees and patch the open gaps with spruce branches. Ts'imqòkò is sometimes used.</p> 

Tools and Equipment

Tḥchq	English	Meaning of the word
ʔqhtsḷ	canvas pack bag	ʔqhtsḷ is very handy for packing. You need to have a strap called a tumpline that sits on your forehead and bears the weight of the pack. You can use ʔqhtsḷ for packing anything, for example, meat or gear when travelling over a portage. ʔqhtsḷ is better than packing in an open tarp. 
k'ets'ege	packing	The girls are taught how to pack with ʔqhtsḷ or using open material or a tarp. They have to balance the weight to walk. It is important to balance your packing and balance your pace when walking. If not your pack can hurt you. The girls are taught how to pack which is another key experience.
ʔqhtsḷ dagoèʔqò ʔaahle.	Fill up your packing bag.	Elders say, fill up your ʔqhtsḷ with your learning. We all need to encourage our young people to fill up their ʔqhtsḷ and cherish all the skills and knowledge for them to live life to the fullest and be independent as Indigenous people.
kwit'a	tumpline	Kwit'a is a head strap (tumpline) that supports the pack and stabilizes the head when packing ʔqhtsḷ.
ekà	traditional twine snare	Ekà is used for rabbit snaring. The girls are taught how to make traditional snares and the modern snare wire that are used more in the communities now. They are taught to make snares, identify rabbit trails, set the snares. When a rabbit is snared, the Elder



		demonstrates how to skin the rabbit, cut it up into parts, clean the meat and cook all the parts of the rabbit.
satsòxa xòò	snare wire	<p>The girls are taught how to make traditional snares and the modern snare wire that are used more in the communities now.</p> 
gah gahwò gahkwì gahdzaà gahgòò gahdzeè gahts'òò gahwò gahts'ìì gahdaà gahkwìghò gahghòò gahdzeèbàa	rabbit rabbit fur rabbit head rabbit leg rabbit front legs rabbit heart rabbit kidney rabbit liver rabbit guts rabbit eyes rabbit brain rabbit tooth rabbit ears	There are many words to learn relating to rabbits.



Water and Snow



Tḥchq	English	Meaning of the word
tı eyıts'q zah zah iḥtsı k'è	water and snow place for getting snow	To respect all living things the girl is not to go close to the lake water. The water is pure and sacred. Water is used for drinking, food preparation and washing. A girl's friends or female family members fetch water for her in the summer. In the winter the girl collects snow in a certain spot to use for drinking and cooking and from a different spot for washing her clothes. The girl has to have a place to pour waste water that she used for washing herself and clothes only. Waste food goes in tree trunks for the animals to pick on but that area has to be further from her tent.
tı daehsò Tı lq nedq nıdè neḡdàà ʔadea ne.	she spurts water If you drink too much water you will be heavy.	The girl is not to drink too much water for the first couple of weeks because she will be very heavy. To avoid being heavy the girl is asked to spurt water from her mouth.


Plants and Trees

Tḥchq	English	Meaning of the word
ʔoo, ʔolı, ʔorı	spruce boughs	ʔoo is the main floor material and ground insulation in the tent or tepee. ʔoo is used for medicine, air freshener, to brush off dust or anything that needs cleaning.
ʔolıgoò ʔorıgo	spruce needle	The girl is tested for patience and laziness so she has to pick, pull or collect lots of spruce needles. During this time she is told to reflect and meditate as she finds a quiet place to test herself. The aroma scent of spruce that she inhales will help her to think of her stability.

		
adzì detsì nàèdì	lichen plant medicine	<p>Lichen is food for caribou. It is used as herbal medicine. The girl is taught how to make herbal medicine. Lichen is prepared by boiling until the juice is brown. The juice is run through clean cloth, after cooling down the girl can drink the juice when she has stomach cramps during her time. Traditional medicine is used every day in some homes. The family collect various plants and berries to make remedies as medicine. The aroma of traditional medicines is good to have in the homes because it is naturally healing and our people feel very comfortable smelling the scent in the house, especially the freshly laid spruce boughs on the ground of the tent.</p> 
detsìdzèè ts'ìdzèè nàèdì	spruce gum spruce gum medicine	<p>If you chew spruce gum, you will have problems with your teeth while you are still young. Spruce gum juice/medicine is used often for various types of infections or colds.</p>

		
gots'agoò	Labrador leaf	<p>This plant is used as traditional medicine and air freshener by boiling the plants on the stove or in an outside fire. The girl can drink the medicine if she has cramps or a cold. Inhaling the aroma clears the sinus and the mind. The woodstove gives extra aroma. People use it for tea - it can be drunk anytime.</p> 

jie	berries	<p>The girl cannot eat any type of berries. She can flow heavily and have red flushed skin as a mark that she did not follow instructions. She cannot walk over berries because berries are picked and eaten by other people. If people know that ts'aht'ᵐ has been in that area, they will not pick berries there and they will not eat the berries. This practice is done today. If a female had been in an area, over berry patches, others will not go there to pick and eat berries.</p> 
kw'ah	moss	<p>Moss are moist, soft, fresh and pinkish. It is used for cleansing. The girl searches for a moss patch and pulls the moss out from the muskeg. There are many types of moss. This moss is the type that the girl will look for and collect big batches. Moss with short rootlets is used for baby diapers and for cleansing the body. Other types that are long and lumpy are used for cleaning pots and pans.</p> 

Ts'èko kw'ah hàhts'1.	A woman is tearing moss out of the ground.	
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Eating – Utensils

Tḥchọ	English	Meaning of the word
beh	knife	Eating utensils are given to the girl. She is the only one to use these utensils and her utensils have to be marked so other people do not use them. She cannot use utensils from her family and other people.
etsḥḥḥ	spoon	
kw'àh	plate	
kw'àwò	tablecloth	
libò	cup	

Clothing for the Girl

Tḥchọ	English	Meaning of the word
ʔah	snowshoes	Many people use ʔah when they are out on the land in winter. It helps them to walk steadily on top of the snow. Without snowshoes a person will get into deep heavy snow and find that it is difficult to get out fast. Some people get hurt when they get into deep hard

		snow due to sharp rocks, wood or broken sticks. The use of snowshoes make it easy to hunt and run after animals. Snowshoes protects feet blisters and helps strengthen muscles and balance.
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Feeding of the Fire

Tḥchḳ	English	Meaning of the word
dehkw'11	dried twigs	Twigs are used to start a fire and build flames fast. Some people use twigs for other uses.
Kḳ nehso-le. Neèhdà k'oòts'oa ade-a ne.	Do not blow on the fire. You will have a pointed chin.	Blowing on the sparks to make fire, the way you form your mouth and lips will transform your chin.
tso whegḳḳ k'àhdzàa	dried wood willow	How to make fire with only dry twigs and kindling. The girls collected dry twigs and birch bark off birch trees or wood, their lesson is to make fire using dry twigs or birch bark and kindling. Papers are not to be used to make fire. The girls have to watch.
K'àhdzàa ayi1 ne?	What is dry willow?	
dehkw'11	twigs	
Tsogwìà	scraps of wood	
tsoèhkw11	wood chips	
tso nàahtsḳ	gather wood	
tso 2aahḳ	collect wood	




k'it'1 whegqò	dry birchbark	
kòèhtla	she lights the fire	
kò ts' iihhtla	let's light the fire	
Nì kòihhtla.	You light the fire.	Why does kò mean so many things in our language? House, fire: wherever we light a fire on the land is home.
Dànighò kò ts'ehso-le?	Why do you not blow on the fire?	
Amì kò dèhtla?	Who lit the fire?	
Amber kò dèhtla ne.	Amber lit the fire.	This is a key experience. It involves identifying, gathering, lighting, fire, twigs, birchbark, branches.

Safety

Tḥchq	English	Meaning of the word
geh	fire poker	A fire poken has to be peeled. Geh is an essential item to have and to use, for example, for poking firewood to spark up and to balance the wood, or to unblock the air hose on the stove. Geh protects and provides balance, to open and close tent flaps. Elders use geh for many useful things due to their age. When the baby sits on the swing, geh is used for pushing the swing. Geh can be used to make a banging noise to keep animals and dogs away from property.



Self-care

Tɬɨchɔ	English	Meaning of the word
Kw'ah ts'i k'e dawhela, egɔ̀ɔ̀ gha.	The moss is on the tree to dry.	<p>When the girls pack the moss back to camp, they put them up on a tree branch or willows to dry. When the moss are dried they will clean the moss, taking the twigs, sticks and dirt out off the moss. They will rinse the moss with water and put it to dry again. After they will store the moss in the bags and use them for their cleansing. Moss are natural healing tissue, moss rejuvenates the body. Moss was used in the homes in the past. It is used by woman during their menstraul cycle and for baby diapers. Moss is very soft and is used because it gives off no odour. Babies raised with moss do not give off any odour nor do they suffer from diaper rash.</p> 
Wɨni nàtso Siidɨhwhɔ̀ɔ̀	Strong mind Self-care	The girl has to be strong and clear minded for everything that she accomplishes and not to be afraid

Dedzı ha-le	Not to be afraid	<p>while she lives by herself. She has to believe the teachings are sacred and powerful lessons. Self-care is taught; there might not be any source of materials for cleansing. Moss, water or snow is used for cleansing. Every day she has to be prepared in order to accomplish what needs to be done.</p> <p>These sacred knowledges were taught and told right from the beginning to the young girl so she will be aware and to understand the conflicts that she might place on herself unknowingly in a situation that will mark her for life.</p>
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Traditional Protocols

Tıchq	English	Meaning of the word
golakw'qò tat'eètł'ı	stringing between the fingers	<p>Tradition of binding fingers: Tying caribou hide string between the fingers on both hands is to test the girl to see if she is able to work well with her hands. The girl has to do all the work as fast as she can without losing the string. The purpose of binding the fingers is not to have big gaps between the fingers. She have to understand that her hands and fingers are connected to work with her body and to treat everything with respect so whatever she works on will be accepted.</p>

		
<p>Įwhąą goįlą t'ą jie ts'eebe gha.</p>	<p>To work fast with our fingers.</p>	<p>To train her hands and fingers to work fast and other finger picking items, picking berries, the girl has to practice her skills so she starts with picking spruce needles as fast as she can without gloves. The type of spruce needles used for picking are smaller, to see how fast she can pick.</p> <p>Black jackpine cones, lesson for the day. This is the time of season when people harvest meat and fish in the fall also the animals store food for winter.</p> 

Traditional Rules and Beliefs associated with Women's Puberty Rites

Tɬchq	English	Meaning of the word
Daht'o, dahbo k'e wheda.	She sits on a log bench or swing.	Sitting on a bench or swing will lighten the weight of the girl. They say, if the girl sat on one of these for two days she will be light even though she's big and tall. If the girl didn't practice this she will be heavy even if she's tiny and skinny.
Nedaà hòneehdì. Godaà kò haewì gedì.	Protect your eyes. Lose your vision.	You cannot look far away because you will lose your vision, your eyesight. They say that if you look far into the distance, you will burn out your pupils. That's why the girl's hut is located in a wooded area and why she covers her head with a kerchief, so as not to look far into the distance.
Kw'itsjì ts'eèht'è-le.	We don't stretch out our legs.	Don't stretch out your legs when sitting, or frogs will get your legs. It is said by our ancestors. It is a traditional teaching, so as women we have to respect how we sit in any place. We are told to sit on our legs close together, not crossed legged. It is also a way of protecting yourself so that your space is not violated.

Positive Choices

Tɬchq	English	Meaning of the word
anìxots'èehwhì	building character, forming attitudes and behaviours	It is very important how you set yourself as a human being during puberty stages. The word <i>anìxots'èehwhì</i> will be emphasized every day until you learn to understand yourself or your daily behaviour.
dàni dq dets'it'jì	how you behave or create a habit	Everything you do, say, work and your desire will become your habit all your life.

Sewing

Tɨchɔ	English	Meaning of the word
belexàa	scissors	Be-lexàa, blade, knife - close together
ket'a	upper	Ke-t'a, feet, footwear- top of feet
datɨ	needle	Da-tɨ,
tɨ'ɨkw'eè, kw'e	thread	Tɨ'ɨ-kw'eè, string-sinew, sinew thread
lahsɨ	silk,	Lah-sɨ, silk embroidery thread
tɨ'ɨkw'eè	thread	Tɨ'ɨ-kw'eè, string-sinew, thread
deghats'etɨ	thread a needle	Degha-ts'eetɨ, in, through, -pull
nàɨlɨ	sew	Nà- ɨ lɨ Here you sew
wemɔɔ	around	It around
daetɨ'e	printed line	Dae- on, tɨ'e -print
Lats'èzɔ	thimble	Lats'èzɔ -cover over finger, la- finger, ts'è – on, zɔ - cover over
t'a	with	Wexe, t'a
Tɨ'ɨkw'eè welò eleàsah	Tie/make a knot on the end of the thread	Tɨ'ɨ- string, kw'eè- sinew, thread, we-lɔ -eleàsah, on- end-tie
xaat'a	cut	Xaa-t'a, it out- cut
Belexaa t'a daetɨ'e k'e wemɔɔ xaat'a	Cut around the printed line with the scissors.	Belexaa t'a- with scissors, daetɨ'e-printed line, k'e – on, wemɔɔ-around, xaat'a cut it out
Ketsat'ɨ nàets'ɨ	strout	ke, moccasin, - tsat'ɨ-around ankle, nàets'ɨ, material that is rip/teared/cut off by size, feet/metre