Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

of

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MSc (University of Calgary, 2011)
BSc (University of Calgary, 2006)

“‘Day by Day: Coming of Age is a Process that Takes Time’: Supporting Culturally Appropriate Coming of Age Resources for Urban Indigenous Youth in Care on Vancouver Island”

Social Dimensions of Health

Thursday, June 10, 2021
1:00pm (PDT)
Remote Defence

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Denise Cloutier, Department of Geography, University of Victoria (Co-Supervisor)
Dr. Karen Kobayashi, Department of Sociology, University of Victoria (Co-Supervisor)
Dr. Renée Monchalin, Department of Public Health and Social Policy, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Ramona Alaggia, Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Danu Stinson, Department of Psychology, UVic

Dr. Stephen Evans, Acting Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s first call to action is to reduce the number of Indigenous children and youth in care, including keeping young people in culturally appropriate environments. While we work towards this goal, culturally appropriate resources are needed to support children and youth as evidence shows that when Indigenous youth have access to cultural teachings, they have improved physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health outcomes.

Our project focused on the protective qualities of Indigenous coming of age teachings. Together with our community partner Surrounded by Cedar Child and Family Services, we worked to develop resources that inform and advocate for a culturally-centered coming of age for urban Indigenous youth living in foster care in Victoria, British Columbia on Lekwungen Territory. This dissertation begins with a literature review to provide the social and historical context surrounding urban Indigenous youth-in-care’s access to coming of age teachings. This is followed by a description of the Indigenous research paradigm that guided our work, what it meant for us to do this project in a good way, and the methods that we used to develop three visual storytelling knowledge sharing tools. Three manuscripts are presented, two published and one submitted, that reflect a strength-based vision of coming of age shared by knowledge holders who participated in our community events.

The first manuscript retells the events of the knowledge holder’s dinner, where community members shared their perspectives on four questions related to community engagement and youth support. An analysis of the event’s transcripts revealed key themes including the responsibility of creating safe-spaces for youth, that coming of age is a community effort, and the importance of youth self-determining their journey. A graphic recording and short story are used to illustrate and narrate the relationship between key themes and related signifiers. This manuscript highlights the willingness of the community to collectively support youth in their journeys to adulthood.

The second manuscript focuses on our two youth workshops that had the objective of understanding what rites of passage youth in SCCFS’s care engage with and how they learn what cultural teachings were most important to them. The findings suggest that when youth experience environments of belonging, and know they are ‘part of something bigger’, qualities like self-determination, self-awareness, and empowerment are strengthened.

The third manuscript focuses on how we translated our project findings into different storytelling modalities using an Indigenist arts-based methodological approach. The project findings provided the inspiration and content for a fictional story called Becoming Wolf, which was adapted into a graphic novel, and a watercolour infographic. These knowledge sharing media present our project findings in accessible and meaningful ways that maintain the context and essences of our learnings.

This research illustrates how Indigenous coming of age is an experience of interdependent teachings, events, and milestones, that contribute to the wellness of the body, mind, heart, and spirit of youth and the Indigenous community more broadly. Through our efforts, we hope to create a shared awareness about the cultural supports available to urban Indigenous youth that can contribute to lifelong wellness.