

ÁLENENEC: LEARNING FROM PLACE, SPIRIT, AND TRADITIONAL LANGUAGE

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Abstract / Résumé

This case study employed grounded theory to understand the nature and outcomes of a learning from place program that included instruction in the Aboriginal language, Sencoten. The research was authorized by the Saanich Indian School Board (SISB) and included a focus on research ethics in Aboriginal communities. Researchers found that learning from place and learning Sencoten in place focused on deepening relationship between the Saanich people and: their traditional places; Elders; their community, selves, and language. The research also discovered barriers to relationship building. Programs focused on learning from place, spirit, and traditional language hold great promise as a foundation for the Indigenization of education.

La présente étude de cas a eu recours à une théorie à base empirique pour comprendre la nature et les résultats d'un programme d'apprentissage à partir des lieux qui comprenait l'enseignement de la langue autochtone Sencoten. Autorisée par la Saanich Indian School Board (SISB), la recherche comprenait un accent sur l'éthique de la recherche dans les collectivités autochtones. Les chercheurs ont découvert que l'apprentissage à partir des lieux et de la langue Sencoten sur place se concentrait sur l'approfondissement des liens entre les Premières nations Saanich et leurs lieux traditionnels, leurs aînés, leur collectivité, eux-mêmes et leur langue. La recherche a également découvert des obstacles au renforcement des liens. Les programmes axés sur l'apprentissage à partir des lieux, ainsi que sur l'esprit et la langue traditionnels, sont très prometteurs pour fonder l'indigénisation de l'éducation.

We could hear the water swoosh from the kayak paddles as the Aboriginal paddler told a story to his non-Aboriginal companion. Long ago, there was a time when the creator actively taught the people how to live. This was the time when all things were human and could communicate with each other. The creator took some people and threw them out across the water. These people became these islands (today most people call these islands off the West Coast of the Province of British Columbia and in the North of Washington State the Gulf and San Juan Islands).

The creator told the island people and the Saanich people to take care of each other. This is why the roots of our word for island, *tetáces* mean relatives of the deep. For a very long time we took good care of these islands. These waters were teaming with fish because we were taught to respect them. This is what we have the responsibility to teach. The islands and the fish are our relatives (personal communication, Ian Sam, 2007; Elliot, 2005).

This essay describes the nature and outcomes of an Aboriginal education program. This program has an Aboriginal name, *ÁLENENEC* which means homeland. The program suffix is learning from place, spirit, and traditional language. Although interest in Indigenizing education and learning from place have pan-Indian expressions (see for example, Cajete, 1999; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001), we, the researchers and authors, were advised by our advisory committee representing the Saanich Indian School Board (SISB) to focus on the Saanich culture rather than pan-Indianism. This focus we are happy to have. Very little has been done to assess the effectiveness of learning from place in any culture.

A fundamental question considering the Indigenizing of education is about what knowledge a community considers most important. The regeneration of *ÁLENENEC* emerged from the question: what is knowledge of most worth to *Wsánec* people? Earlier research found that knowledge of most worth was associated with land and territory, and significant essentials of this knowledge: Elders as carriers, *Sencoten* language and place names, *Wsánec* history, teachings, stories and ceremony, sense of belonging and identity. We considered this knowledge foremost in the development of our *ÁLENENEC* program (Swallow, 2005). Provincially prescribed outcomes for the K-12 curriculum was not our focus. Rather, we chose to pursue the emergence of a curriculum entirely on what *Wsánec* people declared was of most worth to them.

The *ÁLENENEC* program was offered by the Saanich Adult Education Centre (SAEC) in May and June 2007. We chose this time frame to accommodate post-secondary students who finish in April and also be-

cause the warmer, drier weather made outdoor experiences better for participants. Initially offered as a pilot project in our adult upgrading STEP program in 2006, the program was offered for a second iteration with help from a Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) research grant and increased recruitment to include participants from the larger Wsánec community. Our objectives were to: 1) understand better what learning from place means to Wsánec people; 2) determine the outcomes of this program; and 3) contribute to the ethics of research in Aboriginal communities. Ten students age 19 to 43 participated and assisted in our program's development.

Keith Basso (1996) wrote *Wisdom Sits in Places* because place names reach deeply into other cultural spheres. Earl Claxton Jr., an advisor and student, said to us, "a place name is more than just a name of a place. A place name is very important in identifying with our homeland as each of those place names contains a history, an important meaning or a teaching" (personal communication, 22 September 2004). John Elliott Sr., our Sencoten teacher, said that teachings about place, "provide a sense of identity as Wsánec people. They provide a connection to place. Our people learn something from these places. They learn an important value, respect. This is Wsánec thinking" (personal communication, 8 February 2005).

Daily experiences in our program took place mostly at Wsánec places. Elders and participants shared their knowledge of a place's history, teachings and stories. As a group we also discussed Sencoten words that relate to a place's current and traditional value. Eco-cultural restoration projects, outdoor recreation and participant journaling fused practical meaning into our curricular experiences. The bringing together of people, particularly the Elders and our participants, breathed life into our collective experiences. The energy of the people and their stories guided us in our journey toward understanding a wisdom still held in Wsánec places.

In the next section, we describe the methods we used in our research. Then, we report and discuss our findings regarding the program's nature and outcomes. Finally, we conclude with what we believe is important about this program.

Case Study and Ethical Methods for Research in Aboriginal Communities

Overall, our research ethics followed the guidelines given by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for Aboriginal Research (McNaughton & Rock, 2002). The advancement of research ethics was a primary objective in our study. Many researchers

have been challenged regarding their ethics as they performed research in First Nations communities (Champagne & Goldberg, 2005). The comprehensive review of ethics by Ermine, Sinclair and Jeffery (2004) provided a context for our proposed project. These authors wrote of the schism that exists between Western and Indigenous worldviews and the need to better understand Indigenous perceptions of history, culture and knowledge.

Our study contributed to overcoming common ethical shortcomings by featuring collaboration rather than the imposition of academic views. The answers to our questions were found through conversations in the community. The voices of Aboriginal learners feature prominently in the findings. In writing the CCL proposal, a research and curriculum advisory committee was established with Elders, language instructors, Saanich Indian School Board members and former participants from the pilot project. We all collaborated in guiding the development of research questions, methodology, interview questions and the hiring of research assistants. Furthermore, we agreed that the SISB would be the first author of articles that came from this research and project. In short, this research was for this community.

Using grounded theory, we let theory emerge from the data collected (Charmaz, 2006). The researchers met with members of First Nations (program participants and members of the community) and research questions were open-ended. The method for data collection was notes taken of conversations such as interviews and group conversations.

Before the program began, we interviewed four participants from last year. Then, we interviewed the ten learners in this year's cohort. The researchers used a coding scheme leading to insights regarding the data (Charmaz, 2006). These emerging ideas were our time one results.

Adapting grounded theory to different needs is intrinsic to these methods (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Our departure from conventional grounded theory was a matter of focus. We did not focus on objectifying methods—analysis and categorization—as these are alien to Aboriginal culture (Ross, 1996). Rather, we looked for relationships rather than categories. Our focus meant that each person was perceived as a knowing, experiencing, contributing agent rather than a specimen to be categorized.

Internal reliability was increased by having more than one researcher read the notes of particular conversations. Overall, there were five researchers—the program instructor, a university professor, and three Aboriginal students. We held meetings with researchers, participants, advisory group members, and the community regarding agreed upon results. Relaying the evolving findings back to community members is

coherent with research ethics in Aboriginal communities. Initial findings led to a reformulation of the conversational questions. This process repeated until consensus was reached on a theoretical list of themes representing the nature of the learning from place program and its outcomes.

The secondary conversations explored the theoretical findings beginning to emerge from the data. What emerged from the study of data and the second round of interviews after the program further extended and refined the emergent theoretical findings. Such consideration was significant because its time-one, time-two structure enabled us to assess the outcomes of the project.

In summary, Aboriginal members collaborated in influencing grounded theory to fit their needs, values, and protocols. The next section explains the outcomes of the program as described by participants.

Six Program Outcomes

Employing grounded theory together revealed six outcomes. In the sections below, we use first-person voice such as *we* and *our* even though two of the researchers are non-Aboriginal. Each segment begins with a summary and then quotes the voices of Aboriginal learners to express some of the differences and richness. The outcomes were determined by the researchers from interview notes.

Altered Relationship to Place

The first outcome concerned the basic purpose of the program—the goal of understanding better how we can learn from our homeland. Our relationship with place was altered. Relationship with place became much more meaningful, connected and intimate. Learning in place taught us our stories, teachings, culture and the way of life of our ancestors. We are beginning to be able to culturally interpret temporal and physical expressions of our land. With the depth we now have, we can return to those places and learn more. We feel a responsibility to take care of our land.

“I think the way I look at my territory has changed dramatically—the way I look at plants, their Sencoten names, the environment, and the meanings of these places. I look where I step now. I have a much greater appreciation of where I am. Before, I took these things for granted. Now, I feel pretty lucky to live here.

I know this place as Cietnewale. Before, it was just somewhere to go. I now have a different attitude about the place. I take pride in what is there. Now I take my garbage away.

People need to be aware of taking their garbage away and not just leave it.” (Paul Sam Jr., self-trained artist, 5 July 2007)

“In many ways, I have reconciled with our land, our relationships, and our connection with our traditional spirit. This course has reawakened something that has been dead for a long time. Our reconnection to land is so vital to our existence and survival. I felt embraced like I was being guided to certain places, to care and absorb everything like the trees, ocean. The only other time I was at our Mountain was in high school, and I was taught Western history, the settlers of this place.

Returning to our island territories for me was like a re-birth process. I probably wouldn’t have got as much if it wasn’t for being in the longhouse. Because of the longhouse work I was allowed to grieve for these places. To go out there was an amazing experience.” (Rhonda Underwood, Masters student in counseling, 5 July 2007)

“I feel more connected to the land and the use of our territories. Seeing them made me envision our ancestors, what they did, and what my role would have been. I have greater appreciation for our family harvesting, hunting, fishing and celebrating. It would be very different from today. What comes is a picture in my mind of a place where we had fresh water. Every place we went to had a story. Our people had a use because the name tells us that. Life was so organized and routine, which was much easier.” (Ian Sam, Diploma student in linguistics, 5 July 2007)

“Now, I have more understanding of the importance of visiting places. Being there allows more connection. I use our Sencoten names when I talk about these places. I need to explain them to people and now I have more to help to explain them. There is a place near Pkols (Mt Douglas), Sicanen, means becoming Saanich. This course has been like becoming Saanich. I realize we now are way out of balance. We need to take a step back and look at things and get critical as a way of transformation.” (David Underwood, college student in fine arts, 9 July 2007)

“I definitely know my territory differently and have more respect for the responsibility of taking care of our land. We have a starting place for our families out there. My great grandfather had a home out there. We have history out there.” (Branden Wilson, maintenance worker, SISB, 12 July 2007)

“Part of the rediscovery I felt was my reconnection to the land. As a child I was taught about how this land is ours, how it is alive, and how to live and take care of it. I realized how in many ways I was out of balance with what I had learned about our land. The reconnection to our islands was like being home.” (Tracy Underwood, Masters student in social work, 12 July 2007)

“There is so much of my territory that I don’t know, like our islands. I have always tried to learn along the way. I use the place names I do know and spread the names to my friends.” (Menetia, Elisha Elliott, college student in community studies 16 July 2007)

“I have more awareness of how much was available to our people. Unity with land is how we were. Many of the problems in our community are because we have moved away from our connection to our land, Tenew. We haven’t been looking after our land respectfully. Our teachings tell us if we look after our land, it will look after us.” (Toby Joseph, councilor and social worker, 8 August 2007)

“I take the time and pay attention to my environment in new ways, and I ask my kids to do the same. We were picking Kexmin the other day. The kids catch on so quick to what we are doing. I teach them to not pick all from the same plant so that it remains here always. It is amazing how quickly they learn.” (Samantha Etzel, social worker, 10 August 2007)

Enhanced Relationship with Elders

The second outcome was enhanced relationships with Elders. We appreciated deepening relationships with Elders during the course, and we will continue to do so. We need to visit, talk and learn from Elders, before these Elders are gone. Elders know so much of the traditional knowledge and our own family history. We need to deepen and share the knowledge of Elders’ stories before it is too late.

“I look to the Elders and make sure I talk with them now. I appreciate the opportunity to see them, to visit with them, and to show my appreciation for them.” (Paul Sam Jr., 5 July 2007)

“My relationship with my Elders is something for them to decide. I’ve always loved them and acknowledged them for their knowledge. I have talked with more Elders lately. I think I have gained their trust.” (Ian Sam, 5 July 2007)

“I feel sad that I don’t see the Elders. My appreciation

for our Elders has always been very strong, but the course changed this. We have an urgent responsibility, because our Elders are not well. We need to learn from them before they are gone. All of our community's knowledge, history, teachings, language is housed in our Elders." (Rhonda Underwood, 5 July 2007)

"I feel a need to go see the Elders now, and learn the knowledge that they have. Elder Ray Sam told us so much it was hard to keep up. He was telling us about the different tides and their names. Tides were like a transit system that could take you where you wanted to go." (David Underwood, 9 July 2007)

"I have always had a good relationship with our Elders. I have become more close with some. We all have so much to learn from them and not much time. I should have been doing this a long time ago." (Branden Wilson, 12 July 2007)

"Working on the Sencoten conference was an amazing experience, something I have always wanted to see happen. In gathering the Elders, I got to know many of them much better." (Tracy Underwood, 12 July 2007)

"This class has provided opportunity to get to know many more Elders. It has offered a central place to be able to meet with them. They say if an Elder sees your face once, you are able to go visit them." (Menetia, Elisha Elliott, 16 July 2007)

"The stories our Elders shared with us come from our families' histories. These stories are not fictional but have a deep history. We need to know our stories and to carry them with us." (Toby Joseph, 8 August 2007)

"I got to know more of our Elders. They are always sharing the teachings and their knowledge. It is up to us to figure it out. We need to be aware, to listen, to learn, and to take the time to reflect on their teachings. Each Elder has her or his own gifts." (Samantha Etzel, 10 August 2007)

Changed Relationship with Community

The third outcome was a changed relationship with the community. We need to bring out what we learned in this course with our community. We learned to respect all our relatives. Our culture teaches us that everything, even plants, were once people. Restoring our plant communities is good. The first thing is to learn our culture. Then, we need development in our communities but with respect. We need to protect our land as well as protect and support our culture. This class was a good

model for respect and energy for ideas. We need to be culturally sensitive as we serve our communities.

“I want to give back to my community. I have been fortunate to have learned so much, like about the invasive species. The native plants are like our relatives. In our view everything around you is your relative. Everything before was a person, like the trees were once people, there is a story about that. It doesn't matter that restoration worked its way into our program, that it might not be 'traditional.' We are giving back and fixing something. We are creating a relationship with place. You recognize your friends.” (Ian Sam, 5 July 2007)

“Giving back? I think it is my own cultivation of our knowledge. I owe that to myself and to my community, learn more about Wsánec and continue learning.” (David Underwood, 9 July 2007)

“Some issues have become worse in the last little while. It makes me angry at our leaders. I think we need to be more open in our community and find positive ways to approach issues like development. I am not against development. But many of the ways we do things now are not Wsánec. We need to use our land but in respectful and healthy ways.” (Branden Wilson, 12 July 2007)

“I really appreciated our class—the strength and the sharing of ideas. The class allowed for people to care together with a vision, idea. There was energy in our group because we were in our places thinking and learning new things.” (Tracy Underwood, 12 July 2007)

“I have always talked about community and land. I have always had a desire to take a lead in protecting our land. This class has provided opportunity to talk with people who share similar thoughts and beliefs.” (Menetia, Elisha Elliott, 16 July 2007)

“There needs to be a push from the political side for people to see the importance of our ÁLENENEC program. This experience has allowed me to stand up and to show my community who I am, the commitment I have for my people.” (Toby Joseph, 8 August 2007)

“I am aware of more people within our community. I am worried about how will we protect our heritage in this place rather than just making money? I have been questioning what is really important in our community. The residential school

has left a huge hole in our culture. Our people have become so modern, and what have we lost? How do we get our kids to think about what is a good life, a life that was once ours, our traditions.” (Samantha Etzel, 10 August 2007)

Transformed Relationship with Self

The fourth outcome was knowledge that our true identity or self is in our land. Knowing our places means knowing our selves. We need to reconcile with our lands. We belong here, and knowing that and our other teachings is our way to grow as Wsá nec people. The program made us want to take action—to protect the environment and our culture and (often) to be teachers. Learning our history in place taught us about who we are as descendants of our ancestors. We have a unique and important way of knowing our land. We want to be and to share who we really are. Believing and living our ideas and feelings is crucial.

“I think I am not as selfish as I used to be. I was used to doing things for me when I should have been doing things for other people. My outlook has changed. My educational goals have changed. My identity has changed. I am more proud to be Wsá nec. Now I know there is so much to learn about myself, my people and our language. We are not some stereotypical Indians. I want to share what we really are. I am signed up for visual arts and I have an apprenticeship set up.” (Paul Sam Jr., 5 July 2007)

“I think I have changed. My vision is still the same but the experience has opened doors for me like the directed study with UVic. Believing in your idea is so important. I am thankful to be able to research further what I have learned.

Returning to place will help people heal. We are told by our Elders that grief is a part of daily life. Our traditional places give respite for grieving. We’ve stayed lost in addiction and in pain because we are so lost in our grief. Grief is not a weakness but is essential in building strength. Being in this course has helped me return to my whole self.” (Rhonda Underwood, 5 July 2007)

“I have always wanted to teach to children what I have learned. The portion of traditional knowledge in my brain has expanded.” (Ian Sam, 5 July 2007)

“Change is constant, inevitable. Learning our teachings is a positive way to grow. The teachings are the right information for our identity. Wsá nec people have always belonged here. Visiting our territory was the best thing for us. We

needed to go there and learn the meanings, the history, to carry these things. We belong to the land, the land does not belong to us.” (David Underwood, 9 July 2007)

“I think this course has made me more aware of how serious we need to be about land preservation. I now believe my spot in life is to find ways of protecting our land for the survival of our history and to teach our children to never lose what we have left.” (Branden Wilson, 12 July 2007)

“I was thinking about Wsánec people’s way of life. It made me wonder if our way of life has become only a feeling, as opposed to action. It has been meaningful to me to learn about putting thoughts into action.” (Tracy Underwood, 12 July 2007)

“I found I have been very emotional during the program. I think I have learned more about compassion, understanding where some of our youth are coming from, why they sometimes seem so lost, that our young people are hurting themselves.” (Menetia, Elisha Elliott, 16 July 2007)

“Our trip to our *tetáces* formed much of how I think about myself. The stories Ray told me that my grandfather planted those trees out at Tixen. My history is here. There was a change in the way I feel about myself. I belong to this land and our people. Nothing can take that away.” (Toby Joseph, 8 August 2007)

“I want to finish my Masters but in education. I know now that I want to teach our people. I think we all do better in something in which we are interested. I hope to help educate our people about our language and culture.” (Samantha Etzel, 10 August 2007)

Relationship with Language

The next outcome was increased commitment to learning our language. Our language, Sencoten, has become real and is a reflection of our identity as Wsánec people, but how do we continue to learn it? We enjoyed seeing the humor when our Elders talked with each other. Learning our language is learning the roots of words, our culture, our family histories, and our relation to place and, of course, our stories. Our language is open to interpretation and always growing inside us.

“Sencoten is different for me now than when I was a kid. Now I understand each word has a meaning, a history. I want to learn more.” (Paul Sam Jr., 5 July 2007)

“I found the language part of our course very positive. I

need and want more. I liked being in our group, the way we encouraged each other, the opportunity to speak. I felt comfortable in class. It was always interesting to see our Elders talking with each other, their humor.” (Rhonda Underwood, 5 July 2007)

“My understanding of my language has increased. So much of our language connects to our way of living and being. Our place names have impacted how I think. The root words and what they mean provide an understanding of how we organized things, how we named them. Our Elders tell us ‘you are thinking in English, you need to think in Sencoten.’ I realize there is a transformation in thinking in Sencoten. When addressing people in a group I speak from the heart. I feel more comfortable in using my language. I’m becoming me.” (Ian Sam, 5 July 2007)

“Learning our language will always be a growing process. Our Elders say Sencoten is a patient language. Anything I learn I take to heart. My perspective has changed. Our language is open to interpretation. We are taught an inherent meaning and then we can take it on and comprehend that meaning ourselves. To me it is always about perspective. Interpretation is part of our belief. In sacred belief there are 3 variations. *Heli* means lively, *sheli* means life, *sox heli* one’s life belief or life’s teaching. Some words are very personal, our sacred belief. I have heard that you cannot tell a lie in our language” (David Underwood, 9 July 2007)

“I wish I could have done a lot more just to talk, learn, and respect what our teachers are teaching. That connection to land and family is our language.” (Brandon Wilson, 12 July 2007)

“I really enjoyed the stories while learning the language. We could never get far on our travels without stories. I want to speak fluently one day.” (Tracy Underwood, 12 July 2007)

“Around my family we can understand and converse, not fluent, but there has always been a strong message that there is not much time left. It is scary that many of our older people do not even know any greetings in Sencoten.” (Menetia, Elisha Elliott, 16 July 2007)

“This experience has given me names and a history I was not aware of. I use the place names we learned. Taxen, Tileqen. When I see things like Camas, I think about our words *klo,el*. Learning our language was a profound experience

for me. Using our language is about connecting with our identity. The fact that I can now introduce myself in my language is huge. My pride and self-respect are higher than they have been in a long time.” (Toby Joseph, 8 August 2007)

“I have been dreaming in our language. I know I have so much more to learn. I have spent my whole life here and am just beginning to learn our language. I learned a lot from our classes.” (Samantha Etzel, 10 August 2007)

Barriers

The sixth outcome was knowledge about barriers to learning program content. Barriers include time, money, accreditation and the availability of Sencoten classes. Many people are unaware of what goes on at the SISB. Fear of failure with learning the language is common. We need the emotional space to share what is really going on inside. A lack of Elders is and will be a barrier. One barrier is the Western paradigm and its assimilative powers. There is a lack of support and understanding by our own communities, employers and leaders who do not see how the program might relate to our jobs within our community.

“I need to make money to live. Before, I was hesitating to be in this course because of money and a lack of transferability of the course, not that that really matters, it is just a reality. Now I would recommend this course for anyone. We need to get the word out, like having the possibility of Sencoten in the evenings.” (Paul Sam Jr., 5 July 2007)

“Money and accreditation. I think there is also fear, fear of not being able to learn and have it stay. We need to stick together as a community and create opportunity for healing. We need a longer time to allow the opportunity for personal things to come out.” (Rhonda Underwood, 5 July 2007)

“Money was a barrier. But mostly the barrier that comes to my mind is the lack of Elders.” (Ian Sam, 5 July 2007)

“I think our biggest barrier is the Western paradigm. We need to remove ourselves from that mode of thinking to understand our Wsánec teachings. Come in with an open mind. Money, sure that is a barrier, but what do we really need?” (David Underwood, 9 July 2007)

“Money was a barrier for me because I have a family to care for. My attention span, sometimes I find it hard to sit and pay attention.” (Branden Wilson 12 July 2007)

“Lack of support from leadership in the community. I wasn’t aware of the potential for the fact that these things

can be within a curriculum. If people cannot experience this, how can they possibly understand?" (Toby Joseph, 8 August 2007)

"There is a lack of understanding by leadership. They have the opportunity to support us but don't. It has been such a challenge to justify this course to them. I can't understand why there has been such resistance.

The questions they ask, 'what will you bring back to your community, and how do we measure that?' They live in a world that needs papers and figures to demonstrate something. How do you measure something as important as culture, traditions and identity? Our strength is within our traditions and culture." (Samantha Etzel, 10 August 2007)

Discussion

The outcomes section featured the voices of Wsá nec learners as they completed the learning from place program in their territories. Their voices are remarkable because they are tentative yet powerful, and speak as both learners and teachers. Many times they declare their perspective as being their own but as we discussed the creation of this article with our advisory, we agreed their voices represent a synthesis of the collectivistic and the personal. We feel that the voices of the learners best describe the outcomes of the program. Their voices are filled with insight, relevance and richness. Analysis could add little by breaking what they said down into parts. Instead, in our coding we synthesized what the learners said about relationship as we formulated emerging ideas together.

With an agreement in place that enables First Nations in British Columbia to assume meaningful control of education on reserve at the K-12 level, the Indigenizing of education has finally become a reality. Learning from place is a content area with promise as a foundation for Aboriginal education programs such as language acquisition, cultural knowledge, Western traditional subject areas and social and economic development. The work of the SISB with ÁLENENEC demonstrates the power of learning from place programs. The learners in this cohort attest to the power of the program to change perception and relationship. The six outcomes of this project have to do with an altering of relationship. Relationships were enhanced between Aboriginal learners, their traditional places, their Elders, their communities, themselves and their language.

Indigenous worldviews such as Wsá nec are in flux and have been for over 200 years of colonialism. So much has changed for an Indig-

enous reality, including the life-ways and the landscape itself that the Indigenizing of education must be interpreted anew. "Education" has played a large role in the elimination of Aboriginal knowledge. Yet, a new education needs to play a significant role in revitalization.

Aboriginal people today must create education that will: 1) maintain and enhance their traditional culture including their languages; and 2) work effectively in mainstream society. Our theory of learning from place, based on the findings, describes programs that help with both these objectives. First, learning from place provides a foundation to revitalize traditional culture and language. Second, by strengthening identity as a member of a traditional community, learning from place helps participants to be more involved in their own career development.

The six outcomes of this project have to do with an altering of relationship. These findings resulted in a theoretical model of practice, summarized in the following.

Learning from place is a fundamental context for exploring and implementing the process of Indigenizing education. Bringing together people in traditionally meaningful places allows stories to be told, questions to be asked and perspectives on what learning from place can mean. Being Aboriginal involves a deep relationship with Elders, family, community and place. Learning from place is a context for engaging in meaningful experiences and encouraging a common dialogue to explore how we can learn from our homeland. Learning from place was foremost in the outcomes of the program studied. In the words of one participant, "There was a change in the way I feel about myself. I belong to this land and our people. Nothing can take that away." Learning from place provides a foundational process for Indigenizing education through which many Aboriginal life-ways can be learned.

The community must drive the program to effectively address local cultural needs. Indigenizing education means the local Aboriginal community determining, controlling and implementing education for members. Determining community needs requires community input at all levels of program conception, development and implementation. Establishing an advisory committee is essential because the community must oversee the whole program. The committee represents the knowledge of Elders, other knowledge holders and potential participants. Having gatherings, meetings and discussions with all people involved further reinforces that community has ownership and is explicitly driving the program.

The community must teach the program in Indigenous ways involving Elders and knowledge holders. The community must also be intimately involved in teaching the program. According to cultural protocol,

Elders and cultural knowledge holders are the most important teachers. During our program, Elders most often taught in a traditional place and were often fluent Sencoten speakers. They were not handed a script. We only said where we were going and we asked if they could tell stories that were connected to place. Each Elder spoke from the heart and each participant listened with the heart.

Involving Elders in program development, supervision and teaching is necessary for success. Elders receive the acknowledgment of their communities because of their authenticity. Their authenticity often involves their ability to speak the traditional language, to be knowledge holders of traditional ways and to live the traditional culture. Participants, Elders, knowledge holders and other guest speakers are all learners and teachers at the same time. This ensures what one of our advisory members called a collective, communal place of learning.

Learning from place must be real, i.e., it must happen in context both socially and environmentally. For experiences to be most meaningful and for lasting relationships to become established, they must be situated in meaningful places. Although some time in class can be scheduled for discussions, presentations and language lessons, participants confirm that the most memorable experiences are situated in place. Visits to place foster perceptions that are connected to place. In groups, these experiences foster ties to land socially, furthering a common and current notion of relationship with territory. How did our ancestors know their territory, how did they learn from it and what can this mean now?

The foregoing addresses an essential element in program success – the program must be real. At the core for many participants is grieving and a sense of loss. Time for reflection must be made for grieving. An example comes from the sacred places themselves. All places to various extents have been disturbed by development and by environmental degradation. As well, participants often become overwhelmed when speaking about the loss of their lands, their language, their culture, and the shame they feel in not knowing. Participants need the time to think, to feel their loss and to come out stronger.

Language learning in place fosters meaningful relationships with territorial places and the culturally significant entities that live there. In our research, knowing a place as Wsánec is meaningfully different than knowing it as Saanich, as is viewing an arbutus tree as *koko, il-c* or knowing yourself in your traditional name. The landscape that we see around us, the mountains, valleys, coastlines and islands, known in their traditional names encourage an understanding as ancestors might have had. The learning of skills, such as cedar stripping, clam gathering, or praying, provide appropriate context for the development of culturally relevant

language learning. Wsánec identity lies in the Sencoten language just as it lies in homeland. Revitalizing language learning in traditional places is a promising place for language curriculum development.

The program, similar to culture and language, must be open to interpretation and adaptation as time passes. Culture must be reinterpreted anew for each person and each time. Interpretation of the Indigenizing of education is ongoing. Further understanding evolves as time passes. And although there will be commonalities among different Aboriginal groups, one thing is certain, the program needs to adapt to local circumstance. A culture that is alive innovates. For example, we used kayaks on our trip to traditional islands. Kayaks are not traditional to Coast Salish people. Rather, cedar canoes were used in traditional travel. However, kayaks and guides are insurable, they were available and they worked great. We hope to use cedar canoes in the future, but until they are available, kayaks are fine.

The same innovative thinking can be seen in the integration of ecological restoration work. Before contact with settlers, it was meaningless to study removal of invasive plant species because obviously such species were not here. However, restoring native ecosystems such as the Garry Oak that were once essential for traditional life-ways enriches the learning experience. Another example is using scientific measures of pollution for stream and food gathering sites.

The outcomes of the program are significant and positive, particularly for program effects on identity, community involvement and career/educational development. “How can you know who you are without knowing where you come from” is a common saying in Wsánec culture. This relationship is essential to Aboriginal culture. The finding of improved relationship with self means a positive cultural identity as a Wsánec person. The strength of this identity integrates with the development of a career. This career could be very traditional such as carving or it could be less traditional as in finishing post-secondary education or learning to lead an organization or community.

The community, particularly leaders (Chief and council), must embrace and support the program. The program needs to be integrated with other elements of community life, i.e., employers, economic development, social development, other educational programs in the community and post-secondary education. The program’s evolving success depends on its integration with the community and with leaders. Chiefs and councils often lead social and economic development in their communities. The social and economic development of the community needs to be integrated with culture also. It is important to integrate traditional culture with economic and social development to ensure that Chiefs

and council members are steeped in traditional knowledge learned from place.

Aboriginal employers need to be supportive. Some of the main barriers identified by participants were financial and job commitments. Participants are often community people employed by bands. We overcame this barrier by asking band councils to release employees with pay, on a half-time basis, for professional development. This year we had four band employees participate as well as maintain their essential job duties.

These experiences foster cultural learning that is relevant to jobs and make people better workers. Learning from place provides a foundation for other elements of life-ways. We encourage land and housing managers, school board reps, teachers, administrators, social and community support workers to also participate. These are the people who know the realities of the communities where they live and work. The program asks them how they can incorporate what they learn into their jobs.

The curriculum of the ÁLENENEC: Learning from Homeland program can be emulated by other First Nations communities. Inherent in this discussion is the idea that other Aboriginal communities can develop their learning from place programs using the one described herein as a model. Learning from place as we have described it in this article is about the development of meaningful and relevant learning context through a process of bringing people and place together. Outcomes emerge from participants and the relationships they deepen with their homeland, language, community, Elders and themselves. It is about facilitation. We believe that however similar the processes may be in facilitating a program of this type, all programs remain local. Each community is as unique as the ecologies they call home.

Conclusion

As we continue to develop the ÁLENENEC: Learning from Homeland curriculum, we need to work with strengthening the program in many ways. First, we need to integrate the program with other programs and age groups at the SISB. One example is already underway with integrating work with place such as propagating and planting native plants with K-12 programs at the Tribal School and in the local public schools as part of cultural programming. Another need is to integrate the program with higher education institutions so that the ÁLENENEC program counts toward studies in other programs in the arts, social sciences, sciences, tourism, and commerce. We have begun discussions with post-secondary institutions as part of Aboriginal Service Plans to incorporate elements of the program. The University of Victoria is in the

process of beginning a multi-disciplined degree for Aboriginal students. The ÁLENENEC program has helped influence this process. We are working with some of the barriers identified by the course members. An example of overcoming job and financial barriers is offering a program of this type as professional development to band employees.

More research remains to be done on learning from place. For example, we believe that learning outcomes must remain fluid and encourage the possibility that meaningful change is possible. More exploration is needed to understand how learning from place is about *how* we might teach and *how* we might learn in a completely different context. Furthermore, the practice of assessment is a Western educational tradition, therefore we focus our evaluation on the program and not participants. More work remains to be done in understanding Indigenous ways to evaluate learning from place programs.

Finally, Indigenizing the K-12 curriculum is and will continue to be a monumental task. This curriculum development research has hopefully demonstrated that Indigenizing the context will be key to making this transformation a reality. We believe that all Western traditional subject areas can be engaged in learning from place experiences. Contextualizing the learning environment in place, rather than the classroom, is an educational and structural challenge that needs to be overcome.

Ultimately, we can all learn from the places we call our homeland. The quality of listening to the land and stories from the land can lead toward listening to each other. Respect for land and for each other is a lesson for any society and nation.

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