

# Gimiigwemin: Putting Knowledge Translation Into Practice With Anishinaabe Communities

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## Abstract

In the Anishinaabemowen language, *Gimiigwemin* is a concept that means, “we are exchanging gifts.” In the context of research, Indigenous communities often share their gifts with researchers by exposing them to local ways of knowing. Researchers can engage in exchanging gifts through sharing their skills and working towards producing research that meets community needs, such as supporting efforts to maintain health-sustaining relationships with traditional lands.

*Environmental repossession* refers to the social, cultural, and political processes through which Indigenous Peoples are building resilience and reclaiming their traditional lands and ways of life. These processes are important because the health, ways of living, and knowledge systems of Indigenous Peoples all depend on access to traditional lands. This paper presents the results of a community-based participatory research study conducted in collaboration with Elders ( $n = 46$ ) from two Anishinaabe communities on the north shore of Lake Superior (Ontario, Canada). This research employed locally relevant forms of integrated knowledge translation as a means of exchanging the gift of knowledge amongst all involved. This process culminated in a 2-day celebration wherein talking circles were used to explore Elders’ ideas about potential strategies for environmental repossession in their communities. Results from the talking circles pointed to four main strategies: (1) re-establishing the relationship between Elders and youth, (2) increasing time spent on traditional lands, (3) improving physical health, and (4) fostering community pride. This research emphasizes the strength of adopting culturally appropriate approaches to knowledge translation within studies aimed at supporting community aspirations of environmental repossession.

## Keywords

Knowledge translation, Anishinaabe, Ojibway, Elders, Lake Superior, environmental repossession, community-based research, resistance, talking circles, qualitative

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## Introduction

Indigenous Peoples globally continue to actively resist the effects of colonization, including devastating effects on community health. For instance, the physical and mental impacts of the residential school system in Canada continue to manifest across multiple generations (Kirmayer, Simpson, & Cargo, 2003). Resistance to colonization includes persevering in struggles to maintain access to traditional lands and the multiple benefits that result from this relationship to the land (Brown & Strega, 2005; LaDuke, 1999, 2005). Throughout Canada there are ongoing Indigenous struggles for recognition of legal land and resource rights, as exemplified by the circumstances motivating the Ipperwash dispute in the province of Ontario (Borrows, 2005). These efforts are occurring both within communities as well as on international stages, illustrated by the global reach of the Idle No More movement as well as support given to those resisting the construction of a telescope on the sacred lands of Mauna Kea in Hawaii (Cooper, 2012; Kino-nda-niimi Collective, 2014). Increasingly, academics from multiple disciplines have begun to ally themselves with Indigenous Peoples and are seeking to produce research that contributes to Indigenous resistance (Kirmayer, Dandeneau, Marshall, Phillips, & Williamson, 2011; Louis, 2007; Louis & Grossman, 2009).

Recently, Big-Canoe and Richmond (2014) introduced environmental repossession as a theoretical construct for exploring the social, cultural, and political processes by which Indigenous Peoples and communities are reclaiming their traditional lands and ways of life. The underlying assumption of this concept is that the uptake and practice of these processes may yield improvements in the health and well-being of Indigenous communities, as they foster opportunities for both improved social relationships and the practice of Indigenous knowledge. The concept itself emerged from qualitative research conducted in collaboration with Anishinaabe youth from the community of Biigtigong Nishnaabeg, which is located on the North Shore of Lake Superior. With an objective of better understanding youth perceptions about community health, the interviews revealed significant concerns among youth about the impact of decreased access to traditional lands on community health. The pathways through which disconnection from land impacts the health and well-being of affected Indigenous communities are varied. For instance, the 2008/10 First Nations Regional Health Survey linked increasing rates of both obesity and diabetes to decreased opportunities for physical activity and to the consumption of a less nutritious diet (First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2012). Conversely, spending time on the land provides the opportunity for meeting both of these health-sustaining needs.

Globally, in the rural and remote Indigenous context, there is a health-protective relationship associated with the land (King, Smith, & Gracey, 2009; Kingsley, Townsend, Philips, & Aldous, 2009; Richmond, Elliott, Matthews, & Elliott, 2005). Processes that strengthen the relationship between communities and their traditional lands, such as improving access to traditional land-based activities, lead to the adoption of healthy lifestyles (Isaak & Marchessault, 2008). For instance, Kirmayer, Brass, and Tait (2000) found that spending more time on the land in the company of other members of the community was associated with less psychological distress amongst the Cree of James Bay. In another study, Kingsley et al. (2009) found that more time on the land resulted in several health benefits, including building self-esteem, promoting a deeper sense of self-identity and value, enabling relaxation, and promoting cultural awareness.

This paper is the result of a larger study funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) and conducted in collaboration with two First Nations on the North Shore of Lake Superior: Biigtigong Nishnaabeg and the Batchewana First Nation of Ojibways. Chantelle Richmond is an Anishinaabe scholar from Biigtigong Nishnaabeg. Joshua Tobias is a non-Indigenous trainee completing his PhD with Chantelle Richmond within the Indigenous Health Lab at Western University. As such we were able to work within Dr. Richmond's existing social and familial ties within the community and the region, while still being aware of the need to foster new connections. In developing relationships, we strove to create an awareness of who we are as people and as researchers, in hopes that all would feel welcome and willing to contribute towards the research project.

The overall purpose of our research emerged from the need to preserve community Elders' knowledge about the relationships between health and traditional lands, as well as to develop strategies that could support the community's environmental repossession efforts. The project also sought to provide multiple sites of knowledge exchange between Elders, youth, investigators, and graduate students. As such, a research project was developed with a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach that privileged both Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of knowing and allowed researchers and the communities to work together as partners in creating and implementing the research. The hybrid approach taken within this research—through project development, recruitment of Elders, research implementation, and analysis—is detailed in a previous publication (see Tobias, Richmond, & Luginaah, 2013). The purpose of this paper is to explore how integrated knowledge translation was used to build strategies of environmental repossession.

## **Methods**

### **Integrating Knowledge Translation**

Recognizing a need to translate the knowledge gained through health research into applications that improve the health of Canadians, CIHR put forward calls for research that included a focus on the utilization of the knowledge gained to positively influence health. CIHR

defines knowledge translation as “a dynamic and iterative process that includes synthesis, dissemination, exchange and ethically-sound application of knowledge to improve the health of Canadians, provide more effective health services and products and strengthen the health care system” (CIHR, 2016, section 2). CIHR goes on to state that knowledge translation occurs within a system of complex interactions between researchers and knowledge users that link academic health science research and improved health outcomes and programming. Knowledge translation is often categorized in two different ways: end-of-grant knowledge translation and integrated knowledge translation. Integrated knowledge translation entails the engagement with potential knowledge users throughout the entire research process (Graham et al., 2006). In a similar spirit to community-based research, integrated knowledge translation strives to prioritize the inclusivity and equality of all parties within research aimed at influencing health. It was precisely the process of engaged research that drew us to take up this framework in the first place.

Integrated knowledge translation has been framed as an important methodological approach within Indigenous health research because of its ability to act as an interface between two distinct ways of knowing that often seem in opposition (Estey, Kmetz, & Reading, 2008; Sherwood & Edwards, 2006; Smylie et al., 2009; Smylie et al., 2004). Within many Western knowledge systems, individual data are organized into abstract theory and require specialized training (i.e., advanced degree) to be fully understood (Brant Castellano, 2004; Little Bear, 2000). Typically, the objective of research conducted from Western ways of knowing rests on proving or disproving theory in attempts to enrich and advance the current knowledge on a particular topic. On the other hand, Indigenous knowledge systems are typically described as holistic and nonlinear. Knowledge is acquired through experience, is transmitted orally, is seldom sought without an applied purpose, and may even be framed as a gift (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). By emphasizing the use of culturally appropriate research methods, integrated knowledge translation provides the opportunity for Western and Indigenous ways of knowing to come together in order to create new knowledge that satisfies both approaches. Furthermore, integrated knowledge translation is a transformative method that nurtures the emergence of research environments wherein all collaborators can benefit from the experience of applying research in ways with which they may have had little experience.

### **Celebrating Our Research**

Knowledge translation occurred throughout the research project (see Tobias et al. 2013, Tobias & Richmond 2014), from the collaborative development of our analytical framework to sessions for reviewing and providing feedback on preliminary results. Members of the research team were in contact with Elders, youth, advisory committee members, and members from each community throughout analysis of the research findings. Knowledge translation culminated in a 2-day Elders' Celebration held within each community (see Figure 1). The purpose was to relay the results of the initial in-depth interviews, provide space for reflection upon the results, and brainstorm strategies of environmental repossession. These celebrations were held approximately one year after initial in-depth interviews were conducted. All Elders who participated in the

initial in-depth interviews were asked to attend the Elders’ Celebrations. Invitations were also extended to other Elders who had not participated in the initial interviews and to spouses of those who were interviewed. Formal invitations along with transcripts of their initial interviews were delivered to the Elders approximately one month before the celebrations occurred. At this time Elders were also provided with an overview of the research findings to date. This allowed for private processing of the information prior to group discussion. Subsequently, members of the research team telephoned each Elder approximately one week before each celebration. Elders were informed about what was to occur at the celebration and were offered transportation and accommodations if needed.

Phase 1: Establishing Partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community meetings with Elders</li> <li>• Collaborative problem identification</li> <li>• Research agreements</li> <li>• Research strategy</li> </ul>
Phase 2: Trainee Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruitment of youth research assistants</li> <li>• Graduate students introduced to the community</li> <li>• Training of youth and graduate students</li> <li>• Interview guide developed and practiced</li> </ul>
Phase 3: Data Collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• List of potential Elders created</li> <li>• Visits with Elders to explain research and offer tobacco</li> <li>• Interviews conducted</li> </ul>
Phase 4: Data Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analytical framework developed collaboratively</li> <li>• Interviews transcribed and returned to Elders</li> <li>• Iterative data analysis process</li> </ul>
Phase 5: Elders’ Celebrations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ceremony</li> <li>• Presentations of research findings</li> <li>• Talking circles and focus groups</li> <li>• Feast</li> </ul>
Phase 6: Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communities implement action towards environmental repossession based on research results and celebrations</li> </ul>

**Figure 1. Phases of integrated knowledge translation.**

The first day of the Elders’ Celebrations included an opening ceremony and introductions. An opening prayer was offered by one of the Elders, followed by a smudging ceremony. Upon completion of the smudging ceremony, a talking circle was conducted in order to introduce each of the individuals in attendance. Within the introductions, members of the research team discussed their roles within the project as well as their incentive for conducting the research. Several Elders took the opportunity to do their introduction in both English and Anishinaabemowin.

Prior to the Elders’ Celebrations, a discussion focusing on appropriate methods to obtain feedback had been held that included members of the advisory committee from each community as well as Elders. Together, it was decided that talking circles would be an appropriate way for

participants to share their views on the research findings as well as their strategies for implementing these findings in their communities. At the celebrations, an Elder who was familiar with talking circles was asked to explain the process so that all present had a common understanding. Although Indigenous communities have used them for many generations, it is only recently that talking circles have been increasingly incorporated within collaborative research (Hartmann, Wendt, Saftner, Marcus, & Momper, 2014). The talking circle has traditionally been used to solve problems or discuss important issues within communities (Wilbur, Wilbur, Garrett, & Yuhas, 2001; Wilson, 2008). Generally, those in attendance sit in a circle and a sacred item (e.g., eagle feather, grandfather stone, talking stick) is passed clockwise around the circle. This token signifies whose turn it is to speak, with others required to respectfully listen until the sacred item is in their possession. Individuals begin by introducing themselves and are encouraged to speak to the circle, avoiding focusing on any particular individual and confrontational dialogue. In similar fashion to focus groups, talking circles are a culturally appropriate means of determining where consensus and convergence surrounding a particular topic exists within a group. Momper, Delva, and Reed (2011) discuss how talking circles are an appropriate method within the context of collaborative research with Indigenous communities, as they act to remove the researcher from their traditional position of power and instead place them as equal contributors within the process.

Within talking circles, each individual has the opportunity to discuss what he or she may feel about a certain topic without interruption. A significant degree of openness and respect is shown to each of the individual opinions presented, thereby encouraging reflection and discussion (Kovach, 2009). Once every person has taken the time they need to express their individual opinion, at least one more round is conducted. On subsequent rounds, individuals can further express what they may have missed on the first round or can choose to react to what others have said. However, it is important to note that protocol exists when reacting to statements made by another person. For instance, it is rare that an individual would single someone out or directly dispute an opinion expressed by another participant. Instead, what often occurs is that individuals will express counter opinions without directly addressing the person with whom they disagree. Talking circles fit well within our application of the integrated knowledge translation method as it encouraged various types of knowledge to be shared, discussed, and recognized.

After the introductory talking circle, members of the research team led presentations detailing the overall findings of the in-depth interviews. While the themes presented were derived from data collected in both communities, each presentation was tailored to the respective community. It included an overview of expressed health and environmental concerns in each community, as well as a summary of the stated visions for the future of their community that each Elder was asked to provide at the end of their interview. This was followed by a screening of the film *Gifts from the Elders*, which was based on the knowledge collected in the Elders' interviews (<http://www.giftsfromtheelders.ca>). Once these presentations were completed, a catered lunch was served and the first day of the Elders' Celebration was concluded.

While the goals of the first day of the Elders' Celebrations were to share knowledge and discuss the importance of the findings, the key objective of the second day was to draw from focus groups and talking circles to build on the findings shared in Day 1 to develop action strategies. Focus groups consisted of four to six individuals with a member of the research team acting to transcribe for each of the groups using chart paper. Discussion was guided broadly by two questions. Participants were asked to provide feedback on the presentations and film screening, including any areas they would like explored further. We also asked participants to discuss strategies for implementing environmental repossession based upon the results that had been presented.

Each group was given the time that they required to address the specific objective. Focus groups concluded only when all groups believed that they had fully addressed the objective in question. Subsequently, an individual from each of the groups was selected to present their findings to all those gathered before regrouping in order to address the second objective. Once all groups had finished their discussion of the second objective, individual group members once again presented their findings. Overall, there was very little disagreement amongst those in attendance. The majority of participants typically agreed with strategies presented by others and were quick to add their own views to these propositions. We noted only one area of disagreement, which concerned the impacts of a proposed natural resource development project. However, this debate was expressed between two Elders who agreed that it did not merit significant attention within the context of our research.

Once talking circles and focus groups were completed on the second day, all those in attendance were invited to feast the conclusion of the celebration. Local caterers prepared the food for the feast and an Elder was asked to perform a prayer prior to the meal. The feast was appreciated as a way of wrapping up the events of the previous days with several laughs being shared amongst all in attendance. In Batchewana, the closing feast also included musical performances by Elders.

## **Analysis**

The notes collected within each focus group form the data presented in the following section. Notes were transcribed and analyzed using QSR International NVivo 9 qualitative data analysis software. Data were analyzed thematically by creating nodes and sub-nodes for each suggested repossession strategy and then adding all data from across each focus group to the particular node. Coding queries were then conducted and explored to provide evidence for the importance of each node.

## **Results**

The 2-day Elders' Celebrations resulted in the emergence of four themes that Elders in both communities described as key in their goals of environmental repossession: (1) strengthening relationships between youth and Elders, (2) increasing time spent out on the land, (3) promoting physical health, and (4) fostering community pride (Table 1). The following

sections elaborate upon each of these four themes.

**Table 1**  
*Key Findings From Talking Circles and Focus Groups*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
<b>1. Youth–Elder relationships</b>	Youth spending less time learning from Elders	Elder–youth mentorship program, Christmas concert, use of social media	Re-establishing the role of Elders
<b>2. Increasing time spent on the land</b>	Need to strengthen relationship with traditional lands	Youth camps, ceremonies on the land, blueberry picking, seasonal workshops	Increasing opportunities for land-based youth–Elder social relationships
<b>3. Improving physical health</b>	Burden of diabetes and obesity acting as a barrier to well-being	Healthy eating workshops, community exercise programs, community gardens, Medicine Wheel workshops	Develop culturally appropriate and community-driven strategies to improve health and healing
<b>4. Fostering community pride</b>	Loss of Anishinaabe identity	Recognizing community role models, increased opportunities to practise Ojibway language	Reinforce positive identity as Anishinaabe people

### **Strengthening Social Relationships Between Youth and Elders**

A key theme within the initial in-depth interviews was that the relationship between youth and Elders in both communities was at risk. Elders worried that youth were spending significantly less time learning from their Elders because of external demands placed upon them, such as the need to find employment and education outside of the community, as well as the large influence of technology (e.g., television, Internet, social media) in their everyday lives. During the Elders’ Celebrations, participants were keen to suggest strategies that they believed would strengthen their ability to connect with youth in their community.

First, there was consensus regarding the need to reinforce the traditional role of an Elder. To do so, the Elders stated that it was necessary to begin by creating the physical, social, and cultural spaces for these youth–Elder connections to occur. Elders described several locations that could be used by Elders and youth, including their homes, the community centres, and out on the land. Elders could take youth out on the land at various times throughout the year and provide activity-based learning to groups of youth, such as sharing traditional teachings around harvesting food and medicines.

Second, Elders were emphatic that the fostering of these social connections should be developed around the idea that both youth and Elders have important information to share with

one another. For example, Elders acknowledged that there was a great deal that they could learn from the youth, such as using computers and social media. Elders also stressed the importance of using an intergenerational approach to this learning, for example by including parents in developing and implementing Elder and youth activities.

Elders in both communities recognized the important potential of social media for being inclusive in their efforts. They discussed using Facebook as a means of spreading the word about activities. The fact that most individuals in both communities, Elders and youth alike, had access to this social network was seen as an opportunity for creating awareness of upcoming activities and sharing potential ideas for future plans. However, Elders cautioned against using social media to share knowledge. They strongly believed that being out on the land would always be the best place to share traditional knowledge with youth.

Finally, developing an Elder and youth buddy system was believed to be a positive way forward for increasing the role of Elders as youth mentors. This would involve pairing each participating youth with an Elder and having youth visit their Elder once a week. Elders suggested this would be the best opportunity for them to learn from youth, including having youth show them how to use computers and other technology. In exchange, Elders could share stories and teach youth about traditional activities such as beading or making moccasins and snowshoes. It was also believed that pairing Elders and youth could lead to an increase in participation from across the community. Perhaps most important, Elders again stressed the need to use a cooperative approach in creating these spaces; they suggested that the type of activity used to reinforce social relationships mattered less than the ways youth were empowered and made to feel important by being included in the decision-making process.

### **Increasing Time Spent on the Land**

The importance of “getting back to the land” was discussed at length in the Elders’ interviews. In discussing their visions for the future of their respective communities, Elders from both Biigtigong Nishnaabeg and Batchewana First Nation expressed a strong desire to continue to nurture connection to their traditional territories, the main goal being to foster the practice, uptake, and preservation of their traditional Anishinaabe teachings and knowledge.

Elders identified time spent on the land as critically important for the preservation of Indigenous knowledge at the community level. Bridging with the previous theme, Elders agreed that many of the land-based initiatives could and should be aimed at increasing the connection between Elders and youth. Youth camps were identified as an excellent opportunity for youth to gain an appreciation for the cultural ties with their traditional territories. During the time when the initial in-depth interviews were being conducted, a 10-day youth camp was taking place involving high school students from Biigtigong Nishnaabeg. Time at the camp consisted of traditional teachings, bush skills, and team building exercises. Youth slept at Dead Horse Camp and did not have access to electronic devices. Elders were adamant that these youth camps should continue and were keen to be more involved in the camps in the future. It was proposed that workshops could draw upon the Indigenous knowledge and skills possessed by the Elders, such as trapping, hunting, medicine use, safety in the bush, and cleaning meat.

Conducting traditional ceremonies on the land also emerged as an important strategy for environmental repossession. While many of the Elders stated that they often conducted ceremony at their own homes, they identified the importance of doing ceremony openly out on the land. Several Elders emphasized the importance of this and reflected on how previous generations had often been forced to keep ceremony hidden. Two particular ceremonies were mentioned as being especially important in connecting with the land: the full moon ceremony and the sweat lodge.

In discussing the importance of spending more time on the land, annual blueberry picking was put forward by Elders in Biigtigong Nishnaabeg as an activity that everyone could participate in. This activity, although still practised by several members of the community, was seen as having changed significantly over time. Elders stated that they would like to see blueberry picking practised as more of a collaborative community event as opposed to an individual or small family event. This included distributing blueberries amongst families that were not able to collect, as well as sharing foods produced with the blueberries that were picked.

Bushwalks were discussed as an opportunity both to spend time on the land as well as to teach about the various ways that the Anishinaabe people are connected to it. Elders believed they would be able to share knowledge about local plants and animals. This included teaching the Ojibway names for local species, as well as teaching about how each could be used in medicines or for survival. It was also put forward that offering tobacco before a bushwalk, as well as before any other activities, was an important custom to follow as a way of showing respect to the land. Tobacco is one of the four sacred plants of the Anishinaabe people and is traditionally used to show respect and give thanks for the blessing bestowed by the Creator (Benton-Banai, 1988).

All of the above initiatives stress the important role that the land plays among First Nation communities. Increasing a sense of respect and responsibility for the land amongst residents, especially upcoming and future generations, was argued as being crucial for each community in their challenges of maintaining jurisdiction over their territories. Natural resource extraction along the North Shore of Lake Superior is increasing at unprecedented levels. This is often occurring without proper consultation and resulting in environmental contamination. Elders in both Biigtigong Nishnaabeg and Batchewana First Nation had previously encountered struggles to protect their natural resources and hoped that these would not recur in the future. Consequently, spending more time on the land would increase community knowledge of its jurisdiction and allow for prioritizing of full community participation in future resource development planning.

### **Promoting Physical Health**

The third theme that Elders stressed was the promotion of physical health in their communities. During the initial interviews, Elders expressed great worry about the increase in health problems in their communities, including addiction, cancer, obesity, and diabetes. There were concerns that these issues would continue to affect future generations. Increased promotion of healthy eating habits and exercise was recognized as one key strategy for improving physical

health. Several Elders concluded that they would have to set examples of these behaviours themselves. However, they also indicated that such behavioural change required the creation of programming and activities. For example, ongoing initiatives such as group fitness and yoga were spoken of in high regard, and participants argued that these should occur with even greater frequency. Other suggested ideas for health promotion included group cooking and nutrition classes as well as an online forum for sharing healthy recipes.

Building upon existing community garden projects was also discussed as a way of improving physical health. While gardens existed in each of the communities, Elders were eager to see these projects expanded upon, and resources put in place to ensure their continuation year to year. Gardens were described as an essential opportunity for sharing Indigenous knowledge. One focus group suggested that youth tending to the gardens should be encouraged to fill baskets with produce and deliver them to the homes of Elders. They believed that this would instill in the youth a greater sense of ownership and pride over the garden project.

Related to nutrition and healthy eating, Elders also saw an opportunity for improving physical health by increasing interest in hunting, fishing, and trapping. They believed that all community members should be concerned with monitoring the quality of game and fish. Fond memories were shared of a time when the entire community participated in moose hunting, with meat being distributed community wide. There was a strong desire to see this practice re-introduced into the communities.

The need for a holistic approach to improving physical health in the communities was also discussed. The importance of Western medicine was recognized, as well as the need for regular visits with medical practitioners. The Elders attending the celebrations believed that further integration of modern and traditional approaches would yield greater improvements in health. Suggestions included hikes that incorporated traditional teachings and the development of a Medicine Wheel workshop. The teachings of the Medicine Wheel include a cultural framework for balancing physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental health (Isaak & Marchessault, 2008). Elders wanted their Medicine Wheel workshop to be guided by an Ojibway Elder from outside their communities and wanted the workshop to be open to all ages.

### **Fostering Community Pride**

The final theme that was discussed at the Elders' Celebrations was the importance of fostering community pride. Elders were proud of their communities as well as their Anishinaabe culture. They stressed that it was important for all members of the community to have an increased sense of pride in who they are collectively as Anishinaabe people. They believed that being proud to be Anishinaabe was an essential means of preserving culture and traditional ways, including the protection of traditional territories. Several ideas were shared relating to ways that community pride could be nurtured.

Increasing the use of the Ojibway language was the most heavily discussed topic within this theme. Elders emphasized the importance of teaching the language to the youth at a very young age. However, they also stated that it was important for parents to be involved in the process and recognized that it would be difficult for older individuals to begin learning the

language. As such, many Elders put forward ideas geared towards active learning as a means of increasing the use of the language amongst all community members.

Elders believed that active learning of the language should include opportunities for talking to the youth in the language, such as during visits with grandchildren or designated times at the local daycare. Holding community language nights was also suggested. This would involve speaking the language at events such as bingo or community meetings. Another suggestion was introducing a number of labels around the community and at camps on the land. Labelling buildings and trees as well as placing posters around the community illustrating body parts or actions was also suggested as a good way to start. Teaching through stories, dancing, and song was another means of communicating in the language that Elders believed would be successful. Several Elders also expressed an interest in developing ways to integrate youth participation at community language events or in the youth and Elder pairing initiative within elementary and high school curricula.

An important suggestion discussed in both communities was the need to recognize and promote role models. This was discussed as being especially important as a means of getting youth interested in culture and being on the land. However, Elders discussed the need to identify these individuals, as many could name only a handful that they believed would be suitable. It was decided that these individuals should demonstrate a positive and clean lifestyle as well as maintaining a strong Anishinaabe identity. Elders were not opposed to including people from outside of their communities, but were especially keen on identifying those from within their own communities. Elders also discussed the importance of recognizing the Elders themselves as potential examples. Many were eager to put forward their stories of overcoming difficulties such as substance abuse in order to provide positive examples to future generations. The Elders suggested that an Elder recognition program was also very important. Several individuals in the community, many of whom were perceived by younger generations as Elders, did not see themselves as having yet attained this status.

## **Discussion**

Drawing from focus groups and sharing circles, this paper shares the results of 2-day Elders' Celebrations wherein the identification of strategies for environmental repossession was the main objective. Despite grave challenges for the maintenance of their Indigenous knowledge as a result of a long legacy of colonization and various processes of environmental dispossession, the results of this paper illustrate how Elders in two Anishinaabe communities maintain a clear vision for upholding strong connections with their traditional lands, and they identify several strategies for realizing this vision.

Within the 2-day Elders' Celebrations, participants were eager to share what they believed were best strategies for practicing environmental repossession, including reconnecting Elders and youth, spending increased time on the land, improving physical health, and fostering community pride. Overall, Elders believed that the initiatives discussed throughout the two days were a good start to generating action around the previously collected interview data. They

expressed confidence in their ability to take the first steps towards enacting these initiatives and were eager to do so. However, Elders also recognized that it would be crucial for the momentum generated throughout the celebrations to be maintained. Elders did not want to force their will on the communities. Instead, they believed it was important to frame their initiatives as suggestions. They believed that individuals, especially youth, would be more inclined to participate if they could be involved in creating attractive and exciting programs. Furthermore, they argued that sustaining these programs over time was important in order to gain increased participation.

Finally, at the conclusion of the celebrations Elders expressed hope that the work they had done, and were going to do, would inspire their communities. They were also hopeful that this research and its outcomes would inspire other communities to design and enact strategies of environmental repossession.

While the desire to spend increased time on the land may initially seem like the most direct strategy put forward by the Elders, all areas that were suggested can contribute to processes of reclaiming traditional lands and ways of life. The ability to reclaim traditional lands and ways of life depends upon a young generation that is aware and excited about doing so. Furthermore, this requires individuals to be balanced within all aspects of the Medicine Wheel, including physical health. This also requires a deep sense of community pride.

The most discussed of these four themes in both communities was the need to strengthen the relationship between Elders and youth. Increasing individualism and the movement towards urbanization have been cited as contributors to the weakening role of Elders in Indigenous communities (King et al., 2009), and these problems are expected to worsen in the future. The eagerness with which Elders discussed their desire to improve their relationships with youth demonstrates that the Elders in this study still cherished this traditional role. Similarly, Big-Canoe and Richmond (2014) revealed that youth from Biigtigong Nishnaabeg also recognized the importance of their Elders and expressed concern surrounding the loss of knowledge associated with their passing. This points to the need for initiatives aimed at preserving and protecting the vital knowledge held by Elders.

However, Elder voices are seldom heard within typical health research. As demonstrated by the results of this study, Elders hold important visions for the future of their communities, including clear strategies for improving health. This points to the need for a greater Elder voice within Indigenous health research. Yet doing so necessitates that researchers are respectful of the unique ways of knowing and sharing knowledge held by these individuals. The successful inclusion of Elders in this study was the result of the CBPR approach (Tobias et al., 2013), which facilitated the adoption of culturally appropriate research methods.

This study also contributes to an evolving discussion about knowledge translation with Indigenous communities. The findings of this study highlight the importance of seeking to understand and include local processes of knowledge creation, dissemination, and utilization as a prerequisite to designing and implementing knowledge translation (Smylie et al., 2009). Regrettably, a legacy of exploitive research and the overshadowing of Indigenous worldviews by Western research paradigms have resulted in a longstanding exclusion of Indigenous Peoples

from research that could contribute to improving their health status (Menzies, 2004; Smith, 1999). Integrated knowledge translation represents a promising pathway bridging this divide, including the production of research aimed at taking action on issues of importance to collaborating communities. However, to be successful within the context of Indigenous communities, the customary practice of integrated knowledge translation must draw upon the key values of CBPR (Lencucha, Kothari, & Hamel, 2010). This includes building partnerships with communities based upon respect and reciprocity at the onset of project development. Once these foundations have been created, effective and locally relevant strategies for implementing knowledge translation can be developed.

Future research exploring environmental repossession amongst Indigenous populations should continue to emphasize the underlying strengths-based approach that the concept of repossession puts forward. Doing so will contribute to further shifting the nature of Indigenous health research away from focusing on problems and towards the increased exploration of thriving health initiatives within the Indigenous context. Furthermore—as demonstrated within this paper—CBPR and knowledge translation facilitate the development and implementation of research projects that can yield data to support local health initiatives. Further research should strive to strengthen the case for adopting these approaches by exploring the merits and challenges of doing so from the perspective of community collaborators and participants. In such investigations, the academic research can become the researched.

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