

Forming strong cultural identities in an intersecting space of Indigeneity and autism using participatory action research and digital storytelling

AlterNative

1–11

© The Author(s) 2023

Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/11771801231197838

journals.sagepub.com/home/aln



Heather A Simpson (Stswecem'c Xget'tem First Nation, Secwépemc) 

Abstract

This research responds to the urgency to disrupt patterns of social injustice, exclusion, and cultural genocide while promoting positive identity formation, pride, and resilience for Indigenous autistics in the post-secondary education system. This study utilized a participatory action research approach positioning participants as collaborators with the research team. Data collection involved qualitative data derived from the transcripts of online sessions, participant digital stories, and a summative survey. Thematic analysis was used to identify emergent themes of individual and a collective narrative. Findings are presented as an original concept of the author called *Thrival: The Fire Within*, comprising four themes: self-identity, time, balance, and community. This work contributes to a broader understanding and expressions of Indigenization, decolonization, equity, diversity, and inclusion in post-secondary teaching, learning, and policy to better support the identity and success of Indigenous autistic students and arguably, all students who experience intersectional discrimination within post-secondary education systems.

Keywords

autism, culture, disability, identity, Indigenous, post-secondary

Introduction

The Canadian public post-secondary system was created and is maintained, as a living manifestation of the colonial project (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Kuokkanen, 2007). To Indigenize and decolonize institutions, we must acknowledge that the public post-secondary institution's and by extension the system it operates within, fundamental purpose is to uphold various colonial ideals and processes within society based on discriminatory, capitalistic, imperialistic motives. Today's post-secondary education landscape in settler colonial states is described as a more inhospitable environment for Indigenous and autistic people for its exclusionary nature (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Kuokkanen, 2007; A. Smith et al., 2021). While Indigeneity and autism are natural variations of human diversity, people without white, hetero male, cisgender privilege and outside the dominant Euro-Western power structures struggle for protected identity and space within institutions and society at large. With this understanding, we can shed further light on the hegemonic ecosystem existing at institutional and individual levels that operate to make the plurality of intellectual traditions, discourses, and practices different

from dominant Euro-Western episteme, invisible and erased (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Kuokkanen, 2007; A. Smith et al., 2021).

Epistemological supremacy, epistemic dispossession, and indifference and the denial of multiple worldviews, ethics, and values in the Institute thus thwart any real progress to achieving greater equity, diversity, and inclusion in Canadian post-secondary in general and in a teaching and learning context, and also prevent an institute from meeting its responsibility to build a school ecosystem not on singular truth but on multiple truths so that all students, staff, and faculty are respectfully served (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Kuokkanen, 2007; A. Smith et al., 2021). This study created an invitational space for the presence, voice, and capacity of Indigenous autistic learners in educational and policy work in what today is called British Columbia,

Office of Indigenization, Justice Institute of British Columbia, Canada

Corresponding author:

Heather A Simpson (Stswecem'c Xget'tem First Nation, Secwépemc),
Office of Indigenization, Justice Institute of British Columbia, 715
McBride Boulevard, New Westminster, BC V3L 5T4, Canada.
Email: hsimpson@jibc.ca

Canada. Indigenous autistic students are among the most marginalized in public post-secondary and experience intersectional discrimination, in classrooms, in work-integrated learning experiences, in an institute in general, and in society at large (Kapp, 2011; Kapp et al., 2013; Kelley & Lowe, 2018; Lindblom, 2014).

Colonized higher education is in-large inhospitable to different ways of thinking, being, doing, and relating as it is predicated on the superiority and sustainability of white-Eurocentric knowledge systems (Hall & Tandon, 2017) and “settleness as praxis” (A. Smith et al., 2021, p. 142). While the West is multicultural, hegemony in education lends to the experiences of stigmatization, misrepresentation, and erasure of Indigenous autistic cultural identity making it unreasonable for non-normative groups to see themselves and their contributions as visibly represented within institutional life (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Kuokkanen, 2007; A. Smith et al., 2021). Indigenous identity and autistic identity are subjugated to policing of identity through colonial systems, Indigeneity controlled by colonial legislative authority, whereas autism is classified medically as a complex neurodevelopmental disorder in the west by the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* or the World Health Organization’s International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (Simpson, 2021). These confined definitions exemplify the same tactics of cultural dispossession that exist in western academics. This study aimed to counter “epistemicide” in higher education through participant self-determination (Hall & Tandon, 2017, p. 6). As A. Smith et al. (2021) assert, “It is an act of resistance to tell these stories” (p. 134). This research builds on ground forged as “an act of resistance to claim our right to exist in these spaces” (A. Smith et al., 2021, p. 134).

Methods

Participatory action research

This research, JIBCER2021-03-FSCI, was approved by the Justice Institute of British Columbia’s Research Ethics Board on November 3, 2021 and conducted with full consent of participants and with engagement in all stages of research with the respective local Indigenous communities where this research was situated, Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), qiqéyt (Qayqayt), and səliłwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) First Nations, all distinct Indigenous peoples located in the lower Coast region of British Columbia, Canada.

This research was conducted primarily in the English language while introducing a dialect of Cree, an Indigenous language and ethnic group widely represented in Canada and the first language of the project Elder, and Secwepemctsin, an Indigenous language spoken in the Interior region of British Columbia, Canada, and the ancestral language of the author. Research centered Indigenous autistic student expression as valuable and necessary to advancing Indigenized and decolonized recommended practices in teaching and learning and in

educational policy work. We addressed the issues of exclusion and systemic oppression using a participatory action research design supporting the leadership and collaboration of Indigenous autistic students to determine project deliverables; respond to the gap of self-determined, culturally relevant, knowledge in teachings and learning literature; and ensure that Indigenous autistic voices and citizenship were present, represented, and fully articulated, and power, control, and ownership of research and the research process shared (Datta et al., 2015; Johnston-Goodstar, 2013; Young et al., 2019).

Ethical procedures

This research was guided by an ethical framework transparently shared with all esteemed partners in the project proposal and invitation for engagement. It is situated in a knowing that the Canadian public post-secondary system was created and is maintained, as a tool of colonialism built and evolving on the disadvantage spiritually, socially, politically, economically, and environmentally, of Indigenous peoples. Before we finalized the scope and focus of this project, our research team followed protocol and extended an invitation to the First Nations of whose lands partnering post-secondary institutes are located, Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), qiqéyt (Qayqayt), and səliłwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh). First Nations were invited to be involved and compensated in this research project from its inception so that the direction and outputs can directly benefit and fit with the needs and interests of the respective communities. Before finalizing research, these respective First Nations received our research final report to ensure mutuality in sharing the research.

Selection criteria

Research participants were selected on the following inclusion criteria:

1. Be an adult aged 18+ who self-identifies as one of the three federally recognized Indigenous peoples in Canada: First Nations, Métis, or Inuit and autistic person with autism. We were inclusive of mixed racial identity;
2. Be a student enrolled in a post-secondary institute;
3. Be committed to advancing human rights and social justice for Indigenous and autistic peoples given the extensive commitment to the project.

The study recruited two participants with the assistance of local post-secondary institutes. Two individuals met the inclusion criteria and participated in the duration of the study. Both identified as autistic males attending public post-secondary institutions full-time in the Lower Mainland region of British Columbia, Canada. One participant is Métis with Cherokee (distinct Indigenous peoples located in the southeastern USA) and mixed-European ancestry and one Filipino and First Nations to an unidentifiable community.

Research questions

The absence of culturally responsive services and supports for Indigenous and autistic peoples in educational and disability services spaces is correlated to negative social outcomes in holistic individual and public health and in the field of education (Graham, 2012; Sullivan, 2013; Tan, 2018). This research builds upon the author's previous research (Simpson, 2021). To address the research problem as identified in extant scholarly literature, the first question posed was:

1. How might British Columbia post-secondary teaching and learning practices and policy better integrate Indigenous knowledges in education and arts programming to disrupt patterns of social injustice, exclusion, and cultural genocide while promoting positive identity formation, pride, and resilience for Indigenous autistics?

Additional research questions were developed by participants following a mind-mapping exercise to identify key topics using a modified inquiry framework based upon Thompson Rivers University's (2010) *Aboriginal Education Framework* (Figure 1). Critiquing this framework, the author modified by repositioning students at the center of the framework and added a missing communal future focus. This mapping exercise was followed by a collaborative approach among participants to vote on key topics, narrowing to and selecting one topic to guide the development of a co-created research question within each area of the framework.

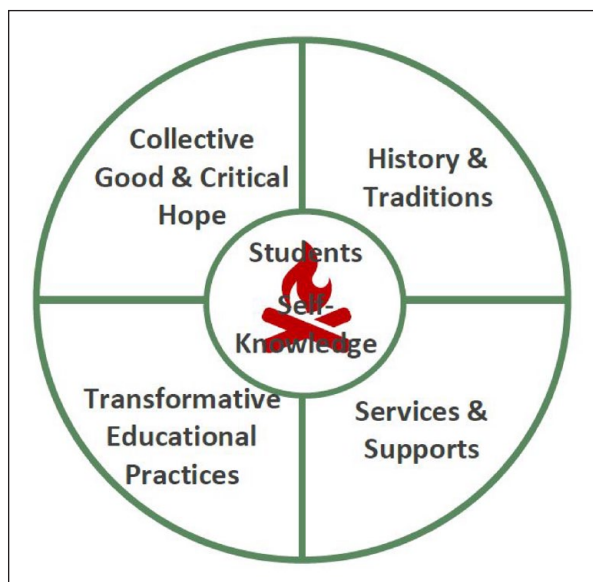


Figure 1. Modified aboriginal education framework (Thompson Rivers University, 2010).

The modified inquiry framework depicts four quadrants representing significant areas to explore and to better understand and plan for Indigenous autistic students'

educational experience: History & Traditions, Services & Supports, Transformational Educational Practices, and Collective Good & Critical Hope. In the center of the framework is a fire, representing Student Self-Knowledge. The fire is symbolic of the inherent natural capacity within students and the transformational power they possess. In addition to the original research question, in the realm of Self-Knowledge, the participants asked:

2. What stressors and barriers do learners experience in post-secondary environments and what strategies do you use to overcome obstacles for greater success and sense of purpose in post-secondary?

In History & Traditions:

3. How do learners in post-secondary access cultural history, knowledge, and practices to support strengthening cultural identity in the context of ongoing colonization in education and society?

In Services & Supports:

4. How does a post-secondary institution provide equity-deserving learners the services and supports to meet learner goals and align with coursework and desired outcomes?

In Transformational Education Practices:

5. What teaching and learning practices do you recommend for creating safer, equitable, inclusive learning environments for Indigenous autistic students?

And to ensure a focus beyond self, a fundamental ethic across various Indigenous worldviews, in Collective Good & Critical Hope, participants asked:

6. How do we create a future in post-secondary education that offers hope and promise to Indigenous autistic students?

Data collection and analysis

This research was conducted using digital storytelling, a participatory audio and visual method of research credited in academic literature as being both more culturally relevant to Indigenous peoples (Freeman et al., 2020; Genuis et al., 2015; Hanemaayer et al., 2020) as it is "a powerful means for promoting community dialogue and creating opportunities for individual and community change" (Wang & Burris, 1997, as cited in Genuis et al., 2015, p. 602) and is a method of research that shows greater efficacy in helping autistic participants "voice their perspective" (Winstone et al., 2014, p. 190). Arguably, digital storytelling as methodology also challenges the Euro-Western intellectual tradition that values and prioritizes written knowledge representation and instead promotes Indigenous oral

tradition, storytelling, and symbolism as valid purveyors of systems and representations of knowledges.

There is no one approach to digital storytelling and published research using digital storytelling is expanding (Freeman et al., 2020; Genuis et al., 2015; Hanemaayer et al., 2020; Hyman et al., 2020; Ward & de Leeuw, 2018). Instead of selecting a specific technology (Freeman et al., 2020; Genuis et al., 2015; Hanemaayer et al., 2020), participants could create digital stories of choice content like photographs and other images, video and audio recordings, artwork, or songs and music, shared into an individual and secured Canadian-hosted digital drop-box, Sync.com, between the participant and the author.

Digital stories explored research questions in ways unique, meaningful, and relevant to the participant. Both students shared digital stories using Microsoft PowerPoint though each participant presented stories in different ways. One participant balanced written and symbolic representations on separate slides and shared their story orally during a recorded live session. Another participant chose to use the voice over function to narrate their story in a series of slides. The slides included text that summarized their oral narration.

Participants were paid CAD \$25 per hour for a total of 15.5 hr. Research sessions were 1 to 2 hr, a mix of individual and group sessions and all online using Microsoft Teams. Each session was process- and outcome-focused, promoting reciprocal knowledge transfer and dialogue including Elder support, ceremony, and Teachings led by Elder Phillip Gladue from the Métis Nation. Research was conducted over eight sessions with two post-research engagement sessions dedicated to participant review and approval of the final research report and a closing ceremony.

Participants were introduced to various ways of approaching digital storytelling and creating digital stories by Knowledge Keeper Aaron Johannes, Métis heritage, including variations of storyboards and planning processes. Elder Gladue shared Medicine Wheel Teachings to help participants develop digital stories that were culturally relevant as well as holistic and individualized.

This research is based on individual participant case studies; however, data collected were analyzed and interpreted both individually and collectively, not as a comparative between participants but to identify emergent themes in response to research questions and the development of a collective narrative. Recordings from sessions and digital stories were transcribed and coded in NVivo. A summative mixed-methods participant satisfaction survey developed by the author and administered using Qualtrics was included in the analysis. Data were analyzed for emergent themes and findings following a six-step process as described in the work of Kiger and Varpio (2020).

Situating research

The author is autistic and Secwepemc (distinct Indigenous peoples located in the Interior region, British Columbia, Canada) from the Stswecem'c Xgat'tem (Canoe Creek

Dog Creek First Nation located in a semi-remote Interior region of British Columbia, Canada) and mixed-European heritage. This research includes some of her storied experience but mostly the stories gifted by our research participants, project Elder, and Indigenous Knowledge Keeper. Working as the Senior Advisor for JIBC in its Office of Indigenization, the author uses and shares power and privilege and guides others to amplify often muted voices and promote plurality in academics. The Truths shared reflect Indigenous autistic learners' voices and do not represent the whole of an Indigenous autistic community and variations of Indigenous communities within oppressional intersectionality. They do, however, represent great wisdom and insight as well as immense courage, thoughtfulness, humility, and respect, all characteristics fundamental to advancing social justice and strengthening of cultural identities for Indigenous autistic peoples. All people have a story and there is something to learn from each story told.

Results and discussion

Research findings theorized as *Thrival: The Fire Within*, an original concept of the author, grounds humanity in the knowing that Indigenous autistic peoples are in constant conflict with oppressive sociological phenomena that is an attack on the fire within. The fire within is our essence, our spirit. It is the source of creation. It is where we all come from and where we will all return to when we are called home. It is with grave misfortune that this fire is diminished, often violently, by human-made constructs—psychological, physical, and spiritual, and many relatives, human and non-human, are wounded.

Indigenous autistic people, like all our relations, are precious and need safety, peace, harmony, and community to ensure their Thrival. The storied experience of participants educate on the ways their fire is suffocated in a post-secondary context, at real risk of extinguishing, and ways that, if they are supported, share their fire with others the way that Creator has intended.

Creating the conditions for protection, preservation, and flourishing of the fire within can and does mean different things for different relatives. A collective storied experience highlighted four overarching and interconnected themes that contextualize the suffocation or the Thrival of the participant's fire within: Self-Identity, Time, Balance, and Community. Before discussing themes below, it is important to emphasize that across these themes are a deeply rooted entanglement of complex trauma and stress that operates at micro, meso, and macro levels and fully addressing requires an Indigenous neurodivergent trauma-informed lens and holistic approach (Faccini & Allely, 2021; Johnson, 2014; MacLeod et al., 2013).

Indigenous neurodivergent trauma-informed lens

It is the findings of this study and in the author's previous literature review (Simpson, 2021) that chronic, ongoing

exposure to oppressive, discriminatory, racist, ableist and hetero-cisgender normative sociological conditions and phenomena experienced by Indigenous autistic peoples in systems and society, in general, seriously impact health. Thrivival is heavily reliant upon a trauma-informed approach through an Indigenous neurodivergent lens. This term and concept are novel and to the author's awareness, not yet presented in literature as is in this article. It is derived from the understandings about intersectionality (MacLeod et al., 2013) and trauma-informed care from an Indigenous and autistic lens (Faccini & Allely, 2021; Johnson, 2014).

Within each emergent theme is expressed certainty that ideologies and practices within the post-secondary system and public at large create and exacerbate traumatic experiences daily. Failing to realize this and respond accordingly in a proactive way to build the conditions needed for Thrivival, traumatization of Indigenous autistic learners is perpetuated. In post-secondary this means by expecting conformity to the status quo, we expose Indigenous autistic learners to profound isolation and neglect as students while upholding institutional structures, policy, spaces, and socialization that diminishes realization of full potential and respect for variant human expression.

Supporting all neurodivergent Indigenous learners to succeed in post-secondary life requires education, policy, and experiences that account for variation in neurology and in personal nervous system responses as well as intergenerational trauma in addition to systemic traumas (Faccini & Allely, 2021; Johnson, 2014; MacLeod et al., 2013). This is trauma-informed care from a neurodivergent Indigenous lens. As themes of this study are explored, examples raised by participants will be shared as to how they are experiencing an ongoing sense of fear, helplessness, and powerlessness in their educational experience and shed light on the ways they care for their fire within and seek solidarity and change in this pursuit.

Thrivival is holistic

Building the fire within requires care and attention to self-identity, time, balance, and community. Like Medicine Wheel Teachings, these components are interdependent and connected, and are in relationships with one another. Much like we observe in nature; for a seed to flourish, it needs a combination of earth, water, fire, and other elements. Building a fire is similar needing parts to make the whole. Without all, we are not whole (Lane & Lucas, 2012). This is a foundational premise of this work and a hallmark for living Indigenousization, decolonization, and practices of equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Just as a Medicine Wheel can follow multiple directions and uses, it is important to think of the main themes for Thrivival in this way. The themes of storied experience are presented one by one but this does not suggest a linear approach. This is purely for sharing Truths and dialogue. In practice, it will be up to the individual institutions and its members as to where to start in taking action as a result of receiving the gift of knowledge offered in this study.

Participants consented to share stories with honesty no matter how difficult to hear, for the integrity of learning and truthfulness of the story told.

Thrivival: self-identity

There was a noticeable difference in the degree of self-confidence and self-esteem among participants. Both participants are very self-aware, clearly articulating their strengths and challenges; however, one participant was more critical of self, making several self-deprecating statements and confiding that they struggled with self-image and self-worth. Stories shared by this participant throughout sessions indicate a concerning pattern of self-internalized doubt and fear, and self-criticism. Research tells us that poor self-identity and mental health often stem from ongoing oppression and subjugation to social injustice, exclusion, and cultural genocide and tragically, a common experience among Indigenous autistic peoples (DeNigris et al., 2018; Lindblom; 2017a, 2017b; Simpson, 2021).

In exploring the concept of self-knowledge, participants shared that their sense of self-identity was connected to their identity as a post-secondary student and that each had a different concept of self based on their Indigeneity and being autistic. One participant acknowledged autism as a disability, while the other participant rejected a disability label in favor of a personal affirmation but later explained challenges in learning and perceived inequitable treatment by instructors related to having a disability.

Regarding Indigeneity, the participant with a demonstrated level of higher self-esteem identified as Métis with Cherokee and mixed-European ancestry, while the participant who struggled with self-confidence, identified as Filipino and First Nations but could not identify with a specific First Nation or Nations, sharing that the residential school system was effective in erasing cultural connections between their family and their Indigenous community.

While positive identity formation is much more complex and multi-factorial, it is possible that some of the mental health challenges experienced by one of our participants could be related to the disconnection and lack of membership to a named Indigenous community on Turtle Island, a genocidal legacy of colonial assimilation policy and the residential school system as well as the long and unique legacy of colonization in the Philippines (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Simpson, 2021; A. Smith et al., 2021). Having a grounded sense of self provides an internalized sense of safety, a basic human need essential for living into our being and full potential (Simpson, 2021).

On the identity of being a student, one participant never perceived themselves as being capable of success as a learner. It was not until they were underway in their first semester in post-secondary that they found their place among their cohort and area of study and deepened their understanding of their strengths and needs as a learner and the accommodations, relationships, and strategies that promoted their success beyond academic performance. The other participant entered post-secondary confident in their academic abilities, commenting that their sense of

self-identity and self-esteem rises and falls based upon their success in their schooling, and specifically, educational achievement. This aspect of story teaches us that taking a strength-based approach to educational planning does help in bolstering one's self-esteem and academic success to a degree (Bailey & Arciuli, 2020). It does not, however, prevent challenges that arise from programming or other demands that are perceived by the student to fall outside their strengths or capabilities.

As the participants told their stories, it was apparent that Thrivival in post-secondary (and beyond) is supported by a holistic sense of self-identity (LaFever, 2016; Lane & Lucas, 2012). A sense of self is what inspired the actions participants have taken thus far in self-advocating and navigating their education and educational experiences based on their uniqueness. This knowing is what inspired their contributions to this study and drawing from this insight to make recommendations for meaningful improvements in policy and practice. Moreover, self-identity is a powerful catalyst for belonging and citizenship (Kuokkanen, 2007; Simpson, 2021; A. Smith et al., 2021). This project gave each participant a group identity, a voice, responsibilities, autonomy over how to share their stories, and with that, a knowing that they are, in fact, not alone no matter how isolating and exclusionary post-secondary can be for Indigenous autistic learners (Kuokkanen, 2007; Simpson, 2021; A. Smith et al., 2021).

Thrivival: time

Self-identity evolves. Naturally over time, our being is shaped by a myriad of forces including context, time, and being in relationship (Flotskaya et al., 2019; Simpson, 2021). Time as a component to Thrivival is situated within Indigenous perspectives, natural laws that instruct us that creation exists within a lifespan of seasons and often in unending, yet altered cycles influenced by internal and external factors (Lane & Lucas, 2012). The development of self-identity and cultural identities are good representations of these natural laws (Lane & Lucas, 2012). Set within the history and context of colonization, it is not uncommon for many Indigenous learners to first encounter Indigenous cultures and explore their Indigeneity in systems (Shepherd et al., 2018). Indigenous peoples have varied and diverse experiences and access to cultures. For those who grew up disconnected from Indigenous culture, time has been a favorable component of Thrivival. Birthright and connection to kin delayed until much later in life, a phenomenon describable as a homecoming. This same sentiment is often shared when one's neurodivergence is affirmed (Simpson, 2021).

In exploring barriers and strategies in education and navigating systems of service and support, participants discussed time in their stories as a great opportunity or obstacle, and often, time constraints preventing their flourishing. At the heart of opportunity was the mindful act of making time. Participants talked about the success they realize when giving themselves the time to reflect and then connect; time to check in with oneself and decide who and

what is needed to navigate the given feelings or situation. Then giving themselves the time to act.

Time is an important component of self-determination; however, this is not a solo journey. The barriers highlighted in stories often were related to the lack of time given to students in reciprocity, when they reached out, sharing their time. Sometimes time is yielded in support and accommodation of learners, as both participants raised, being given extra time on exams or for assignment completion (McMorris et al., 2019). This was the extent of the benefit of time mentioned by participants.

Both participants acknowledged the difficulty of conformity to rigid systems and expectations that enforced universal timelines for all learners (Kuokkanen, 2007; McMorris et al., 2019; A. Smith et al., 2021). Western education by nature is prescriptive and time-bound regardless of the delivery model of programming (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). For the standard semester-based programs, time constraints can impose greater challenge for students who require more time to process information, generate graded assignments, and are expected to perform academic exercises that require extensive cognitive energies within limited timeframes. For many neurodivergent learners, this is not conducive for effective learning or optimal academic performance. Often it exacerbates mental health challenges creating layered stresses for students (McMorris et al., 2019).

One participant reported that these course-work experiences were followed by emotional and physical withdrawal academically and socially. Though the participant reflected on systemic barriers, they did identify struggles with liberal arts coursework as a personal failure.

This same participant raised concerns for students who they deemed as socially or economically disadvantaged.

We must account for and tend to increased cognitive and social demands experienced by neurodivergent Indigenous learners by adjusting policy and practices so that they do not use time as a tool of the system but rather as a component to facilitate Indigenous autistic Thrivival. Forcing a status quo and conformity to the rigidity of a time-bound system will not serve many Indigenous autistic learners (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; McMorris et al., 2019; A. Smith et al., 2021). Like building a fire teaches us, if the fire burns hot and bright for the short term, it will likely become ash before long. If we build a fire to a consistent and steady pace, the fire will keep longer. While we may be unable to change rigidity of time constraints in post-secondary, it is possible to challenge the contraction of time by expansion, that is, reforming systems, structures, policies, and practices that account for implications of trauma and neurodivergence and seek out alternative representations of learning that is person-centered and achieved at their pace in their learning journey (Faccini & Allely, 2021; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Kuokkanen, 2007).

Participants of this study tell us that effective practices of equity, diversity, and inclusion are situated in a decolonized perspective that there is more than one Truth and more than one way to do and to be. While we have made some advances in this regard in teaching and learning

such as in models like Universal Design for Learning (UDL), this model is situated in a western science perspective, and still upholds the idea that learning is outcome- or competency-based (Lubin & Brooks, 2021). Where we can see an Indigenization of UDL is in promoting the belief that learning happens in relationship with the environment and is emergent, not prescriptive (Lane & Lucas, 2012). This is not totally self-directed as there is an interconnected ebb and flow between all present. The relationship and pedagogy we see in our natural laws and how Elders carry themselves serve as optimal examples. Everyone is a learner, and everyone is a teacher, human and non-human (Lane & Lucas, 2012).

In addition to the concern of a suitable system, curriculum, and pedagogy relative to time is the concern of timely access to some student services and supports, namely student counseling (McMorris et al., 2019). Time was not an issue for both participants in accessing Indigenous Student Services, Student Aid support, and Disability Services. Regarding Indigenous Student Services, participants gained a kind of support—social and spiritual—that, while it did not address academic challenges, provided them with needed outlets and connections to alleviate stresses (Simpson, 2021). Unfortunately, for both participants, accessing student counseling is not readily available. During a time of high stress during studies, one participant recalled that counseling was inaccessible and how problematic that is for students who seek timely mental health support.

Thrival: balance

What does balance mean? From a western perspective in education, it might mean reading, writing, and arithmetic—all mental exercises. From an Indigenous perspective, this theme encompasses a holistic view, recognizing that balance is found when all aspects are brought into harmony (Lane & Lucas, 2012). Indigenization is a philosophy and practice that strives for greater balance in education, embracing and lifting up Indigenous ways to move beyond Eurocentric ways and traditions (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Pidgeon, 2016). This is an incomplete picture as it still leaves out representation that is neither Indigenous nor westernized. For a fulsome representation of balance, we can look to The Sacred Circle Teachings or Medicine Wheel Teachings as it is often referred to by its English names (Lane & Lucas, 2012). Aspects of these Teachings represent humanity as made up of mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of self, while other Teachings emphasize the interrelatedness, interconnectivity, and holism that is natural to the Circle. As Teachings it is told that we are not whole without all, and what is not whole is imbalanced as all parts need each other (Lane & Lucas, 2012).

Similarly, the concept and prayer of *all my relations* emphasizes respect and honor for the balance of life. Indigenous Nations have their own sets of laws and ethics that govern social and environmental responsibility; however, one commonality between First Nations, Métis, and Inuit worldviews is a shared belief of *all our relations*,

that all living and nonliving have a place and significance in the universe (Lane & Lucas, 2012; Simpson, 2021). In other words, we are all related, and everything is connected.

For the participants of this project, the conceptualization of balance from an Indigenous perspective was a main focal point for one of the participants. In the telling of their story, they opted to share a series of graphic representations of different sacred circle concepts with the intention of using the symbolism and interpretations of the symbolism to inform and guide their responses to each research question and their recommendations for improving educational opportunity for all learners. The other participant explored the concept of balance in a way that spoke to the individuality and unique career path of learners in post-secondary, advocating that not all disciplines should be treated the same in program requirements.

Both participants expressed concern about the imbalance of course load for Indigenous autistic learners, both requiring a reduction of course load to the 40% threshold acceptable for qualifying for StudentAid BC student loan funding as a full-time student as their only strategy to manage academic demands and rigor. It was the shared experience that participants were unable to satisfy the demands of mandatory coursework at a higher course load. For one participant, this meant failing the same writing course twice, explaining that for them, mandatory courses outside their mathematic and computing strength areas require twice their effort with limited returns. For the other, it meant being on academic probation in their first semester of post-secondary and passing all courses with the minimum grades required. From these experiences, both participants changed their approach to coursework to register for a maximum of two courses per semester so that they could continue enrolment as full-time student. This, however, does not provide the equitable experience of graduating on time with a peer cohort.

In exploring balance, one participant raised a concern related to Institute's responsiveness to Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (2015) *Calls to Action* and other mandates as established in the advancement of Indigenous rights. When asked about their thoughts on coursework that teaches about the history of Canada, the history of Indigenous peoples and Indigenous rights and justice issues for example, the participant was clear that this training should not be universal in post-secondary but dependent on the career path of the student and the ethical responsibilities carried by certain disciplines toward social justice.

The idea that balance is achieved by the sharing of roles and responsibilities was a message expressed as well by the other participant in their digital story titled *My Medicine Wheel*. Seven graphics were selected, each depicting different applications of Medicine Wheel Teachings with all supporting a fundamental message that Thrival is dependent on interdependence. For this participant, achieving balance in post-secondary education expands beyond the brick and mortar and studies, but requires care and attention to all the essentials that make attending school and thriving in it possible for mature learners things like

employment, income, housing, public safety, community engagement, and access to quality care. The participant acknowledged these essentials as medicines needing to be balanced to achieve wellness as a learner. The participant's story continued exploring balance through Wheels that depicted the Teaching of *all our relations*, to ground us in a knowing that all of creation exists in a natural balance in the web of life (Lane & Lucas, 2012; Simpson, 2021).

The participant's story too symbolized the balancing of roles that they play, *visionary, healer, teacher, and warrior*, and the values that would support realization of success in these roles, truth, love, wisdom, and courage. To answer our research questions, the participant reflected that we need to look at ourselves. For the participant, living out this character and roles is supported by balancing a life filled with practices and traditions that nurture this way of being. Practices like exercising, sleeping, eating well along with practicing forgiveness, spending time in nature, attending an African church, and practicing self-reflection are integral to mental wellness from a balanced holistic perspective (Lane & Lucas, 2012; McKivett et al., 2020).

This participant's story expands the concept of balance beyond oneself. It encompassed a recognition that if Mother Earth is not balanced, everyone suffers. Finding a pathway to balance is, according to our participants' story, an interplay between internal and external worlds with Mother Earth and creation as a connector with balance of worlds achieved by the participation of all of humanity upkeeping their responsibilities to natural elements (Lane & Lucas, 2012; McKivett et al., 2020).

Thrival: community

We need to come together and community is an essential component of Indigenous autistic Thrival (Simpson, 2021). The fire within is strengthened and sustained in relationship and connection with our people, our ancestors, our cosmology, nature, and the Creator (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Kuokkanen, 2007; Simpson, 2021). For Indigenous peoples it is in the blood memory we carry that tells us that though we might feel alone, we are not (Schultz et al., 2021). We are still here. We have always been here, and we always will (Monchalín, 2016). As a group cast to the margins in education and in society, born into the other, many Indigenous and autistic peoples struggle to feel a sense of safety, security, and belonging (Faccini & Allely, 2021; Johnson, 2014; Simpson, 2021). The author has heard many stories from relatives that out of fear, they could not acknowledge their cultural heritage as Indigenous. The same is true for her relatives that are neurodivergent. Prevalent racism and discrimination in western society have made it unsafe to do so (Faccini & Allely, 2021; Johnson, 2014; Simpson, 2021). Social isolation is made further complex by the degrees of cultural and familial separation that has happened because of colonization and impacts of assimilation policy on Indigenous peoples, and for autistic peoples, the challenges associated with autism identification. While this is not everyone's experience, it

is the experience of many (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Simpson, 2021; A. Smith et al., 2021).

It was with this understanding that this study's main priority was holding a safer space for all our members, especially our participants. Elder Gladue explained that community building starts with and is maintained with safety. Our protocols, values, and practices are followed for a reason, and the foundation is safety and respect (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Monchalín, 2016; Pidgeon, 2016). Before the study began, Elder Gladue shared his perspectives on what it means to hold a safer space together as we journeyed forward in this research. In a later session, he added to his Teaching, acknowledging that learning and participating is only made possible when a person feels safe.

Holding safer space was essential to community building in this project and provided the environment where we could hold each other up during difficult conversations and be honest sharing intimate details and Truths of lived experiences. Everyone who participated in this project understood this as a shared responsibility and all contributed to creating a safer environment. This was achieved through participant-to-participant support, Elder support, research facilitation practice, and the practice of traditions like introduction protocol, sharing circles, and consensus governance. Decolonizing our research processes was as important as the results we worked toward (Archibald et al., 2019; Datta, 2018; Hall & Tandon, 2017; L. T. Smith, 1999).

Establishing a safer environment for this study inspired ethical citizenship in practice (Hall & Tandon, 2017; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Wilson-Raybould, 2019). Participants demonstrated great respect, care, and concern for each other, by sharing affirming comments. Encouragement of active citizenship and inclusion occurred throughout sessions and was upheld and promoted by our Elder. He emphasized to the participants the importance of telling their stories, their Truths, in an honest way and to know the value of their knowledge and experiences.

When one participant shared their story, it invited the other to reflect on their experiences and share, building from each other and contributing to a feeling of shared storied experience. Stories are a powerful medium for conveying knowledge and understanding as we know well through the oral traditions of Indigenous peoples over millennia across the globe (Archibald et al., 2019; Genuis et al., 2015; Hanemaayer et al., 2020). Stories are also essential to forging strong community, transmitting culture, instilling ethics, values, and influencing actions (Freeman et al., 2020; Genuis et al., 2015; Hanemaayer et al., 2020; Simpson, 2021).

For the participants of this study, improving education and educational experiences requires much more than improvements to the transactional nature of knowledge consumption and representation. From an Indigenous perspective, education is not individualized but a collective responsibility (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Kuokkanen, 2007; Pidgeon, 2016). Making positive changes requires us to be community-minded and mind those in our community. The stories told by the participants carry guidance on how to create a community within educational settings for which Indigenous autistic learners

are safe, respected, and cared for. They also think of community beyond the Institute and hold expectations that supporting individuals, whether they are adult learners, are not just the role and responsibility of their Institute, but of the societies that they are members. From the macro concept of community and specifically addressing the issue of internalized oppression, one participant asserted that Elders and other adults in First Nation communities are integral to inspiring younger generations to overcome fear and do things that might seem difficult.

On a micro level, community development within post-secondary and teaching and learning environments requires taking in to account the different sensory needs of class members (Lubin & Brooks, 2021). One participant's story expressed the barriers that they encounter that disrupt their learning capabilities, for example, when there is cross talking from the other students in the classroom that is not relevant to the teachings and has overtaken the instructor while speaking. Over the course of their semester, they reflected on their learning preferences and advocated with instructors for alternative opportunities for tests and assessment. In one case, the participant tells that an instructor allowed the participant to visually represent their ideas and it resulted in an improved grade for the participant than the previously failed assignment.

Building community with Indigenous autistic learners calls in all to the circle (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Lane & Lucas, 2012; Simpson, 2021). This includes those yet not present or whose voices are not included. Many Indigenous cultures share a future-facing perspective, an ethic that governs what is good for the collective must be good for future generations (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Pidgeon, 2016; Simpson, 2021). The legacies that our participants desire to leave behind for those that come behind them are to remind that students are the teachers and that storied experiences help make things better, recognizing their trauma, grief, struggles, and Thrivival can be a steppingstone for one or for many. In critical hope, they know their stories, made whole by a Medicine Wheel lens, inform change because they provide insight and context about the Thrivival of Indigenous autistic peoples.

Future directions

To close, future directions are determined by one of the participants, concluding the importance of sharing diverse Indigenous autistic storied experience as an act of Thrivival. It was advised that further consensual exploration is needed to test Indigenous autistic student cognition and cognitive demand within a post-secondary environment, examining potential impacts on learning and health of Indigenous autistic learners with a focus on stress levels and feelings of student self-worth.

Conclusion

This study offers new paradigms to advance the work of Indigenization, decolonization, equity, diversity, and inclusion through culturally responsive arts-based

education and research methodology centering the storied experience of Indigenous autistic students. When situated and explored through a holistic, Indigenous neurodivergent trauma-informed lens, Indigenous autistic student storied experience contributes to reforming post-secondary teaching, learning, and policy to better support the identity and success of Indigenous autistic students, and arguably, all students who experience intersectional discrimination within post-secondary education systems.

Author's note

Heather A Simpson (Stswecem'c Xget'tem First Nation, Secwépemc) (MA) carries the Secwepemctsin traditional name Mégcen Tskwínek, Rainbows Around the Moon Woman. She is Secwepemc from the Stswecem'c Xget'tem First Nation, and the Senior Advisor for the Office of Indigenization at the Justice Institute of British Columbia. Holding a Master of Arts in Leadership degree from Trinity Western University in a Business Specialization Stream, Heather has led a successful career in human service and education for over 20 years, with most of this time serving marginalized peoples and communities, specifically, peoples with disabilities and Indigenous peoples.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Skwxwú7mesh, x'məθk'əyəm, qiqéyt and səliłwətaʔ First Nations, the project team, Elder Phillip Gladue, Dr Aaron Johannes, and Wendy Parry and the participants of this study. Thank you to Jason La Rochelle, Director of the Office of Indigenization and April Haddad, Director of Library Services at the Justice Institute of British Columbia, and BCcampus for funding this project with a special mention of Leva Lee, Manager, Learning & Teaching at BCcampus, for her role in stewarding this partnership.


Declaration of conflicting interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and publication of this article.

Funding

The author disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and publication of this article: This study was supported by BCcampus RF2101.

ORCID iD

Heather A Simpson (Stswecem'c Xget'tem First Nation, Secwépemc)  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7691-9801>

Glossary

Cherokee	distinct Indigenous peoples located in the southeastern USA
Cree	an Indigenous language and ethnic group widely represented in Canada
Inuit	a federally recognized Indigenous people in Canada
Métis	a federally recognized Indigenous people in Canada
qiqéyt (Qayqayt)	distinct Indigenous peoples located in the lower Coast region of British Columbia, Canada
Secwepemc	distinct Indigenous peoples located in the Interior region of British Columbia, Canada

Secwepemctsin	an Indigenous language spoken in the Interior region of British Columbia, Canada
Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish)	distinct Indigenous peoples located in the lower Coast region of British Columbia, Canada
Stswecem'c Xgat'tem	Canoe Creek Dog Creek First Nation located in a semi-remote Interior region of British Columbia, Canada
səlilwətaʔl (Tsleil-Waututh)	distinct Indigenous peoples located in the lower Coast region of British Columbia, Canada
xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam)	distinct Indigenous peoples located in the lower Coast region of British Columbia, Canada

References

- Archibald, J.-A., Lee-Morgan, J., De Santolo, J., & Smith, L. T. (2019). *Decolonizing research: Indigenous storywork as methodology*. Zed Books.
- Bailey, B., & Arciuli, J. (2020). Indigenous Australians with autism: A scoping review. *Autism*, 24(5), 1031–1046. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361319894829>
- Datta, R. (2018). Decolonizing both researcher and research and its effectiveness in Indigenous research. *Research Ethics Review*, 14(2), 1–24. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1747016117733296>
- Datta, R., Khyang, N. U., Prue Khyang, H. K., Prue Kheyang, H. A., Ching Khyang, M., & Chapola, J. (2015). Participatory action research and researcher's responsibilities: An experience with an Indigenous community. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 18(6), 581–599. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13645579.2014.927492>
- DeNigris, D., Brooks, P. J., Obeid, R., Alarcon, M., Shane-Simpson, C., & Gillespie-Lynch, K. (2018). Bullying and identity development: Insights from autistic and nonautistic college students. *Journal of Autism & Developmental Disorders*, 48(3), 666–678. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29243098/>
- Faccini, L., & Allely, C. S. (2021). Dealing with trauma in individuals with autism spectrum disorders: Trauma informed care, treatment, and forensic implications. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, 30(8), 1082–1092. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10926771.2020.1853295>
- Flotskaya, N., Bulanova, S., Ponomareva, M., Flotskiy, N., & Konopleva, T. (2019). Self-identity development among Indigenous adolescents from the far north of Russia. *Behavioral Sciences*, 9(10), Article 106. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs9100106>
- Freeman, S., Martin, J., Nash, C., Hausknecht, S., & Skinner, K. (2020). Use of a digital storytelling workshop to foster development of intergenerational relationships and preserve culture with the Nak'azdli First Nation: Findings from the Nak'azdli Lha'hutit'en project. *Canadian Journal on Aging*, 39(2), 284–293. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0714980819000588>
- Gaudry, A., & Lorenz, D. (2018). Indigenization as inclusion, reconciliation, and decolonization: Navigating the different visions for Indigenizing the Canadian academy. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, 14(3), 218–227. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1177180118785382>
- Genuis, S. K., Willows, N., & Jardine, C. (2015). Through the lens of our cameras: Children's lived experience with food security in a Canadian Indigenous community. *Child: Care, Health & Development*, 41(4), 600–610. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cch.12182>
- Graham, L. (2012). Disproportionate over-representation of Indigenous students in New South Wales government special schools. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 42(2), 163–176. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0305764X.2012.676625>
- Hall, B. L., & Tandon, R. (2017). Decolonization of knowledge, epistemicide, participatory research and higher education. *Research for All*, 1(1), 6–19. <https://doi.org/10.18546/RFA.01.1.02>
- Hanemaayer, R., Anderson, K., Haines, J., Lickers, K., Lickers Xavier, A., Gordon, K., & Tait Neufeld, H. (2020). Exploring the perceptions of and experiences with traditional foods among First Nations female youth: A participatory photovoice study. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(7), Article 2214. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17072214>
- Hyman, A., Stacy, E., Atkinson, K., Novak Lauscher, H., Rabeneck, J., Oleman, G., Cooper, P., Young, W., Kellman, C., & Ho, K. (2020). Digital storytelling and dialogue to support culturally safe health care for Indigenous patients in British Columbia: The integration of Indigenous healing practices in the province's health care system is being facilitated by a video that features traditional practitioners and Western medical professionals. *British Columbia Medical Journal*, 62(3), 94–97. <https://bcmj.org/articles/digital-storytelling-and-dialogue-support-culturally-safe-health-care-indigenous-patients>
- Johnson, S. (2014). Knucwénte-kuc re Stsmémelt.s-kuc trauma-informed education for Indigenous children in foster care. *Canadian Social Work Review/Revue Canadienne de Service Social*, 31(2), 155–174. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43486319>
- Johnston-Goodstar, K. (2013). Indigenous youth participatory action research: Re-visioning social justice for social work with Indigenous youths. *Social Work*, 58(4), 314–320. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/swt036>
- Kapp, S. K. (2011). Navajo and autism: The beauty of harmony. *Disability & Society*, 26(5), 583–595. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09687599.2011.589192>
- Kapp, S. K., Gillespie-Lynch, K., Sherman, L. E., & Hutman, T. (2013). Deficit, difference, or both? Autism and neurodiversity. *Developmental Psychology*, 49(1), 59–71. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/22545843/>
- Kelley, M. N., & Lowe, J. R. (2018). Strong cultural identity effects stress levels among Native American youth at risk for obesity. *Journal of Cultural Diversity*, 25(4), 127–131. <https://www.proquest.com/openview/ed7351dc71350b5b3b3d74d2a7164cad/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=34124>
- Kiger, M. E., & Varpio, L. (2020). Thematic analysis of qualitative data: AMEE guide no. 131. *Medical Teacher*, 42(8), 846–854. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2020.1755030>
- Kirkness, V. J., & Barnhardt, R. (1991). First Nations and higher education: The four R's—respect, relevance, reciprocity, responsibility. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 30(3), 1–15. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24397980>
- Kuokkanen, R. J. (2007). *Reshaping the university: Responsibility, Indigenous epistemes, and the logic of the gift*. University of British Columbia Press.
- LaFever, M. (2016). Switching from Bloom to the Medicine Wheel: Creating learning outcomes that support Indigenous

- ways of knowing in post-secondary education. *Intercultural Education*, 27(5), 409–424. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14675986.2016.1240496>
- Lane, P., & Lucas, P. (2012). *The sacred tree* (3rd ed.). Four Worlds International.
- Lindblom, A. (2014). Under-detection of autism among First Nations children in British Columbia, Canada. *Disability & Society*, 29(8), 1248–1259. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09687599.2014.923750>
- Lindblom, A. (2017a). Exploring autism and music interventions through a First Nations lens. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, 13(4), 202–209. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1177180117729854>
- Lindblom, A. (2017b). “It gives them a place to be proud”—Music and social inclusion. Two diverse cases of young First Nations people diagnosed with autism in British Columbia, Canada. *Psychology of Music*, 45(2), 268–282. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735616659553>
- Lubin, J., & Brooks, J. (2021). College students with autism: Navigating the bumpy road. *College Student Journal*, 55(3), 318–324. <https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA681132861&sid=googleScholar&v=2.1&it=r&linkaccess=abs&issn=01463934&p=AONE&sw=w&userGroupName=anon%7Ef505020&aty=open-web-entry>
- MacLeod, A., Lewis, A., & Robertson, C. (2013). “Why should I be like bloody Rain Man?!” Navigating the autistic identity. *British Journal of Special Education*, 40(1), 41–49. <https://nasenjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1467-8578.12015>
- McKivett, A., Hudson, J. N., McDermott, D., & Paul, D. (2020). Two-eyed seeing: A useful gaze in Indigenous medical education research. *Medical Education*, 54(3), 217–224. <https://doi.org/10.1111/medu.14026>
- McMorris, C. A., Baraskewich, J., Ames, M. A., Shaikh, K. T., Ncube, B. L., & Bebko, J. M. (2019). Mental health issues in post-secondary students with autism spectrum disorder: Experiences in accessing services. *International Journal of Mental Health & Addiction*, 17(3), 585–595. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11469-018-9988-3>
- Monchalin, L. (2016). *The colonial problem: An Indigenous perspective on crime and injustice in Canada*. University of Toronto Press.
- Pidgeon, M. (2016). More than a checklist: Meaningful Indigenous inclusion in higher Education. *Social Inclusion*, 4(1), 77–91. <https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v4i1.436>
- Schultz, A., Nguyen, T. P., Sinclair, M., Fransoo, R., & McGibbon, E. (2021). Historical and continued colonial impacts on heart health of Indigenous peoples in Canada: What’s reconciliation got to do with it? *CJC Open*, 3(12), S149–S164. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cjco.2021.09.010>
- Shepherd, S. M., Delgado, R. H., Sherwood, J., & Paradies, Y. (2018). The impact of Indigenous cultural identity and cultural engagement on violent offending. *BMC Public Health*, 18, Article 50. <https://bmcpubhealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-017-4603-2>
- Simpson, H. A. (2021). Forming strong cultural identities in an intersecting space of indigeneity and autism in Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, 17(3), 416–424. <https://doi.org/10.1177/11771801211039274>
- Smith, A., Funaki, H., & MacDonald, L. (2021). Living, breathing settler-colonialism: The reification of settler norms in a common university space. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 40(1), 132–145. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/07294360.2020.1852190>
- Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples*. Zed Books.
- Sullivan, A. L. (2013). School-based autism identification: Prevalence, racial disparities, and systemic correlates. *School Psychology Review*, 42(3), 298–316. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02796015.2013.12087475>
- Tan, C. D. (2018). “I’m a normal autistic person, not an abnormal neurotypical”: Autism spectrum disorder diagnosis as biographical illumination. *Social Science & Medicine*, 197, 161–167. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29247898/>
- Thompson Rivers University. (2010). *A handbook for educators of aboriginal students*. https://inside.tru.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/ALBAA_handbook.pdf
- The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). *Calls to action*. https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf
- Ward, V., & de Leeuw, S. (2018). Web of culture: Critically assessing online mental health resources for Indigenous youth in northern British Columbia using digital storytelling. *UBC Medical Journal*, 9(2), 20–22. <https://ojs.library.ubc.ca/index.php/ubcmj/article/view/189864>
- Wilson-Raybould, J. (2019). *From where I stand: Rebuilding Indigenous nations for a stronger Canada*. Purich Books.
- Winstone, N., Huntington, C., Goldsack, L., Kyrrou, E., & Millward, L. (2014). Eliciting rich dialogue through the use of activity-oriented interviews: Exploring self-identity in autistic young people. *Childhood*, 21(2), 190–206. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0907568213491771>
- Young, A., Nicholas, D. B., Chamberlain, S.-P., Suapa, N., Gale, N., & Bailey, A. J. (2019). Exploring and building autism service capacity in rural and remote regions: Participatory action research in rural Alberta and British Columbia, Canada. *Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice*, 23(5), 1143–1151. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361318801340>