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Western Research Centre

Final Paper

Exploring the Process and Outcomes of Partnering with Urban Aboriginal Partners to Promote Physical Activity for Young Children: Working from the Heart: Co-creating Educational Resources with Urban Aboriginal Communities

UAKN Western Regional Research Centre

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The Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network, the UAKN, is a community driven research network focused on the Urban Aboriginal population in Canada. The UAKN establishes a national, interdisciplinary network involving universities, community, and government partners for research, scholarship and knowledge mobilization. For more information visit: www.uakn.org



Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada

Abstract:

Experiences in early childhood impact a lifetime. Sound motor and physical development are important aspects of total well-being and are key factors in the development of young children. Collaborating with urban Aboriginal organizations and with urban Aboriginals working in the local school districts, we will implement community-based, participatory action research methods to explore the process and outcomes of developing and implementing culturally sensitive physical activity resources for young urban Aboriginal children (ages 3-8).

An authentic partnership has come together and includes researchers from the Centre for Early Childhood Research and Development at the University of Victoria, the Victoria Native Friendship Centre, the WSANEC school board, the Aboriginal principals of Aboriginal Education in the Victoria, Sooke and Saanich school districts, the Island Métis Family & Community Services Society and others.

Background:

Experiences in early childhood have significant impacts on later life.

Sound motor and physical development are important aspects of total well-being and are key factors in health and school readiness of young children (Pienaar, 2009; Oja, L & Jurimae T, 2002). An increasing proportion of Canadian children aged 2-5 years are overweight or at-risk of being overweight. Excess weight gained between 0 and 5 years is strongly associated with overweight and obesity later in life (Naylor & Temple, 2011). Physical inactivity sets the basis for the development of chronic diseases.

On the other hand, physical activity helps develop healthy habits that track into later childhood, adolescence and adulthood and helps prevent many chronic health issues. Physical activity is a resource for everyday living.

Objectives:

- To engage with Aboriginal stakeholders to identify strategies to develop and implement culturally appropriate physical activity resources
- To review the processes undertaken with the communities to learn from them

Engagement with the Community:

The university researchers worked individually with each of three communities

1) SENĆOŦEN LE,NONET SCUL,AUTW

Renee Sampson, coordinator and teacher of the SENĆOTEN LE, NONET SCUL, AUTW preschool partnered with the University team. The project began as a translation of an existing, evidence-based physical activity and literacy resource. As a SENĆOTEN language learner herself, Renee began working with an Elder, John Elliot. Their collaboration led to a much more expansive project. They developed their own physical and literacy activities rooted in stories and games of their culture. These activities are currently used in the preschool and kindergarten classes at the school.

2) Victoria Native Friendship Centre (VNFC)

Margot Edwards and Leslie McGarry working at the VNFC had different needs and the direction they chose was therefore different. The Friendship Centre serves Aboriginals with diverse traditional languages and from diverse backgrounds. They were therefore looking for a theme that would be meaningful across the diverse Aboriginal cultures. Margot and Leslie chose to develop a resource based on an animal theme. Having previously created cultural language and literacy booklets (titled, *Let's Talk with Bear* and *Let's Walk with Bear*) they extended the series with a booklet incorporating physical activity. It is titled *Let's Move with Bear & His Friends*.



Figure 1 – This is the cover of the resource co-created by VNFC and CECRP

3) Island Métis Family and Community Services Society (IMFCSS),

The inception of the project with the IMFCSS was at a gathering of the partners and other interested educators of young Aboriginal children. Ramona Carlson, whose work at the society includes FASD support and family visitation programs, was interested in developing a resource based on the iconic Métis Red River Cart story. The cultural resource (with physical activity, literacy and art activities) that resulted is titled *The Journey of the Métis Red River Cart*.

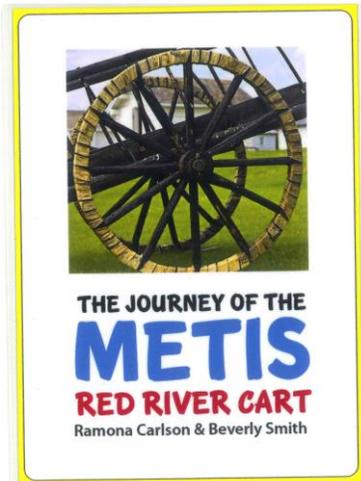


Figure 2 – This is the cover of the resource co-created by IMFCSS and CECRP

Exploring the partnership and co-creation process:

The partners involved in this collaboration identified a number of open-ended questions that were used in interviews with the partners to generate responses and narrative about the process and outcomes of the partnership (see the figure 4 below). Due to time constraints one of the community partners was unable to participate in this phase. The other partners were polled as to whether they preferred individual interviews or a focus group to gather the data. They chose individual interviews.

Interview questions:

What did you do to develop this cultural, physical activity resource?

What made the process easier?

What were the challenges that arose?

How did you implement, or how do you plan to implement, the contextualized resource?

Having gone through the process what advice would you give another community embarking on the tasks?

What are the next steps in this process for you?

How did the development of this resource influence your practice?

How did this process influence your relationships?

Figure 3 - Interview questions used to generate responses and narrative about the process and outcome of the co-creation process with communities.

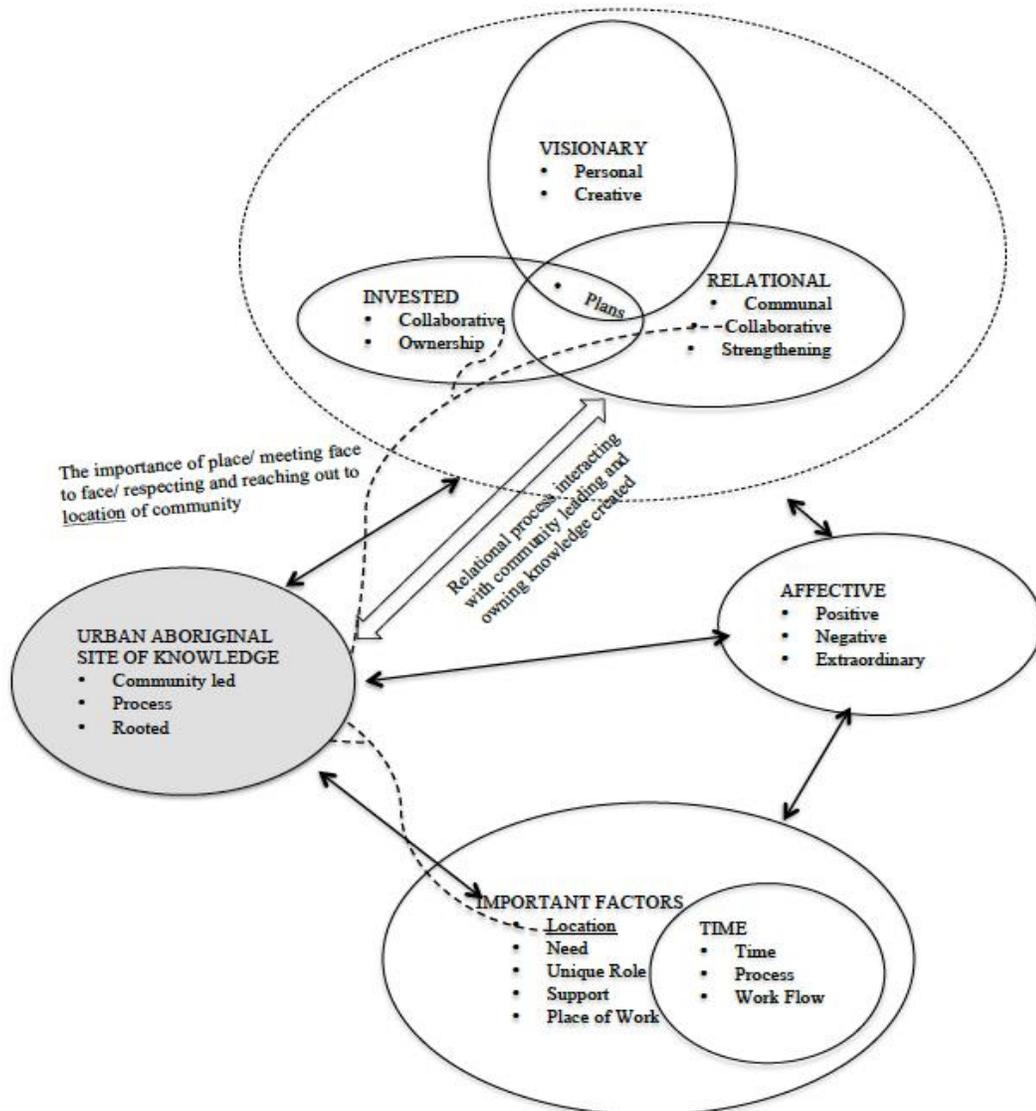


Figure 5 - Data display of categories.

Findings include the importance and benefit of the category *URBAN ABORIGINAL SITE OF KNOWLEDGE* that indicated subcategories: *community led*, *process* (creative and iterative) and *rooted* (both in culture and practice).

THE LINKS BETWEEN THE '*SITE OF KNOWLEDGE* and *VISIONARY – INVESTED – RELATIONAL* highlight the importance of face-to-face meetings and of the meetings occurring in community.

VISIONARY – INVESTED – RELATIONAL describe the impacts. Participants had impacts that were *VISIONARY: personal and creative; INVESTED: collaborative* and in terms of *ownership* and *RELATIONAL: collaborative, communal* and strengthened.

These relationships were between the university and community, partners and elders, among co-workers, etc.

IMPORTANT FACTORS identify factors that influenced the development of the project:

- *location* (was important in strengthening and imparting meaning to the process)
- *need* (an urgent need for cultural resources was felt)
- *unique role* – filled by the collaborators
- *support* (support for the project and its participants by different stakeholders and by the partnerships)
- *place of work* (informed the work)
- *TIME*: (conceptual category of time encompasses the ways in which participants in the process interact with the subcategories: *time*, *process* (including the creative iterative process) and *workflow* (including the unique role of Elders))

An important theme that emerged was identified as *AFFECTIVE: positive, negative and extraordinary*. The collaborative process had an emotional impact on the participants. It was mostly *positive* (e.g., confidence), mildly *negative* (e.g., change of staff) but also *extraordinary* and spiritual. Examples include:

- *Ancestors handed me the information ;*
- *I just see it like a river flowing. Its falling into place for a reason;*
- *work from your heart and your feeling*
- *I think I did it from my heart. You know the vision from my heart for the children's future."*

In summary the analysis of the interviews provided a rich and meaningful understanding of the processes involved in the co-creation of the educational resources. The themes that emerged highlight important aspects of the process that can be considered in future co-creation processes.

In addition to the Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network funding we would also like to recognize and thank the Centre for Outreach Education (CORE) at UVic and Success By 6 for their support.

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Dr Smith is with the Centre for Early Childhood Research and Policy; Dr Brown, the Institute for University-Community Engagement; Dr Naylor, the School of Exercise Science, Physical and Health Education.; Dr Rodriguez, Indigenous Education and Alison Preece, Centre for Early Childhood Research and Policy. These units are at the University of Victoria. Ms Sampson was a graduate student in Faculty of Education at the University of Victoria and is a teacher at SENĆOŦEN LE, NONET SCUL, AUTW preschool. Mss. Austin, King-Hunt and Nelson are District Principals of Aboriginal Education in School Districts 63, 62 and 61 respectively.

An authentic partnership has come together and includes the authors (researchers at the University of Victoria), the Island Métis Family and Community Services Society, the Victoria Native Friendship Centre, the SENĆOŦEN LE, NONET SCUL, AUTW preschool and the Aboriginal Principal of Aboriginal Education in the Victoria School District (SD#61). A broader group including other Aboriginal communities, principals of Aboriginal education in other school districts and various government agencies are interested and have been informed of the project from its inception to present. Time constraints prevented more active participation by these individuals and groups but their ongoing interest and involvement ensures opportunities for knowledge mobilization and future activities.