



TALKING CIRCLE:

Building stronger communities between Indigenous peoples and intercultural communities through sharing stories and histories.

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Purpose

The purpose of this community-based research is to identify the challenges and barriers that newcomers, and members of intercultural communities, and Indigenous peoples face to create meaningful connections. Further, this research aimed to understand how people from intercultural communities and Indigenous peoples can build meaningful and mutually transformative relationships.

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Edmonton Multicultural Coalition is located within Treaty 6 Territory and within the Métis homelands and Métis Nation of Alberta Region 4. We acknowledge this land as the traditional territories of many First Nations, such as the Nehiyaw (Cree), Denesuliné (Dene), Nakota Sioux (Stoney), Anishinabae (Saulteaux), and Niitsitapi (Blackfoot).

Acknowledgement

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Report Summary

This research project was designed and conducted with the goal of creating a space in which group members could gather to share their own experiences as settlers or Indigenous peoples and discuss the most effective way to build bridges between intercultural communities and Indigenous peoples. The project included two presentations of literature reviews with the intention of sharing accurate information with group members, as well as a talking circle in which the community members shared their histories, perspectives, and hopes for the future.

In the first part of the talking circle, the participants explored their own positions and connections to the land in Canada and identified the similarities between intercultural communities and Indigenous peoples, such as the shared colonial history, some shared cultural values, similar experiences that have led to the marginalization of people of color and Indigenous peoples, the challenges of integration, and the lack of a sense of belonging to the mainstream society.

In the second part of the talking circle the participants identified their goal for the future as an equitable society in which all members of the society can thrive. To build such a society, the participants made the following suggestions on how best to move forward to build an equitable society:

- Address traumas at the individual, community, and then collective level.
- Be an engaged listener and learn about the other.
- Create more opportunities for Indigenous peoples to be in leadership positions to share their knowledge and ways of being.
- Build relations with other communities through literature and the arts.
- Connect with Indigenous peoples through work, education, and places of residence.
- Form advocacy groups to address societal issues that impact racialized and Indigenous communities.

The study shed light on the importance of creating community spaces to connect people of different backgrounds and facilitate the building of bridges between and amongst Indigenous peoples and intercultural communities based on community needs and strengths.

Background

In 2020, Edmonton Multicultural Coalition initiated this community-based research project to explore how people from intercultural communities and Indigenous peoples can build meaningful and mutually transformative relationships in Edmonton. This project is aligned with the organization's mission to "foster greater and reciprocal social integration among all Edmontonians through positive social interactions and mutual transformation." By creating new and strong relations, we can dismantle fears of the unfamiliar to positively grow and transform as individuals, a community, and a collective society. To that end, the community-based research was designed to address the following:

- Gain a better understanding of the challenges and barriers that newcomers and Indigenous peoples face in making meaningful connections.
- Gain a better understanding of effective approaches that enhance relationship building between newcomers and Indigenous peoples.
- Recommend actions and strategies to improve engagement and support to newcomers and Indigenous peoples who are actively engaged in relationship building.

This study was a joint collaborative process between the research facilitator and community members. Collaboration, contributions, and the involvement of all interested community members were essential to pave the path to create

meaningful and mutually transformative relationships. To do so, it is essential to create spaces where dialogue and the sharing of stories, histories, and ideas can occur. Every contribution, from defining the research questions, the terms of the study, and the means of participation from community members, is valued and incorporated into this study. This process facilitated the continuous learning of all those involved with the project and, I hope, will further provide means to continue that learning and the building of relationships that were created. This report includes a summary of the existing research on this topic, the findings from the talking circle, and suggestions on how we can make progress.

Position of Researcher

As a research facilitator for this community-based research study, I hold myself accountable to ensure the participation of community members and note their equitable involvement and meaning making at different stages of the research. However, as a facilitator who was the constant part of this study and mainly responsible for translating the knowledge that I gained from the talking-circle gathering, I believe that it is important that I acknowledge my position and background, which influenced the analysis of the findings and the writing of this report. As David Bohm (1980) stated, "Both observer and observed are merging and interpenetrating aspects of one whole reality, which is indivisible and unanalysable" (p. 9). I acknowledge that I am part of this process, and I created the report and analyzed the discussion that arose through my personal lens, which is limited to my observations, experiences, and understandings.

I am a racialized settler in Canada who, like many others, came to this land for a better and more secure life. I was born in Iran and lived in Iran for a little over a decade while during the vast majority of those years the country was caught in revolution and war. The revolution, war, and migration taught me at a very young age what it means to belong and then not to belong to a country, what it means to have and not to have, what it means to be understood and understand a language and not to be understood and understand the language. Similarly to many, I felt shunned and no longer belonged according to some in my country of birth; I faced racism and felt unwanted by some in the country that my family decided to call home. However, I am proud to be born and rooted in Iran, with its rich culture and history. I know that I will always carry with me the history and ways of being and knowing of my grandparents and ancestors. I also feel privileged to have been raised in Canada, a land that ultimately allowed me to be my authentic self, or at least to be on the path to becoming my authentic self. I therefore want to acknowledge that I am inhabiting this land as a settler and that this land rightfully belongs to various First Nations. I humbly want to extend my sincere thanks to those who were here before me. As a settler, I have benefited from being on this land. However, I hope that by weaving the privileges that this land has bestowed upon me and further learning about Indigenous histories and ways of being, I will be part of creating the tapestry that is Canada, where all living beings can live in harmony and peace.

In creating this report I have tried to remain mindful of my own biases and hope that through my awareness to move beyond them, and in collaboration with other members, this report will function as a steppingstone for future work in reconciliation and the building of bridges between settlers and Indigenous peoples.

Talking Circle

The most impactful path to strengthen relationships between Indigenous and newcomer communities is to enhance the opportunities in each community to receive decolonial, community-driven information about the other communities (Alidina et al., 2020; Ghorayshi, 2010; Gyepi-Garbrah, 2010; Gyepi-Garbrah et al., 2014; Khan et al. 2015; Vitt, 2020; Wong & Fong, 2012). Therefore, given the significance of creating connections and understandings between Indigenous peoples and intercultural communities in the literature and the culmination of feedback from the community, talking circle was chosen as a medium to bring Indigenous and intercultural communities together.

Prior to attending the talking circle, participants were encouraged to watch *ôtenaw* (McNally, 2017), a film that documents the oral storytelling of Dr. Dwayne Donald, who described “the multilayered histories of Indigenous peoples’ presence both within and around *amiskwacîwâskahikan*, or what has come to be known as the city of Edmonton.” The documentary provided context and was a starting point for discussion among the participants in the talking circle, which we held virtually with 25 participants. Two participants were indigenous to Canada, several other participants were settlers in Canada who came from Indigenous communities in their homelands, two participants and their parents and grandparents were born and raised in Canada, and other participants had called Canada home for various lengths of time, from 20 years to just over a year. Given that we held the session virtually, we also included participants from outside Canada; specifically, from the United States, Australia, and New Zealand.

To accommodate the limitations of a virtual gathering, the group was divided into four smaller sections for discussions with their own group facilitators. The session was two hours in length and consisted of 40 minutes of small-group discussions and 15 minutes of large-group summary. The virtual gathering observed the same values as a sharing circle or talking circle; most notably, that each person is equal and has an equal contribution to make, everyone belongs, and each person must listen and respect the views of others (First Nations Pedagogy Online, 2009).

Definitions

The members of this talking circle defined *Indigenous peoples*¹ as a collective term to refer to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples in Canada. Indigenous peoples constitute over 600 distinct communities and have their own histories, belief systems, governance, and languages. However, beneath the diverse communities is a shared belief system that all living beings are connected. Therefore, governance is based on living in harmony with the Earth to benefit all living beings and protecting the land (ISSofBC, 2020).

Intercultural communities are persons other than Indigenous peoples who are non-Caucasian in race and non-White in colour. The visible-minority population consists mainly of the following groups: South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Latin American, Arab, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Korean, and Japanese (Statistics Canada, 2021).

¹ The author of this report uses the term *Indigenous peoples* as decided by the community who participated in this project and recommended by Marie-Céline Charron (2019) to signify the collective name of the original people of North America and their decedents. However, to maintain the integrity of the participants’ comments, she retained *Indigenous People* in quotations.

Talking Circle: Virtual Session


The session consisted of two parts. In the first part of the session, groups were presented with a poem from Rumi, a Persian poet, to serve as a means to begin self-reflection:

Yesterday I was clever, so I wanted to change the world
Today I am wise, so I am changing myself.

The groups were asked to share and explore: what does it mean to be an Indigenous person or a settler in Canada?

The second part, exploring ways forward, included a quotation from the clip "Welcome to Our Homeland" (ISSofBC, 2020). "The Land is us. The Land is our language. We share this Land, let's work together to heal the wrongs of our country and build a bright future for all to inspire" (5:35). The participants were asked to share and explore:

- Some ways that Indigenous peoples and intercultural communities can connect and create relations with one another, and
- What they wish the future of Canada to be for all the people living on this land.

A wide-angle photograph of a majestic mountain range. In the foreground, a calm lake reflects the surrounding landscape. The middle ground shows steep, forested slopes leading up to rugged, rocky peaks. Some peaks are covered in snow, contrasting with the green coniferous trees. The sky is a pale, hazy blue with soft, wispy clouds. The overall mood is serene and awe-inspiring.

“ Yesterday I was clever, so I
wanted to change the world.
Today I am wise, so I am
changing myself ”

- Rumi

Lessons Learned

Part I: Reflection of Self

The first part of the talking circle created a space where the participants learned about one another through sharing their experiences as settlers or an Indigenous person, and in the dialogue the participants spoke of their shared experiences or followed up with questions to further learn and relate with each other.

Intercultural participants: A Settler or Not?

The participants began to share their reflections on their position and their connection to the land, but not all participants from intercultural communities saw themselves as settlers. Although some participants acknowledged that they are settlers, others thought of themselves as either Canadians or newcomers. The participants did not take the labels lightly, and there was a distinct sense of convictions and thought processes placed behind the labels with which they chose to identify:

I guess you might look at me and say I have got to be a settler, but, honestly, I have a really, really hard time, because I am Canadian, because my grandparents on one side were immigrants to Canada and great grandparents on one side were immigrants to Canada, and as I was growing up it was very much enforced that I was a Canadian and we were Canadian... I had the opportunity a couple of years ago to go to a blanket ceremony....but coming out of that I was ashamed, because the education that I received, just through my schooling, didn't tell me the truth about our Indigenous peoples and what they went through, and I am trying to rectify that through educating myself and by going to sessions like this.

I definitely don't feel like a settler. I arrived here two years ago, and I feel like a newcomer. Of course, I am not an Indigenous person in Canada . . . I come from inside/outside space in India. I am from the border city in India. A huge part of my community speak Nepalese, my mother language, consider themselves as Indigenous people of Himalayas, so I have a very strong connection, and I feel a lot of similarities and experiences with Indigenous peoples. But definitely as a person myself, I feel like a newcomer. Yeah, mixed. . . . Integration is a very layered concept.

I came to Canada from the United States as a newcomer in 1999, . . . between that year and Truth and Reconciliation. . . . In that time frame in between, I considered myself a newcomer, not a settler. I am not even sure if . . . Yeah, I have heard of the settler/colonialist issues, and I assumed, I thought to myself, that's not my issues because my ancestors didn't contribute to this problem. And then I went to the Truth and Reconciliation and was part of the panel where I was challenged with that. At that time I was working in a settlement agency. The end result was that anybody who didn't have an Indigenous ancestry was in fact a settler.

The diversity of the responses to the questions of being a settler reflected individual histories, experiences, and knowledge about the history of Canada, as well as access to Indigenous peoples and their histories. However, the quotations are representative of the identification of each participant at a specific time. As the participants emphasized, reflecting on oneself and one's place is not static; it is a learning process that changes with experiences and connection. It is important to consider how people from intercultural communities see themselves in their new

homes, but it is also important to be cognizant that these are just thoughts that can and will change with time and experience.

Indigenous Participants

The Indigenous participants shared their backgrounds and connections to their Indigenous roots. Sharing their history provided background on the diversity of Indigenous peoples, each with his or her own unique history and culture, which can sometimes go unrecognized:

I am an Indigenous woman. Both my grandmothers were First Nations women, both my grandfathers were settlers, so I have grown in walking the lines of two different worlds, often trying to navigate not only who am I, but how do I fit in, how do I navigate the two families, especially during the times where it wasn't safe for my grandmothers to identify with their Indigenous heritage and what have those impacts been, and the impact of their survival in residential schools and day schools. I identify as Cree-Métis given the fact that my dad is a member of Saulteaux Cree First Nation and my mom is a member of the Métis nation of Alberta.

As I mentioned earlier, I was a part of the Sixties Scoop. My great-uncle had adopted me when I was five and brought me to my First Nation community, which is in Northern Alberta—Wabasca-Desmarais. So I am from Bigstone Cree nation, and he was a residential school survivor. He actually got stomach cancer and passed away just before I was 13, so he and his wife had given me back to my biological mom. So needless to say that I was in the system. I find, in my opinion, there is this misconception that if Indigenous peoples live in a First Nation community and they are from there, they are automatically exposed to their language, their culture, and their traditions; and from my own experience, that is false.

Limited Accessibility to Indigenous Histories

The consensus among the participants who identified as settlers or newcomers was that they lacked or had limited knowledge on the history of Indigenous peoples in Western countries that Europeans colonized upon their arrival. Although this background knowledge varied, all of the participants expressed shock and feelings of pain after learning and bearing witness to the existing circumstances of Indigenous peoples upon their arrival in the Western world:

So when we came here initially, I didn't know Canada has Indigenous communities. You know, back in Nigeria we used to think about places like in Canada as world-developed places as there are no villages or no settlement areas, and everywhere is just very developed. So the first shock I got was when I got to know there are Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Well, I didn't have any awareness until... I worked in [a not-for-profit organization] ... when I got to know them a little better, they started to open up a little and started talking about intergenerational trauma, which I had never heard anything of before and had never had any awareness before.

As stated by these participants and others in the talking circle identified, the atrocities were done to eliminate First Nations' peoples and assimilate them into the European culture. Participants acknowledged the importance of providing accurate information and representations of Indigenous peoples, their histories, and their resilience.

Similarities Between Intercultural and Indigenous Communities

Participants who identified as settlers or newcomers also discussed the similarities between the two communities as they learned more about Indigenous peoples and culture. The similarities were experiences of colonial history, the collectivist culture that is more prevalent among recent migrants to Canada from the global South and Indigenous communities, and the systemic and institutionalized racism that Indigenous and racialized communities experience that has its roots in colonial practices.

Colonial History

Early on participants noted the shared colonial history between some groups of migrants and Indigenous peoples in Canada. Participants noted that many leave their homelands in the face of fear for their survival because of religious or political persecution, diminishing resources, and lack of security stemming back to colonization of their lands. Following is a description of participants from intercultural communities sharing the colonial impact on their homelands.

Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh were actually all together before 1947 and before the British left, so before leaving they divided what was known as the Indian subcontinent. It was so big. They divided it into Pakistan and India, and Punjab was the area where the main division was created. So, literally, they drew a line, so half of Punjab went to Pakistan and the other half into India. There were countless examples that half of the family lived in India, and the other half eventually ended up in Pakistan. So literally, one brother on one side of the border and the other on the other side of the border.

And even for me as a woman, as a person who self-identifies as Black, there is a question around land being stolen from Black folks in the south [in the United States], but we must understand the original inhabitants.

It is really interesting that the experiences of the world wars for the Indigenous in Himalayas and Indigenous communities in North America is so similar, and the whole literature on the Indigenous community in the British military literature is so similar in terms of certain group of people as essentially marshaled, as someone who just want to fight and dragged to the world wars without their, of course, their idea or because they had to fight.

Shared Cultural Values

The participants acknowledged that, after connecting with Indigenous peoples or learning about Indigenous cultures, they recognized similarities among their own cultural values and practices and Indigenous peoples' cultural values and practices. For example, respect for Elders, strong familial bonds and relationships, connectedness to nature, and strong spiritual belief systems:

Based on my experience, there is another common element which is a shared collectivist culture. We all come from a culture that has very similar and common values. We have the same kinship system, same family system, same social support network; that is collectivists. That really helps us to connect with Indigenous communities, from my experience.

The recognition of cultural similarities was of particular significance to the participants because it enabled them to find a space where they felt that they belonged. Finding that sense of belonging is essential as it enables members of intercultural communities to develop a sense of purpose and the ability to connect to their new home and to the land.

Racism

Experiences that lead to marginalization and keep people of colour on the peripheries of society are another similarity to Indigenous peoples that the racialized settlers had experienced and discussed. For some participants, the realization that they are not alone in facing systemic racism was a surprise that brought them closer to other community members, as the following statement from a Black participant demonstrates:

I am surprised when you talk about colour. I know that I am so visible that I can't hide, but I didn't know that you go through that, so I think we have a bond, a kinship more, and see how we go from there. But I am very surprised.

An Indigenous participant talked about their experience of hate that her child had to face:

...my daughter who is Indigenous... with lots of Asians, hate with COVID—she was told to go back to her country. And I as a parent. . . I get that perspective...Where is the good in that situation, and what can we learn? And I hope for that individual who said that, they learned a good lesson, I really, really do.

Racism is a major societal concern that causes social marginalization and devaluing of knowledges and ways of being amongst Indigenous and racialized populations. The systemic racism inherent in Canadian and Western policies and practices perpetuates the dominance of one group over another and hinders the creation of strong communities and societies.

Intercultural Communities: Lack of Feeling of Belonging

The participants from intercultural communities had migrated from their country of birth with the hope of finding a "better life." Some had left their countries because of war and economic instabilities. Others wanted to experience different cultures and ensure a more secure and thriving life for themselves and their children. However, the racialized participants spoke of feeling a sense of not belonging to any space. They reported that they did not feel welcome in the country to which they had moved, and they faced limitations and barriers to participating on par with other members of the society. As well, their experiences of migration had created a distance and a disconnect between them and those whom they had left behind in their home countries:

I don't really know where some of us would ever belong. It is tough for me when I go back home. It is the same colonialism with people. Because we are foreigners in our own land, they say, "Look at the way she speaks. She is no longer Sierra Leone; she has an accent." Where do we fit? It is tough.

Indigenous Peoples: Lack of Feeling of Belonging

The Indigenous participants expressed strong connections to the land. However, they also expressed a lack of a sense of belonging because of the inaccessibility of their ancestral language and culture. Not only did the colonial practices of removing Indigenous languages and culture cause those from Indigenous backgrounds in urban settings to have limited access to their language and costumes, but also those who were on reserves might not have necessarily been introduced to all aspects of their culture:

I find in my opinion there is this misconception that if Indigenous People live in a First Nation community and they are from there, they are automatically exposed to their language, their culture, and their traditions; and from my own experience, that is false.

The Indigenous participants shared important information about the deleterious effects of colonialism with the

purpose of eradicating Indigenous people's cultures and languages, and they still suffer many negative impacts. As the participants explained, it is crucial to be cognizant that some members of Indigenous communities learned about ceremonies and rituals later in life, and in some instances they had never learned the languages. This disconnect has important implications for the development of identity and feelings of belonging. Therefore, being aware of this important concern, working towards cognitive justice, and valuing different knowledge and ways of being should be foundational to the process of reconciliation.

Challenge of Integration

The challenges that recent settlers and Indigenous peoples have faced, such as systemic racism, the feeling of not being welcome, the lack of a sense of belonging, and inaccessibility to ancestral languages, have led to the isolation of different communities and limited their participation in mainstream society. It is important to emphasize that the limited participation has not resulted from a lack of motivation or attempts that they have made to integrate, but from the constant barriers that the participants have faced:

We talk about integration, but what is integration? If others don't allow you to enter their space, how can you become integrated according to their standards?

As the participants asserted, integration goes beyond simply showcasing cultural representation to creating a cohesive society. For all to feel part of Canada, it is essential to overcome divisions, labels, and assumptions about others that a group originates and popularizes for their own benefit. As the participants stated, it is important to understand and be respectful of others' ways of being and to learn and connect with our own sense of being. Through these understandings, we can realize our interconnectedness and create a harmonious society in which everyone can thrive respectful of one another as well as of our environment.

Part II: Moving Forward

The discussions in the first part of the talking circle, which including connecting with one's history and sharing that history with others, brought the realization of interconnectedness to all of the participants. Therefore, they acknowledged the importance of finding different ways of connecting with other communities and maintaining relationships to overcome the existing superficial barriers that humanity faces.

The following are suggestions from the participants on how best to create spaces, paths, and the means to expand and maintain the recent initiatives of building bridges between Indigenous peoples and intercultural communities.

Suggested Ways to Build Bridges Between Indigenous Peoples and Intercultural Communities

Addressing Trauma at Individual and Collective Level

The participants agreed that moving forward to build collective relations is important first within each group to address the existing trauma and the lack of belonging that different groups feel before they come together as a larger community and collective.

After the participants addressed the traumas and overcoming the past traumas at an individual level or within a community, they noted that building relationships should include having the difficult conversations about intergenerational traumas with other communities and the larger society. Sharing the difficult histories and helping one another enables us to heal and move forward to build stronger communities:

He [referring to a partner] left in pain, and it is super sad. I don't think a lot of people really get the chance to talk about that. That is a really, really important piece of this intergenerational trauma: . . . how a lot of survivors, fighters pass in such a horrendous way, and it's super sad. And I think it should be more a part of narrative, and people should be talking more about that because a lot of us suffer in silence.

More Opportunities for Indigenous Peoples in Leadership Roles

The participants raised the idea of placing Indigenous peoples in leadership roles to build the bridges as an important factor in creating connections between the communities. They suggested that having Indigenous peoples in leadership roles is important for several reasons: they need to learn about connection to the land from Indigenous peoples, communities are not accessing the wealth of knowledge in Indigenous communities, and Indigenous ways of education and the sharing of knowledge and culture are very effective and influential in enabling those from intercultural communities to redefine their position in Canada:

I believe our Indigenous community holds the key to our climate change and taking care of the land and environment. There is so much knowledge that is being underutilized. I believe listening and amplifying Indigenous voices and... actually listening and doing things can be powerful in reversing the damaging effects that our settler society has created all over the world.

Being an Engaged Learner

To create meaningful connections between Indigenous peoples and intercultural communities, the participants emphasized the importance of moving beyond being passive listeners and partners to being active participants and listening, feeling, learning, and incorporating the learned lessons into our lives:

That sharing-our-story piece is also about experiencing each other's teaching, and so not just listening to the stories, but actively participating and experiencing in one another. Reconciliation is just not one-sided: we need to reconcile within all of our own nations as well, so the recognition that goes there as well.

Making Personal Commitments in Building Relations and Learning

The participants from intercultural communities discussed the wealth of knowledge that results from building relations with Indigenous peoples in their places of residence and through work or study. They referred to those relations as steppingstones to becoming familiar with Indigenous peoples, their histories, and their ways of being. For example, the participants recommended learning about the history of the Indigenous peoples of Canada by building relationships with them at work and learning about their experiences in residential schools. Other participants suggested learning about the history of Indigenous peoples through documentaries, books and available courses and others talked about building relationships with Indigenous peoples through their research:

When I started working on my PhD, one of my supervisors advised me to conduct holistic research. That was a new term to me: What is holistic? When I started digging and reading, I came to recognize this is exactly what we call systems approach or, you know, systematic approach in the Western world. So all the tenets and assumptions are exactly the same as Indigenous holism says or incorporates for centuries and centuries and millenniums; exactly the same assumptions have been included or proposed in systems approach developed in Western world maybe 50 or 60 years ago.

Connecting Through Literature and Arts

Connecting through similar experiences, shared knowledge, and art forms is another way that the participants suggested to build bridges between Indigenous peoples and intercultural communities. For example, participants explained that understanding literature requires a deeper level of understanding of the language and culture; once they are connected through literature, they will also have a deeper understanding of the language, history, and culture and thus stronger connections among the communities:

So I think literature brings people together, so if I have to do that. I strongly believe that coming together comes from understanding each other's history and your literature, your folklore, your stories, your metaphors. So if I can bring a connection there, I strongly believe I can bring a strong connection, not a ceremonial one.

Another participant described how the shared art of weaving, that she learned from her grandmother when she was younger, connected her to the Indigenous community:

Because Ngarrindjeri people are strongly connected to the cultural stories and communal activities, one of those is weaving. And during weaving happens sharing of stories, not just my own stories as well, but their own stories, their experiences learned, being colonized that still exist today.

Coming Together to Address Societal Concerns

Given the shared similarities between the two communities, the participants emphasized the importance of working together to address some of the concerns that have perpetuated the isolation and marginalization of Indigenous peoples as well as racialized communities, such as Indigenous peoples and intercultural communities who come together to address the racism that impacts both community groups and perpetuates the existing social inequities:

I think it is very important that Indigenous People and people who migrate to Canada, especially Western Canada, form some relationships and connections, because a lot of times people who are newcomers to Western Canada, Alberta especially, they face a lot of barriers. For example, I had a friend from Africa who was a pizza delivery guy, and he told me one day he took the pizza to this house and the guy took the pizza from him, and then the guy gave him the money and told him to go back to his country. He told [the guy], "If the First Nations person tells me to go back to my country, then I will go. But you are in a same position as I am. You are an immigrant just like me, so this should be a relationship between the two groups." It is very vitally important.

Addressing other societal concerns such as environmental crises and mental health concerns is crucial, and the participants discussed which Indigenous peoples and intercultural communities can work together. Working on common societal concerns will bring the communities together, but it will also enable their collective knowledge to tackle the issues. Such collaborations will help to create societies built upon stronger foundations because they will utilize different knowledge systems and consider different views, outcomes, and implications.

Envisioning the Future and How to Get There

The future that the participants wished to see is a society based on equity and social justice. They spoke of a society in which all of its members can participate equally in different aspects of life: economics, education, governance, politics, and arts. They need to create spaces where healing from the past can occur and new models of governance are designed that value all knowledge systems and enable all of the members to thrive in society through mutual respect and understandings among communities and between people and their environment:

I would love to see an equal and participatory society, everybody having equal representation which is based on respect, relationship, and reciprocity.

The participants recognized colonization and colonial practices as the underlying causes of the societal problems that Indigenous and racialized people face and asserted that moving forward means decolonizing the policies and practices to ensure that all members of society can live as equal members and thrive in their societies. The group members discussed working with advocacy groups to ensure that people from marginalized groups are active participants in creating policies and programming based on equal utilization of knowledge systems. Such policies not only enables more educational opportunities with regard to Indigenous histories and knowledge systems, but it also facilitates the implementation of programs that enable the transmission of knowledge through Indigenous languages or other native languages.

Decolonizing policies removes the dominance of one way of being over another and allows Indigenous ways of being to exist alongside others in an equitable society, regardless of the political party in power. The intention of the participants in this talking circle was to cultivate stronger bonds and relations among different community groups in our city. As the dialogue continued, the discussion expanded from building bridges between communities to working together to overcome barriers, misrepresentations, and hatred towards others, and even recognition of the interconnectedness of all.

Closing the Circle

As a research facilitator it was an honor for me to be part of this study and the talking circle. The talking circle was an amazing experience. I truly enjoyed the stories, dialogues, and conversations. Although the talking circle took place virtually, there was a sense of community, and the resulting conversation brought a sense of hope and optimism for the future of our community and collective relationships. The conversations were very rich and informative; however, our time was limited, and we were unable to unpack important terms or follow-up concepts.

The talking circle revealed hesitation amongst some participants to identify as *settler*. It is important to take the time to explore and identify some of the controversial terms, such as who is a settler. Teasing out the nuances of who is a settler helps to understand one's position on this land, to learn and acknowledge histories and the atrocities committed, and to build stronger relationships with Indigenous peoples and other community groups.

Moving forward in the future should include safe spaces where we discuss the meaning of settler and whether all settlers are equal. As Lawrence and Dua (as cited in Pheung, 2011) argued, "When marginalized settlers of colour organize and demand equal access to citizenship rights and benefits, they risk staking colonial claims to belong and own land and resources that have been stolen through imperial land treaties" (p. 293). However, as some participants from the intercultural communities wondered, how can their marginalized position be equated to the position of those who have benefited from many privileges and opportunities that this land offers those who share physical, linguistic, cultural, and religious similarities to mainstream populations who have been in power and continue to perpetuate the privileges. It is important to provide accurate historical and educational information to help long-term residents, immigrants, and newcomers to better understand and tease out the meanings of the words and their implications. The recognition of such foundational terms is of the essence for reconciliation to be implemented and processed.

The sharing of stories and dialogue in the first part of the talking circle revealed the participants' prevalent feeling of not belonging; therefore, the question becomes, when there is a lack of belonging at a personal level, regardless of backgrounds or of being Indigenous or a settler, then how do we move ahead and create a society to which everyone feels that they belong? The work of moving forward should begin at an individual level. Finding our connection within ourselves and connecting with cultures and understanding our own histories and overcoming our individual past traumas and/or feelings of shame and guilt need to be the first steps of this important journey. This work can begin individually or in groups. This work can be self-driven or guided. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that creating a society driven by power and profit has resulted in generations who are struggling to find a space where they feel welcome and that they belong, where they can live in peace to learn and grow. As the participants in this talking circle demonstrated, a sense of belonging is not dependent on the place of birth and the prescribed boundaries drawn on maps. The feeling of belonging surpasses such physical matters and goes beyond what we can sense. The feeling of belonging develops through a mutual understanding of one another. Although in mainstream society some, including myself, want to find answers through intellectual processes and identifying paths and means to create a cohesive community, the answer might simply be in connecting with our hearts and finding the connection in ways that the mind is never able to comprehend.

Historically, human actions have had many negative consequences; therefore, it is important to contemplate our actions to determine not only the intended implications, but also the unintended consequences that might arise as a result of our actions. This is not an easy task, but when different communities collaborate towards a common goal, they will more likely take more comprehensive and equitable actions. For example, the participants discussed addressing the racism that racialized and Indigenous communities as a collective face to overcome their marginalization, the equity of access to services, and the ability to participate equally in society. This is significant because it will bring communities together in a way that will dismantle the stereotypes and divisions amongst groups.

In his book *White Masks Black Skins*, Franz Fanon (1967) unraveled the possibility of moving beyond the construction of the Other if people of all ethnicities are willing to understand Self and the Other and have “authentic communication” (p. 180) among the races. In doing so, it will be possible to challenge racism and disrupt the existing prescribed narratives and labels directed towards members of different ethnic backgrounds.

The willingness of different community groups with different backgrounds and ethnicities to work together is essential to create the foundation for the development of a new meaning and understanding of the culture. As David Bohm (1980) stated in *David Bohm Dialogue*:

The general view I have is that participation is fundamental. We must have dialogues, we must share our thoughts. We must be able to think together. If we can’t think together and talk together, then we can do nothing together. Culture implies shared meaning in which everybody participates. (para. 4)

The sharing of histories, stories, dialogue, and collaboration will lead to an examination of old understandings and ways of thinking and will give way to new ways of being that are more inclusive and based on the creation of mutual respect and equitable spaces for humans and nature.

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