

# Yehyatonhserayenteri: A Haudenosaunee Model for Onkwehon:we (Indigenous) Education

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## **Abstract**

Focusing on Onkwehon:we (Indigenous) ways of knowing, and Haudenosaunee ways of knowing in particular, this article showcases the strengths of Onkwehon:we-led education and leadership. Under the leadership of our Youth Advisory Council, 22 young people (11 Onkwehon:we and 11 non-Onkwehon:we) took part in three days of workshops on Six Nations. The workshops were led and conducted by Haudenosaunee knowledge keepers who covered a range of topics. Six months after the completion of the workshops, 18 of the 22 youth participated in one-on-one follow-up interviews. We also conducted community impact interviews with 10 adult community members from Six Nations and Brantford. Through the workshops and interviews, we learned that Nation-specific learning helped to inform non-Onkwehon:we youth about the history of the lands on which they live, granting them access to traditions and ceremonies that resonated with them in both emotional and intellectual ways. Through experiential education and Haudenosaunee leadership, both Onkwehon:we and non-Onkwehon:we youth learned to value the original instructions, build relationships, and address the challenges of decolonization in an increasingly uncertain world.

*Keywords:* Indigenous education, decolonization, experiential education, youth, allyship, reconciliation

## **Résumé**

Focalisant sur les formes de connaissances et de savoirs onkwehonwe (autochtone), et en particulier sur celles du peuple Haudenosaunee, cet article expose les forces d'un leadership et d'une éducation dirigés par les Onkwehonwe. Sous la direction de notre Conseil consultatif des jeunes, 22 jeunes personnes (11 Onkwehonwe et 11 non-Onkwehonwe) ont pris part à un séminaire de trois jours sur les Six Nations. Les ateliers étaient dirigés et conduits par les gardiens du savoir haudenosaunee qui ont couvert un éventail de sujets. Six mois après la fin des ateliers, 18 des 22 jeunes ont participé à des entretiens individuels de suivi. Des entrevues d'impact sur la communauté ont également été conduites avec 10 membres adultes de la communauté issus des Six Nations et de Brantford. Par les ateliers et entrevues, nous avons constaté que les apprentissages spécifiques apportés par les Nations

ont contribué à informer les jeunes non Onkwehonwe à propos de l'histoire de la terre sur laquelle ils vivent, leur octroyant l'accès à des traditions et cérémonies dans lesquelles ils ont trouvé une résonance tant émotionnelle qu'intellectuelle. À travers une éducation expérientielle et le leadership haudenosaunee, tant les jeunes Onkwehonwe que les non Onkwehonwe ont appris à valoriser les savoirs traditionnels, bâtir des relations et de relever les défis de la décolonisation dans un mode de plus en plus incertain.

*Mots-clés* : enseignement autochtone, décolonisation, éducation expérientielle, jeune, allié, réconciliation

*Tsi ákta raotihén:ton wa 'tekheyatkà:neren', wa 'káttoke' tsi tyo 'knón:we otstehrà:ke ratine 'kòn:reks táhnon ratiráhstha'. Onkenà:kwen' tsi tsi 'k sha 'oyé:ra wahatihéhtkente', sok è:ren ya 'kítýe'. Tsi tóhka niwahsì:take ní:iore yé:ke 'skwe, tontakakahraté:ni' táhnon wa 'katkátho' tsi Yethi 'nisténha Onhwéntsya wahonnónnia 'te otstehrà:ke, thiya 'tewahsónhkwake nok yohní:ron. Tsi wà:kýe', kitstó:tahkwe tsi ká:ton "Í:kehre eh nákyere.*

—Kawennakon Bonnie Whitlow

## Introduction

Between 2006 and 2016, the number of Onkwehon:we<sup>a</sup> (Indigenous) youth aged 15 to 34 living in Canada increased by 39%. This number is just over 6% for their non-Onkwehon:we (non-Indigenous) youth counterparts. Likewise, since 2006, the Onkwehon:we population has grown by 42.5%, which is a rate of growth more than four times faster than the rest of the population (Statistics Canada, 2018). More attention than ever should be paid to how and what Onkwehon:we young people are learning. The ongoing legacies of colonialism and residential schools in Canada have meant that formal public education has often not met the needs of Onkwehon:we youth, who commonly cite instances of systemic racism or well-intentioned non-Onkwehon:we teachers who are unable to recognize how ill-prepared and unqualified they are to teach about Onkwehon:we histories and current realities (Gray & Coates, 2010; Crooks, Chiodo, Thomas, & Hughes, 2010; Bomberry, 2013). Education for all young people should give an accounting of past and current injustices, while also reflecting the cultural traditions, languages, artistic expression, and traditional foundations of Onkwehon:we communities (Riecken et al., 2006; Patteson, Restoule, Margolin, & de Leon, 2010).

Unfortunately, it is still common practice for Indigenous Studies courses to be taught by non-Onkwehon:we teachers. This practice can be problematic since non-Onkwehon:we teachers are unlikely to have lived experience in Onkwehon:we communities. Onkwehon:we scholars focused on defining hallmarks of Onkwehon:we expertise, scholarship, and cultural fluency contest the entire Canadian education system (Gorlewski & Tuck, 2018). These conversations about cultural fluency speak to non-Onkwehon:we people's inverse relationship to Onkwehon:we knowledge: cultural illiteracy. This is a provocative challenge to Canadian educators to both recognize their own limitations and think about how culturally fluent they are relative to Onkwehon:we experts. The best litmus test is a single self-reflective question issued to anyone who wants to teach an Indigenous Studies course: How comfortable would you feel delivering this course content in front of a panel of Onkwehon:we educators or an all-Onkwehon:we audience? These educational inequities can be rectified when programs are led, designed, and delivered by Onkwehon:we teachers and academics.

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a Onkwehon:we is a Kanien'keha (Mohawk) word that roughly translates to mean "The Original People."

Creating spaces for Onkwehon:we youth to see themselves accurately represented through genuine participation resists Eurocentric education curricula. When Onkwehon:we youth are participants in their own education and have a voice in setting their own priorities for learning, they create curricula that are reflective of their cultures and identities. Developing education delivery models for both Onkwehon:we and non-Onkwehon:we youth outside of Eurocentric school-based curricula creates the potential to foreground Onkwehon:we knowledge and ways of being (Battiste, 2000). Onkwehon:we experts have suggested that these alternative educational spaces should adopt traditional teaching and learning methods; include the promotion of cultural knowledge and pride; provide positive Onkwehon:we role models; and promote understandings of Onkwehon:we traditions in the broader Canadian context (Riecken et al., 2006; Gaudreau, White, & McDonald, 2009; Thomas, 2012; Bomberry, 2013).

In response to the calls to forefront Onkwehon:we models of teaching and learning, our team embarked on an Onkwehon:we-led research project, infused with the spiritual power of dreamtime, including elements of prophecy, and following a path of practice that was governed by the Spirit World or Ancestors. The research began with the project creator's dream of Shakotinyoya'ks (Little People) wearing the different ancestral dress from all the different nations of the world, climbing the canyon walls and painting on them. The dream would become the motivation to begin this project, which came to be known as #TAG. The research was driven by the following research questions: How do youth understand Onkwehon:we identity in the context of traditional knowledge and arts-based practices? Does cross-cultural exchange of knowledge promote healing and strengthen Onkwehon:we communities? Do young people benefit from Onkwehon:we education? #TAG was a partnership of Onkwehon:we young people, allies, university-based researchers, students, and community activists. Through this project, Onkwehon:we and non-Onkwehon:we young people experienced educational workshops that were led and conducted by Haudenosaunee community members and knowledge keepers. The experiential workshops covered a range of topics: sovereignty, food, ceremonies, treaties, historical agreements between Six Nations and Brantford, decolonization, resistance, art, residential schools, cultural pride, language, and artistic practice.

In follow-up interviews, six months after the workshops were completed, youth participants and adult community members discussed the importance of #TAG's informal education model—Onkwehon:we education delivered by Haudenosaunee people,

for Haudenosaunee people, on Haudenosaunee land. Interviewees discussed the ways in which community-specific education that was experiential, arts-informed, and based in ceremony made a big difference in what they learned and how they felt about it. The young people were very articulate about the ways in which Onkwehon:we knowledge and leadership created a sense of pride for Onkwehon:we participants, and a sense of accountability for non-Onkwehon:we participants. Focusing on Onkwehon:we ways of knowing, and Haudenosaunee ways of knowing in particular, this article showcases the strengths of Onkwehon:we-led education and leadership, demonstrating the power of shifting the narrative away from deficits to elevate original knowledge, life-giving stories, beautiful traditions, and sustainable living practices that make the world a better and more vibrant place for everyone.

### **Onkwehon:we Ways of Knowing**

One of the most destructive acts of colonization was the attempt to discredit and destroy Onkwehon:we ways of knowing. These ways of understanding the world fused language, culture, and living life in a good way (Thomas, 2012). Onkwehon:we understandings were disrupted and interfered with by colonial codes of thought and behaviour that prized individualism and patriarchy, as settlers continued to undermine Onkwehon:we ontologies that focused on holism and community support (Tuck & Yang, 2012; Thomas, Mitchell, & Arseneau, 2016). These continued unrelenting attempts to entrench colonial codes in Onkwehon:we communities are clearly still present today, as is evidenced by scholarship on Onkwehon:we leadership that continues to focus on power that accrues through hierarchical positions like chief or council member, rather than on leadership models that are more reflective of the original instructions (Cote-Meek, Dokis-Ranney, Lavallee, & Wemigwans, 2012; Monchalin, 2016; Oliver et al., 2015). Colonial governments continually try to bypass traditional governance structures because they can control and influence Canadian elected systems. Through economic sanctions and displays of false power, they coerce elected councils to do their bidding. Thomas (2012) argues that the denial of Onkwehon:we ways of knowing demands a counter-response that re-centres and celebrates traditional practices and philosophies: “liberation by reclaiming Indigenous knowledge through Indigenous ways of knowing is the ultimate goal” (p. 16). In

many Haudenosaunee communities, the traditional leadership structures simply continues to function and govern for the people in the same manner in which they have always led. They continue to reject false forms of power and assert their sovereignty.

Onkwehon:we leadership, in contrast to settler models, often places emphasis on responsibility for the larger community and for the coming faces (generations yet unborn; Evans & Sinclair, 2016; Hill, Wakerman, & Matthews, 2001). This connection between and across generations has particular resonance for the well-being of families, communities, and cultures (Anderson, 2011). The Haudenosaunee have guarded and maintained a strong anti-colonial, socio-political separatism and sovereignty since contact. The prescription for an international relationship of non-interference was encoded and ensconced in early treaty documents like the Two-Row Treaty Wampum (Monture, 2014). The Two-Row treaty was the first international agreement between the Haudenosaunee and the Dutch, which would set the stage and provide the foundation for all future Haudenosaunee treaties with European immigrant populations and governments.

Countless Onkwehon:we scholars and activists have shown that cultural knowledge is paramount in creating better mental health outcomes for young people. Providing opportunities for them to celebrate their Onkwehon:we identities through ceremony, song, language learning and other traditional practices is a powerful form of healing (Freeman, 2017; Deer, 2016; Thomas et al., 2016; Thomas, 2012). Teaching and learning Onkwehon:we ways of knowing and being is crucial to the process of decolonization for Onkwehon:we peoples, and, arguably, would provide a more holistic and relational understanding of the world to non-Onkwehon:we people as well. A well-balanced focus that goes beyond simple intellectual pursuit and requires action, emotion, and spiritual expression brings us into wholistic alignment with decolonization according to the tenets of Onkwehonwe'neha (the teachings and practice of original ways of being). In oral traditions active listening proves more powerful than the written word—the return to storytelling provides a more powerful engagement with the teller and other listeners. Monture (2014) emphasizes John Mohawk's understanding that the "collective 'hearing' of cultural narratives is imperative to having people actively and deeply engage in 'thinking' about their content" (p. 218). The Onkwehon:we view of active listening engages the whole being and requires the listener to engage, digest, and then integrate ancestral teachings into action and practices that modify and improve our way of being in and interacting with the world. In terms of our understanding of Onkwehon:we ways of



teaching, this oral storytelling method holds a great deal of power in working with Onkwehon:we young people to build identity and with non-Onkwehon:we young people to build responsibility.

## **Our Project**

#TAG: Transformation, Action, Graffiti, is an Onkwehon:we-led research guided by dream and following a path determined by the Spirit World or Ancestors. Our approach is grounded in a strengths-based understanding that Onkwehon:we young people are strong, active, and talented. Our team is comprised of researchers, students, community members, and artists from across Turtle Island: Six Nations, the Brantford area, Chile, and the Mapuche territory of Kompu Lof. The graffiti artists on our project team are the Alapinta Muralist Collective ([www.alapinta.cl](http://www.alapinta.cl)). Between us we speak two original languages: Kanien'keha (Mohawk) and Mapudungun (Mapuche language), and two colonial languages: English and Spanish. The delegation from Chile, including the artists, were also a mix of Onkwehon:we and non-Onkwehon:we people. Those who were Mapuche spoke Mapudungun and led workshops to teach the young people about the struggles and strengths faced by Onkwehon:we people in Chile.

#TAG centres, promotes, and showcases Onkwehon:we ways of knowing, being, and doing. Research has long played a role in contributing to oppressive social relations woven into systems of power, and Western research, in particular, has systematically silenced Onkwehon:we ways of knowing (Thomas, 2012; Wilson, 2008; Smith, 1999). This project attempted to do research in a way that foregrounds Onkwehon:we ways of knowing and challenges Western research paradigms (Thomas et al., 2016). Indeed, we have attempted to subvert the Western research paradigms that are fundamentally embedded in the academic institution and its priorities for academic researchers. For example, our team struggled with authorship on this article since academic researchers who want to continue securing research funding and career promotions understand that first-authored academic publications are key “measure[s] of productivity, success, and promise” within academe (Ninomiya & Pollock, 2017, p. 33). This article was largely formulated and written by the second author, but the invaluable Indigenous knowledge that makes this article truly Indigenous is that of the Haudenosaunee community, and thus requires that



the article have a first author who is a part of that community. The OCAP (Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession) principles specify that Indigenous communities have a right to self-determination in research (First Nations Centre, 2007). We see this authorship model as an advancement of these principles, which recognizes a need “to push mainstream academic boundaries, foster openness to different ways of doing research, practice humility, and integrate Indigenous ways of knowing into research” (Ninomiya & Pollock, 2017, p. 32).

We began this process by hiring a Youth Advisory Council (YAC) that is staffed and led by Onkwehon:we young people. Because the project was interested in beginning the process of healing relationships between Onkwehon:we people and settlers, two non-Onkwehon:we youth were also hired to support and guide the research project. In total, six young people acted as the guiding force of #TAG, working tirelessly to recruit youth into the workshops, set the tone and content of the work, and lead the team with their vision. Under the leadership of our Youth Advisory Council, 22 young people (11 Onkwehon:we and 11 non-Onkwehon:we) took part in three days of workshops on Six Nations. Six Nations is the most populous First Nations reserve in Canada and is located adjacent to the city of Brantford. Six Nations is also unique in that it is comprised of six Haudenosaunee nations: Mohawk, Onondaga, Oneida, Cayuga, Seneca, and Tuscarora. Brantford is situated on the Haldimand Tract, land promised but never ceded to Six Nations, which includes six miles on each side of the Grand River.

The workshops were led and conducted by Haudenosaunee knowledge keepers who covered a range of topics: sovereignty, food, ceremonies, treaties, historical agreements between Six Nations and Brantford, colonization, decolonization, resistance, art, residential schools, cultural pride, language, and artistic practice. Each of the speakers or artists attempted to show a balance between negative, colonial legacies and the pride, resistance, and activism embedded in Onkwehon:we communities. The goals of the workshops were to instill or enhance cultural pride for Onkwehon:we young people, and to break down stereotypes and educate non-Onkwehon:we youth through a for-Onkwehon:we-people-by-Onkwehon:we-people framework. During this period of experiential learning, the youth were encouraged to doodle and draw pictures and images that represented what they were seeing and hearing. At the end of the workshops, the Alapinta muralists collected the youth’s drawings and integrated their ideas into two public art sister murals that were collaboratively painted in Six Nations and Brantford. As two halves of a

whole, these pieces were intended to remind each community of their relationship to the other. Six months after the completion of the workshops, 18 of the 22 youth participated in follow-up one-on-one interviews. We also conducted community impact interviews with 10 adult community members from Six Nations and Brantford. Each interview was conducted, recorded, and transcribed by the YAC. Our team of academic researchers, alongside the YAC, read the transcripts, coded for key themes, and produced a website and community report showcasing the findings ([www.tagsix.net](http://www.tagsix.net)).

In this article, we reflect on the ways in which young people and community stakeholders talked about the importance of Onkwehon:we mentorship, leadership, and decolonization. Drawing on data from their interviews, we foreground the voices of young people as they explain the ways in which they benefited from being members of, or hosted by, Six Nations, and the ways in which these factors created both emotional and intellectual change in the participants. The expertise that the young people offered in their interviews is also contextualized by empirical research evidence that attests to Haudenosaunee-specific ways of knowing, which are grounded in ceremony and unique to these territories. These two forms of evidence—lived experience and Onkwehon:we research—are nested to paint a picture of the benefits inherent in learning from, and being led by, the Haudenosaunee community.

## **Onkwehon:we Leadership**

Although popular political discourse in Canada extols reconciliation—a word we use carefully in this article as well—it is equally important to note that definitions of reconciliation look remarkably different on both sides of the Onkwehon:we/settler dynamic, especially since the emotional and everyday labour of that enterprise falls to Onkwehon:we people. Several of the Onkwehon:we people involved in #TAG were hesitant to accept the language of reconciliation since they could not see the conversation being linked to concrete actions such as repatriation of land or reparations:

I think it's good to get people talking about the culture, but I'm not so sure about that reconciliation part because you wouldn't really know how that even works. I don't know. I just feel like it's great to represent the Two-Row Wampum belt,

but it doesn't really show their apology or get us anywhere or fix anything for us.  
(Onkwehon:we Youth)

Onkwehon:we researchers argue that these embodied, spiritual, territorial, and ancestral facets of Onkwehon:we communities are those that will sustain and bolster young people and the coming generations (Evans & Sinclair, 2016; Hansen, Ropo, & Sauer, 2007). Interrupting the dominant settler narratives with Onkwehon:we stories from Onkwehon:we people on Onkwehon:we lands is a form of this resurgence (Simpson, 2014). Refusing mainstream platitudes and instead creating Onkwehon:we art, narrative, and spiritual practice—all elements of the #TAG workshops—opens the possibility of writing one's self:

I also think that it was important that the workshops be run by people from Six Nations, so that the youth could see the capacity of people in the community and understand that those strengths exist. [*Laughs*] That we do exist as Indigenous people but also as educators and health administrators and artists and dancers. I think that's actually about showing who we are on our own terms. (Onkwehon:we Community Member)

Stories and events that are infused with cultural power, and that are told by the community for the community, sustain and support communities through positive affirmation, cultural pride, and generative narratives. The original stories are those that have sustained Onkwehon:we people through acts of genocide and ongoing challenges, and those stories are critical to decolonization and interruption (Thomas et al., 2016; Kirmayer, Dandeneau, Marshall, Phillips, & Williamson, 2011). As Monture (2014) suggests, "It is now the responsibility of our people to make these images and symbols become relevant again within the world around us, employing the tools and technologies of the present" (p. 22). Celebrating these images and stories in graffiti form is a key strategy of the #TAG project:

I see the symbols in that mural and I think if the corn can keep coming back and keep growing, I think that we as Haudenosaunee people can do that. Like my beans come back, the corn comes back and the water, you know, people messing up the planet, but it keeps adapting and changing and coming back. I think that's clear in the mural for me. The hope of the corn coming back, the hope of the

beans coming back, the hope of our people constantly changing, adapting, and coming back and being resilient. (Onkwehon:we Community Member)

## **Haudenosaunee Teaching and Learning**

This project was led and hosted by the Haudenosaunee people of Six Nations of the Grand River. The workshops were hosted on the land and on reserve—they were very much steeped in the stories and traditions of the Haudenosaunee people. Onkwehon:we researchers have consistently called for more Nation-specific models of Onkwehon:we youth leadership and Onkwehon:we research (Oliver et al., 2015; Smylie et al., 2004). Although the #TAG workshops also created spaces for the voices of Mapuche, Cree/Metis, and Anishinaabe people, #TAG was very much centred in Haudenosaunee ways of knowing. Hosting the workshops on Haudenosaunee territory linked learning to the land, its history, and its reclamation: “The reclamation activities and ongoing negotiations involving Six Nations and the Grand River tract lands have reaffirmed educational priorities about Haudenosaunee traditions, languages, history and culture” (McCarthy, 2008, p. 135). Nation-specific learning also helped to inform non-Onkwehon:we youth about the history of the lands on which they live. Youth leaders talked about the importance of hosting #TAG in this context:

I thought that was a really important part putting everyone, all the youth on the land, and in the community because it was a way to welcome the non-Indigenous youth who had probably never been there. But I think that, if you’re a kid from Six Nations, I think that there will always be a connection to that land, like, “Oh, this is mine. This is for me.” (Onkwehon:we Youth)

Haudenosaunee Elders and scholars emphasize key elements of Haudenosaunee ontology that are fundamental to the culture: “keeping a good mind, relational responsibility and a sense of reverence and gratitude” (Johnson, 1996, p. 124). Monture (2014) points to the original instructions that emphasize the importance of using a good mind to be kind and helpful, and to work together for the greater good. All of these responsibilities are embedded in the Creation story and in the Great Law of Peace, which guide Haudenosaunee people in living a good life (Thomas et al., 2016). Gaining knowledge

in a Haudenosaunee context often involves experiential learning, storytelling, and interacting with the land (Freeman, 2015). Watts (2013) advocates “place-based thought,” which speaks to the interconnections between Haudenosaunee ways of knowing and the land itself. In contrast to mainstream society, Onkwehonwe’neha views each entity in the natural environment (plants, animals, water) as sentient beings with body, spirit mind, and soul. Understanding the land is integral to understanding ourselves, our purpose, and our relation to the rest of the world. All of these teachings were embedded into the #TAG workshops and had a discernable impact on the non-Haudenosaunee youth as well:

I think I had a deeper understanding of the culture from hearing the opening [Ohen:ton Karihwatehkwen or Thanksgiving Address] because just thanking everybody, you know? The sky mother and then, for instance, fruits and the vegetables and then the sun. Just everything. You just thank it for everything. I realized how much you have to be thankful for. (Non-Onkwehon:we Youth)

The Ohen:ton Karihwatehkwen is a spoken address that opens gatherings and brings people’s minds together as one mind, aligning all minds with the natural world. While this participant may not have understood the full significance of the Ohen:ton Karihwatehkwen, their take-away learning is not insignificant. As John Mohawk (2005) writes, “Iroquois teachers of the tradition, in my experience, are willing to accept that different people at different stages of life are able to grasp and learn from different elements of the story at different moments. Their point might be only that the story should be told and discussed among the generations” (pp. xi–xii). To this end, informal, experiential Haudenosaunee education achieved its goal of inspiring gratitude.

Being on Haudenosaunee land also had another role to play in mediating the relationships between Onkwehon:we and non-Onkwehon:we youth:

You’re just held accountable by your environment, being on Six Nations. Like you’re in their community... I think that’s like really helpful whereas maybe if we had these workshops in Brantford and you’re talking about a community that you’re not actually in, it’s not holding you super accountable. You’re in their house, so be respectful while you also inherently try to learn at the same time. (Non-Onkwehon:we Youth)

Being a guest on the land had a significant impact on the non-Onkwehon:we youth, most of whom had never been to Six Nations before the workshops. The exchange of home-field advantage that happened between Onkwehon:we and non-Onkwehon:we youth meant that non-Onkwehon:we youth felt more accountable for making change once they had been guests of, and developed relationships with, Onkwehon:we people. Several non-Onkwehon:we young people talked about feeling more accountable for creating change and healing relationships between the communities when they learned that they lived on unceded Haudenosaunee territories.

## **Youth Leadership and Learning**

### **Non-Onkwehon:we Youth**

While Onkwehon:we people are engaged in decolonization and interruption, the Canadian government's stated commitment to reconciliation provides opportunities for non-Onkwehon:we Canadians to take concrete actions toward ending systemic racism against Onkwehon:we people. In the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015), the commission underscores the importance of non-Onkwehon:we youth coming to understand how their own privilege has been shaped by colonial narratives that undermine Onkwehon:we people's experiences. #TAG provided opportunities for non-Onkwehon:we youth to hear those experiences from Onkwehon:we people themselves:

The best parts were the dancing and the story that was told about the Natives staying strong with their culture. It made it really obvious what had happened and why it's so bad and so awful that White people stole their kids and their cultures and everything they loved and was precious to them. That stuck with all of us, I think. Reminded us of what that must have been like and how painful it would have been. It made me want to do better at telling people that their stereotypes are wrong and that they don't know the real story of what happened. (Non-Onkwehon:we Youth)

In this case, the young person balances the beauty of the culture (dancing) against the horrific legacy of residential schools, concluding that her experiences on Six Nations have created a sense of advocacy and responsibility. Call #63 in the TRC's (2015) Calls to Action reads as follows: "iii: Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect." Through Haudenosaunee leadership and hospitality, #TAG sought to answer this call. Moreover, the experiential and artistic format of the workshops combined to evoke ideas, images, and perhaps more importantly, emotions:

The workshop versus the classroom experience learning about everything was much more personal. At school, the teacher hadn't been Indigenous. She'd been from Brantford, I believe, so she maybe has some understanding of the history and stuff, but I don't know. I think with learning in the #TAG program—it put a lot more feeling into it, like there was personal connections and it just put more emotion into it. (Non-Onkwehon:we Youth)

#TAG was invested in changing hearts and minds, and our data shows that the Haudenosaunee context was ideal to work on the whole person, not just their intellect. Many of the youth commented on the stark difference between learning in the formal educational setting (mostly through reading textbooks) as opposed to learning on the land and in the community (mostly through art and oral storytelling).

Another key aspect of #TAG's Haudenosaunee-led model of education was having Onkwehon:we youth lead activities and conversations with non-Onkwehon:we youth (Kahn, Hewes, & Ali, 2009; Freeman, 2015). This peer-to-peer model instilled confidence and pride in the Onkwehon:we youth, while creating relatability and a sense of ease for non-Onkwehon:we youth:

I remember a lot more than I would if there was a test or a book. I remember the people and their stories. [Name of Haudenosaunee youth leader] was so good at telling us about her ways and showing us all the cool stuff about having Native culture. (Non-Onkwehon:we Youth)

The Onkwehon:we young people on the Youth Advisory Council (YAC) were also adamant that the workshops not focus too heavily on trauma and marginalization, insisting instead that the richness of the culture take centre stage (Tuck, 2009). The project team sought to work with youth because they are often more open to new ideas and social



change, and the YAC wanted to make this change in a strengths-focused context. The effectiveness of this strategy was demonstrated in the interviews:

My favourite part was that I learned about the dance demonstration because I had never really seen it up until that point, like smoke dancing or anything like that. But I got to witness how beautiful and amazing and difficult it is. (Non-Onkwehon:we Youth)

Experiences like this one showcased the talents and gifts of Haudenosaunee people. The dance demonstration was led by one of the members of the YAC who spoke to the participants about the history and tradition behind Haudenosaunee dancing, explaining that dancing was one of her favourite parts of being Haudenosaunee. In a study of the activism and agency of Haudenosaunee youth, Freeman (2017) found that young people thought it was important to “tak[e] a stand to right...history” and to assume “an active role in creating awareness and educating the settler population about our way of life and our beliefs” (p. 67). The #TAG project confirms and reaffirms Haudenosaunee young people’s commitments to creating change for their communities and showcases their teachings. Their generosity with their non-Onkwehon:we peers demonstrated the vibrancy and strength of Haudenosaunee culture.

### **Onkwehon:we Youth**

Since they are its future leaders, Haudenosaunee youth are the core of the community (Gaudreau et al., 2009). The education of young people, then, is of the utmost importance to the growth and strength of their nations. Although education itself is a noble pursuit, the assimilative nature of Western methods of teaching and learning have brought into question what, how, and where Onkwehon:we youth need to learn (Monture, 2014). Haudenosaunee youth who participated in similar research projects have stressed the importance of learning more about their own culture in mainstream school curricula; however, in Canadian public schools, Onkwehon:we education is often taught by non-Onkwehon:we teachers who, at best, do not have access to lived Onkwehon:we experience, or, at worst, have incorrect or culturally insensitive understandings of Onkwehon:we histories and ways of knowing (Bomberry, 2013). For these reasons, youth

receive most of their Haudenosaunee cultural teachings from within their own families, longhouses, and communities:

It's different learning in school. All the important things that I carry with me, I've learned within my culture, you know. And even outside my culture with other people I'm really passionate about it and I can teach other Native and non-Native people about it no problem. (Onkwehon:we Youth)

Because the pride of the collective informs the pride of the individual, having a positive sense of who you are as a people impacts your sense of self and your sense of belonging (Freeman, 2004).

Through #TAG we hoped to provide Onkwehon:we youth with opportunities to learn and to lead in Haudenosaunee-centric ways. Lickers's (2018) research shows that ceremony is a key way in which young people learn Onkwehon:we leadership skills. For instance, the workshops began with a welcoming ceremony led by an Elder and performed in the traditional way. One Haudenosaunee youth spoke about how powerful that experience was for her:

I read about [that particular ceremony] a lot, but I had never actually experienced it with other Indigenous people in our community. So that to me was so powerful. I knew how important [that ceremony] was but to actually do it and watch it. I couldn't stop talking about when I got home. I was really so happy, because I know it's so important. I feel like we need to do that with each other, with other Haudenosaunee people. I loved hearing the language again too. (Onkwehon:we Youth)

Previous research has shown the importance of providing opportunities that emphasize strengths-based cultural connection (Crooks et al., 2010). Crooks and colleagues (2010) stress that in order for young people to benefit from such programs, youth first need to be engaged by them. The #TAG team sought to appeal to young people on a number of levels: using peer-to-peer recruiting, peer-to-peer teaching, and graffiti-based and experiential education. Our YAC was also comprised of youth who were born and raised with their culture, and youth who were Onkwehon:we but less familiar with their culture. This mix of experience provided many opportunities for learning, leadership, and mentoring. The youth who had participated less in ceremony and tradition took pride in what they

had learned from their Onkwéhon:we mentors, and were proud to share their cultural teachings with non-Onkwéhon:we youth at the workshops:

They're walking through and I was smudging people. I never really got to smudge people before. It's pretty interesting. I like doing that. And then people were asking me questions like, "What is this?" and I explain "This is our tribe." (Onkwéhon:we Youth)

This circular, multidirectional approach to learning and transfer of knowledge generated confidence and instilled a sense of belonging in young people who were previously shy and uncertain. Haudenosaunee politics of non-interference require teachers to guide students to a place where they experience the thrill of discovery for themselves. Watching the transformation in these youth was perhaps the most powerful outcome of the entire #TAG project.

Youth gained knowledge both by watching (passive) and by participating (active). Thomas (2012) discusses how when young people observe they are learning through role modelling, a mode of learning that has always been an essential part of Haudenosaunee knowledge transmission. The Onkwéhon:we youth who were involved with #TAG were often simultaneously learners and role models. Some of the Haudenosaunee youth spoke their original languages, had Kanien'kehá: ka (Mohawk) names, and had gone to long-house their entire lives. These young leaders were instrumental in showing other youth, both Onkwéhon:we and non-Onkwéhon:we, the importance of Haudenosaunee culture:

Me and [name], what we have to bring is...that kind of knowing that, you know, we are respected and we're not going to accept anything else because we were raised that way. We didn't have to learn ourselves, it was already embedded in who we are. And just having that be a part of who we are makes it easier to share with other people, I would say. (Onkwéhon:we Youth)

Having been raised around Haudenosaunee people who are steeped in the culture, these young leaders had experienced role modelling from the time they were born. In turn, they became leaders themselves, role modelling for other young people. These youth talked about the ways in which their leadership skills were derived from Haudenosaunee teaching and practice—in stark contrast to most Western leadership styles (Oliver et al., 2015; Matthew, 2009). One young woman said that, as a leader, she had to be "humble, patient,

have empathy, and pay attention to the needs of those around [her].” These young people were an invaluable asset to the #TAG project. They embodied Haudenosaunee ways of knowing, being, and teaching.

## **Conclusion**

Education and research led by Onkwehon:we people for Onkwehon:we people centres way of knowing, doing, and being that speak to thousands of years of tradition and history. Nation-specific learning also helped to inform non-Onkwehon:we youth about the history of the lands on which they live, granting them access to traditions and ceremonies that resonated with them in both emotional and intellectual ways. The youth involved in this project show us the ways in which young people are mapping their own trajectories toward decolonization and cultural reclamation. Through experiential education and Haudenosaunee leadership, both Onkwehon:we and non-Onkwehon:we youth learn to value the original instructions, build relationships, and address the challenges of decolonization in an increasingly uncertain world. Importantly, Onkwehon:we young people are at the centre of confronting these challenges—prepared to meet them with the knowledge of their Ancestors, their faith in the Spirit World, and their deep respect for the natural world. Their path is paved by their deeply rooted Onkwehon:we education and upbringing. Perhaps the best example of the power of this model of education is expressed by a Haudenosaunee youth leader when she says:

One thing I wish we had in the workshops was even more positive education stuff. We have to acknowledge what has happened in the past, but what’s happening right now with Native young people is really cool. And I know that this project was an example of that, but it would have been even better if we had Native language speakers come in and teach the language or other traditional teams around. I know we tried, but let’s try even harder next time.

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