The nêhiyawak Language Experience:

A RADICAL RESURGENCE

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The Team

okihcitawi-opîkiskwêwak (Language Warriors)

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Peter Turner | James Smith Cree Nation | **U of R**

Randy Morin | Big River First Nation | **U of S**

Bill Cook | wapātakociwanohk, SK | **U of R**

Dorothy Thunder | Little Pine First Nation | **U of A**

Andrea Sterzuk | Watson, SK | **U of R**

We **SHOW** the

LANGUAGE by **DOING** the LANGUAGE

24/07/2007

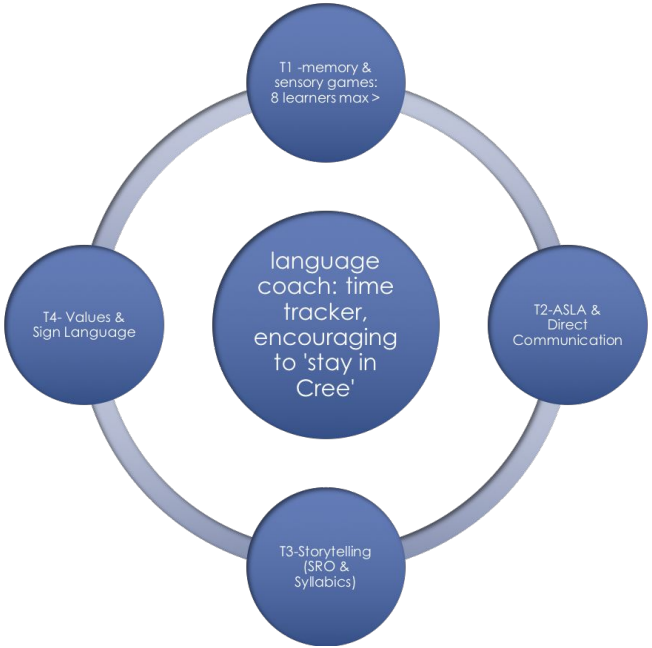
Youtube Video Link:

https://youtu.be/loprl3zddS8

Peter Turner

" ...you're not just **learning** words, you're actually **engaging** with **people**."

Camp Model: 20 to 40 min Rotations



Structure of the

LANGUAGE CAMP

How we did our study

-We asked: What are the experiences of adult participants in a land-based nehiyawewin immersion camp?

-We used: Indigenous research methodology because it blurs lines of researcher/participant & let's us co-learn. It's based on circle model *(Castelden et al., 2017; Drawson, Toombs & Mushquash, 2017; Kovach, 2010).*

-Roles & Data: As both co-researchers and study participants, our team used four Sharing Circles to explore language camps as a revitalization strategy *(Baskin, 2005; Kovach, 2010; Lavallée, 2009).*

-Analysis (two circles): layered approach to align with larger Indigenous research methodology: open coding; holistic coding; regrouping data into categories; & identifying linkages *(McGinnis et al., 2019).*

Spirituality & Relationship-Building in Research

-Our research is spiritual in nature. We understand ourselves as spiritual beings having a physical experience and we conduct ourselves accordingly.

-This includes the action of *miyāhkasikēwin* - smudging.

-We value relationship-building as co-researchers .

-When together, we socialize and plan opportunities for visiting. This is important because “visiting is lateral sharing in the absence of coercion and hierarchy and in the presence of compassion. Visiting is fun and enjoyable and nurtures the intimate connections and relationship building. Visiting is the core of our political systems” (Simpson, 2017: 165).

-We also pray together for ten minutes each Monday night.

-We use humour in our relationships.

Community-based Approaches to Adult Language Revitalization

Indigenous communities recognize that adults are important for revitalization because of the need for: 1) language teachers & 2) parents who can support children's language learning in the home (Hinton et al, 2018).

•**Master–Apprentice** language learning program (Hinton 2001a; Hinton et al. 2002)

•**Language Houses:** small group of learners meet or live in a house for three to six months (Johnson 2014; McIvor, 2015).

•**Language Camps:** Cross-generational; usually intensive, one- or two-week sessions for a daily-life experience of the language (Alexie et al. 2009; Daniels-Fiss 2005; Jacobs 1998; Lee 2016).

Indigenous Languages & Land

Research has considered the relationship between Indigenous languages & land from several perspectives including place names, ecolinguistics and land-based learning (Schreyer, 2008).

Indigenous languages and Indigenous language revitalization are connected to Indigenous knowledge.

As a concept or term, *Indigenous knowledge* represents beliefs, assumptions, and understandings of non-western people developed through long-term association with a specific place.

Through this long-term association, strong relationships form between people, the environment and more-than-human counterparts (other living things and spiritual forces) that share their land (McInnis et al., 2019).

“Every land has its own language” (Manriquez, 2001, p. 544).

Indigenous Languages & Wellness

Health & wellness in Indigenous communities is lower than the general population (Adelson, 2005; Gracey & King, 2009; Kolahdooz et al., 2015).

The loss of land, language, & spiritual ways continue to impact Indigenous wellness (Whitbeck, Chen, Hoyt, & Adams, 2004).

Indigenous languages and cultures do have positive effects on the health and wellness of Indigenous people (Jenni et al, 2017; McIvor & Napolean, 2009, p. 6).

Cultural connectedness, is key in improvements to Indigenous wellness (Snowshoe, 2015).

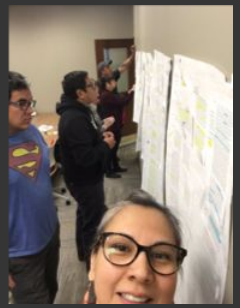
Culture may prevent and treat health outcomes such as depression & substance abuse (Walters et al., 2002; Stone et al., 2006; Rieckmann et al., 2004).

“Language is one component of culture and therefore may be a means to improve health among Indigenous populations” (Gonzalez et al., 2017).

INTER-DIALOGUE between themes

-The soul or the spirit, the Cree spirit, is sustained by the earth which is sustained by the language of the earth. It speaks to you, the trees, the animals, the putting of all those things together, makes a language, and that's where language emits from, everything in Cree comes from the earth; the earth first, spirituality was second; the Cree third and I am fourth. That's how I imagined it" (Kouritzin, 1999, p. 213).

-This is how our data unfolds, there is no separation between "themes" but an interrelatedness and inter-dialogue.



Findings

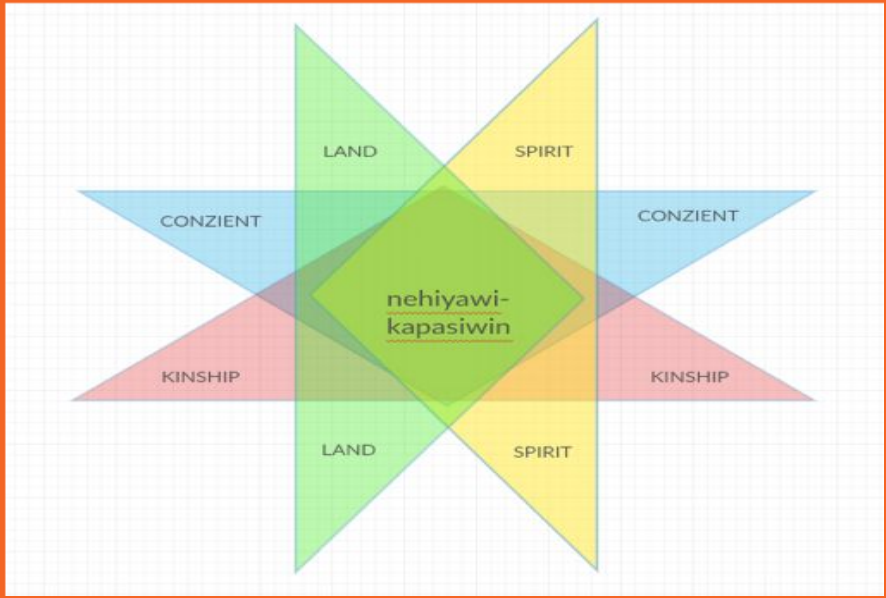
nêhiyawi-kapesiwin serves as a path towards greater cultural connectedness; it is a therapeutic process (Bals et al., 2010). The process includes: kinship; coming together as nêhiyawak people; being together with land; coming home; and being able to talk about suppressed feelings.

Spirit - *ahcahk* we refer to a kisê manitô

Land - *askiy*

Language - *nêhiyawêwin*

Person - a *nêhiyaw* conscientization



SPIRIT-AHCAHK

Belinda: “I do believe there is something spiritual going on”

Peter: “maybe there is a spirit, I wouldn’t deny there’s a spiritual thing going on.”

Bill: “there is something that happens, I don’t know why it happens, but something happens.” “I want to call it energy, because that is what it is.”

Dorothy: “I feel like its a broken spirit, something is missing, part of that spirit is this living language.”

Randy: “I always think back to the honor, the integrity, the pride, the respect, that our people have with each other, with the land, with the spirit world.

Andrea: “But I would say that it’s sort of healing to be around the laughter. I think there is something spiritual that goes on there, that’s not my place to talk about that, but I think there is something spiritual too.

LAND- ASKIY

Randy: “The land misses the language”

Belinda: “At language camp, going back to land really really helps, being around fluent speakers and listening really really helps. It was like, you will learn when you come to cree camp, it has its own breathe, it has its own vibe or vibration, and you will see that people go to sleep or wake up, get hungry, it just has its own rhythm, and that’s how we go, it has its own rhythm, it’s the rhythm of the collective.”

LANGUAGE - *NÊHIYAWÊWIN*

Dorothy: Yeah, so okay, I am continuing repetition with them, but being very gentle with it as well, so that they could concentrate, kwayask, kwaysak and they're so happy, right? And when they watch each other, they observe each other, what they are doing, êkwa really staying in the language right, at camp, on the 3rd day, I tried my best not to really translate anything for you guys.

Peter "now, because I've had so much ear experience listening to people speak, I can pick up the pauses between words and that's real beneficial behind having so many different instructors. Osâmitonew..."

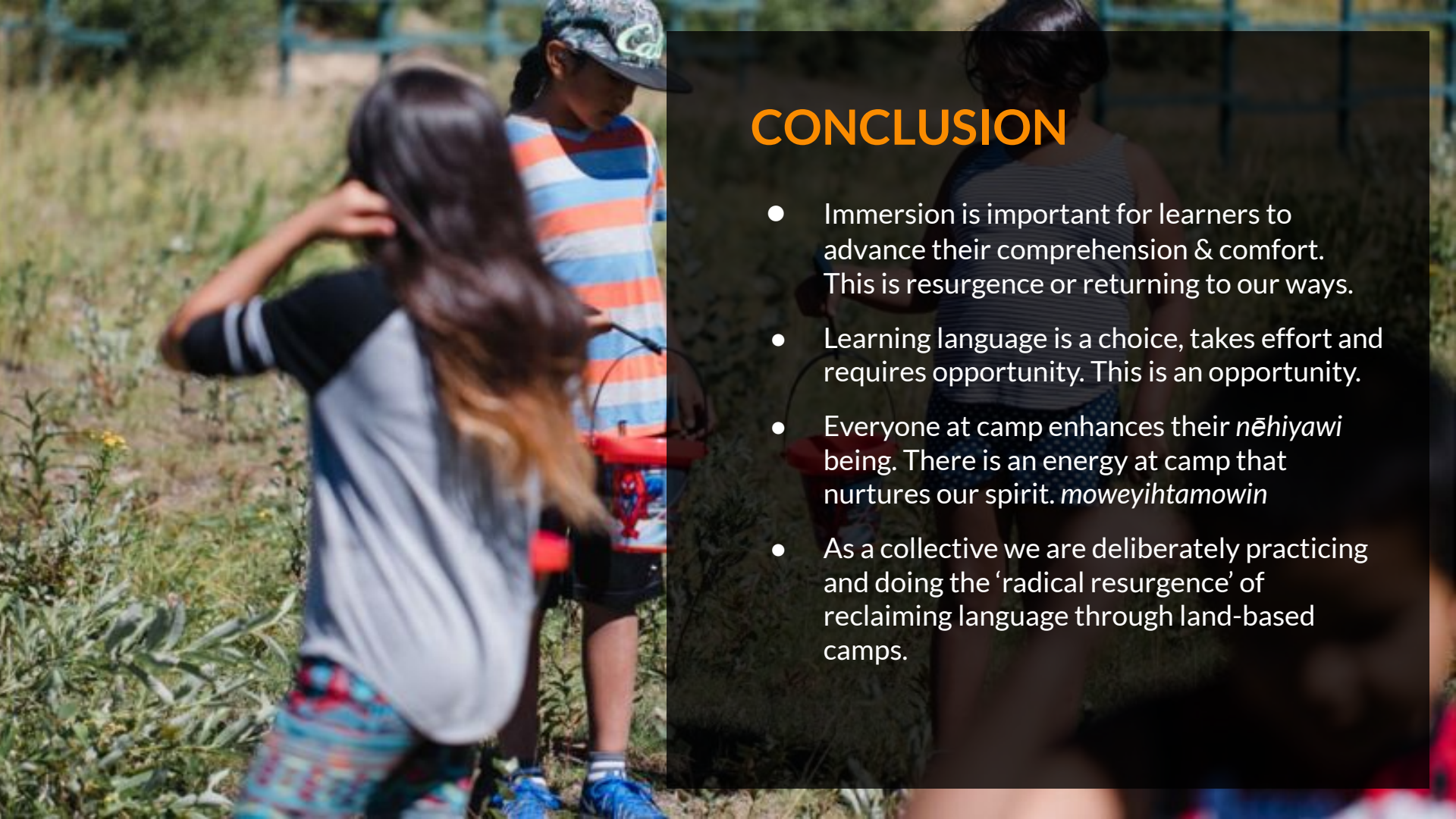
Andrea: "Hearing the language spoken and not using the written language, obviously that's the best way to learn. And repetition."

Ā NĒHIYAW CONSCIENTIZATION

Randy: “I think about our ancestors, mother earth, grandfathers, grandmothers out there in the spirit realms. I think back to ceremonies, we are a praying people like Elders they would pray with such sincerity, *kakisimowin*, and it is for unselfishness, altruism right, they are not doing it for themselves but for the benefit of all.

Belinda: Cree camp has its own rhythm and that’s how we go, it the rhythm of the collective. So that's how that works out.

Bill: I guess I just assumed that people know they can’t own natural things and natural elements. I assumed that everybody knew that.
Andrea: We think we own the land, we think the land is there for us to do things with. So, going out on the land on those walks where we were picking medicines and there are things that were just there that were helpful and beneficial. That’s not how we think about it (the land)



CONCLUSION

- Immersion is important for learners to advance their comprehension & comfort. This is resurgence or returning to our ways.
- Learning language is a choice, takes effort and requires opportunity. This is an opportunity.
- Everyone at camp enhances their *nēhiyawi* being. There is an energy at camp that nurtures our spirit. *moweyihtamowin*
- As a collective we are deliberately practicing and doing the 'radical resurgence' of reclaiming language through land-based camps.

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