

Language as a Link to Wellness

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Wellness

Aboriginal concepts of health and healing start from the position that all the elements of life and living are interdependent. By extension, well-being flows from balance and harmony among all elements of personal and collective life. (RCAP, 1996.a.)

- As mentioned in the literature and interviews, social relations, physical and mental health, identity, land, language, spirituality, and worldview are fundamental themes related to a sense of wellness.
- These seven elements of wellness are interconnected as they are continuously mentioned in the literature as being in relation to or linked to one another and as parts of a greater understanding of wellness. (See quotes on poster)

Language and Wellness

- The figure displays one way of conceptualizing wellness: each of the elements of wellness are in equal relation where one does not dominate over another.
- For the purpose of this research, language is located at the center of the figure: we approach wellness through language as a link connecting to all other elements.
- There are many ways to understand and live wellness as there are many Indigenous nations, communities and individuals. These seven elements of wellness are not a comprehensive account but rather a starting point in understanding wellness as a whole. Therefore, this representation is adaptable as the circle can be enlarged and there are empty spaces to include other elements. As well, the same approach could be done through any other element as the central element.

- This conceptualization is meant to be dynamic and adaptable as wellness is experienced and is thus not solely an abstract concept.



- Following are additional quotes linking language and each of the elements of wellness:

Language and Health

“At least in the case of BC, those bands in which a majority of members reported a conversational knowledge of an Aboriginal language also experienced low to absent youth suicide rates. By contrast, those bands in which less than half of the members reported conversational knowledge suicide rates were six times greater.” (Hallett et al., 2007, p.398)

Language and Worldview

“Languages are a direct and powerful means of understanding the legacy of tribal knowledge. [...] Through sharing a language, Aboriginal people create a shared belief in how the world works and what constitutes proper action. The sharing of these common ideals creates a collective cognitive experience for tribal societies that is understood as tribal epistemology” (Battiste [Mi'kmaq], 2000, p.197).

Language and Social Relations

“There was an interplay between nations about the exchange of knowledge, right. [...] much of it here in the Coast Salish world through a huge large extended marriage network that goes all the way into Washington State and down the coast. That people actively sought out to expand their ties with each other because it was also tied to ways about talking about the world.” (Dr. Peter Jacobs [Squamish], Interview February 18th 2016)

Language and Identity

“We express things in our language, it's really an assertion of our identity, in some ways it's equivalent to putting [on] our regalia [...] language is this marker of who we are. And I guess for me, when I can express myself in my language, it does give me a sense of coming home, of reconnecting, really having a sense of connection with my community, and ancestors.” (Dr. Trish Rosborough [Kwakiutl], Interview January 6th, 2016)

Language and Land

“Indigenous languages come from the land, and the land is expressed and understood through these languages. Together, language and land both embody and express the Indigenous worldview as a whole.” (Parker, 2012, p.46)

Language and Spirituality

“There is no one word in our language that encompasses our concept of spirituality. Instead there are a number of words in the *Sahtúgot'íne*

language which together describe the concept of spirituality from a *Sahtúgot'íne* perspective.” (Tatti [Sahtúgot'íne], 2015, p.98)

Language Revitalization and Wellness

- As language is connected to all other elements of wellness mentioned above, learning or reconnecting with one's ancestral language can contribute to strengthen these links. In that way, language revitalization can also contribute to healing as the notion of healing itself can also be embedded in the language.

“Our Elders taught us that language is the soul of the nation, and that the sound of the language is its cement...[...] Through seeing and listening, we can harvest what we need to sustain ourselves and to secure the properties that will heal us. Ever since I can remember as a child, speaking my language, it helped me to restore my inner harmony by maintaining my mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being.” (Jenny Blackbird [Anishinaabe] as cited in TRC, 2015, p.225)

“While the product is very important, like the development of an online dictionary, or the development of K-12 curriculum, the process will be invaluable, as it will bridge the gap between generations and build respect between the generations.” (Thompson [Thaltan], 2012, p.239).

“Through my desire to be more connected to my ancestors and to my people, language learning had no doubt played a large role in the development of my cultural identity. [...] The relationship between language and identity in my life is now mutually reinforcing – because my cultural rootedness is stronger, my language learning is more successful, and because I am becoming a better *níhiyawíwin* speaker, my identity as a *níhiyaw-iskwín* (Cree woman) is strengthening.” (McIvor [Swampy Cree], 2012, p.163)

References

Please refer to the references provided on the poster.

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