

Traditional crafting as a catalyst for Indigenous women's intergenerational cohesion and wellness: a Canadian perspective

Beate C. Sydora ^a, Luwana Listener^a, Janice Y. Kung^b, Sue Ross^{a,c} and Cora Voyageur^d

^aDepartment of Obstetrics and Gynecology, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada; ^bJohn W. Scott Health Sciences Library, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada; ^cWomen and Children's Health Research Institute (WCHRI), University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada; ^dDepartment of Sociology, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta, Canada

ABSTRACT

Indigenous crafting practices are increasingly being recognised for their benefit to community connectedness, health, cultural identity, and individual wellbeing. This article explores published literature to determine the role of Indigenous crafting in transferring traditional and cultural teachings from female relatives and Elders to girls and younger women. We examine the effect of crafting on intergenerational cohesion and social connectedness within the Indigenous community. Does crafting serve as an effective conduit for physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental change in learners and teachers? Our review identifies 12 publications that describe Indigenous mostly girls and younger women's experiences as they acquire female Elders', teachers' and older family members' traditional and cultural teachings while participating in crafting activities. The papers identify an array of traditional and cultural activities including: basket weaving, beading, sewing, language acquisition, traditional songs, traditional dance, and storytelling. More contemporary forms of artistic expression such as photography, theatre and film production are also included. Research findings show that learning, teaching and practicing Indigenous crafting is associated with increased intergenerational cohesion, cultural connectedness, and wellbeing for both teachers and learners. Further, learning about Indigenous crafts and activities helps inspire pride in Indigenous identity and promotes healing from historical trauma.

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Introduction



Prior to colonisation Indigenous women held leadership roles within their communities [1,2]. Women were viewed as both life-givers and the caretakers of life, and as such, were responsible for the early socialisation of children. Colonisation due to government policies and intergenerational trauma as a result of residential schools have had stark impacts on women's traditional roles and it is still felt today [1–3]. Notably, these situations limited the Indigenous women's ability to transfer traditional knowledge and cultural practices such as language, bush skills, spiritual beliefs and leisure activities such as crafting [4]. Despite these barriers, Indigenous women continue to be leaders in their home, their community and in the national and international realm [1].


Women's lives were complicated by the increasing pressures of balancing domestic roles and working outside the home. Women who additionally undertake demanding community or national leadership roles,

experience further complexity which impacts their own lives and their families [5].

Indigenous crafting has a long and rich history, with many crafts being recognised as specific to particular Indigenous groups or families and passed on from generation to generation [6]. Traditional teachings obtained through craft-making processes continue to be an important part of Indigenous culture [7]. Many crafted items are associated with Indigenous experience and identity [8,9]. Engaging in the Indigenous craft-making process and completing a crafted item evokes feelings of accomplishment, pride, belonging, and reflects the maker's personal and cultural background [10,11].

In this paper, we use the word "craft" to describe products created as a result of, or in conjunction with, traditional knowledge transfer and cultural teachings. Here we have included a variety of traditional activities including handiwork resulting from sewing, beading, weaving using various materials, artwork such as paintings, or performing

CONTACT Beate C. Sydora Email:  bsydora@ualberta.ca  Department of Obstetrics & Gynecology, University of Alberta, 626-1 Community Service Centre, Royal Alexandra Hospital, 10240 Kingsway Avenue NW, Edmonton, Alberta T5H 3V9, Canada

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arts such as drumming, dancing, songs, storytelling and theatre. Craft may not be a term originally used by Indigenous people themselves but has been increasingly accepted as a way to describe Indigenous traditional crafts, artwork and performing art.

Wellbeing has long-been associated with engaging in traditional culture. Participation in traditional craft-making has been shown to be beneficial for both the teacher and the learner. Specifically, increasing involvement in women's traditional crafts may increase appreciation of those skills, promoting intergenerational cohesion and enhancing women's wellness [12].

Our Mature Women's Health research group has a long relationship with women at Maskwacis, a Cree community in central Alberta, Canada. Building on this strong relationship and the women's experiences of the beneficial social effects of crafting, we obtained a CIHR grant designed to offer craft workshops to bring Elders and younger women and girl community members together to engage in both craft-making and traditional and cultural knowledge transfer.

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic meant that this CIHR-funded project could not proceed as originally planned since the community was locked down and we were unable to gather with community members – especially the elders who were particularly vulnerable.

We had to readjust our research objectives and decided to conduct a narrative review to examine published academic articles. We aimed to identify how traditional craft-making was used as a vehicle to transfer traditional knowledge and Indigenous culture to both the younger generations and other interested community members. Due to our experience and involvement with female -related research in the Indigenous community, we intentionally focused our research on crafts traditionally created by women and girls. We hoped to examine the impact of learning about traditional craft and arts on intergenerational cohesion and connectedness to the community, and on the physical wellness and spiritual, emotional and mental health of both teachers and learners.

Methods

Study design

We conducted a narrative review with the goal to explore the range of articles in the literature that reported on workshops and teachings of Indigenous craft and arts and the impact of these workshops and teachings on the learners and the teachers in terms of intergenerational cohesion, cultural connectedness, and wellness aspects. The use of a narrative review design

permitted us to analyse this topic in a qualitative and explorative manner.

Database search and keywords

A medical librarian (JYK) developed and executed searches in eight databases on 15 July 2021. They include Academic Search Complete, Gender Studies Database, CINAHL, Ovid MEDLINE, APA PsycInfo (Ovid), Scopus, Web of Science Core Collection, and Sociological Abstracts. To capture all relevant literature pertaining to sharing traditional knowledge through craft, an Indigenous collaborator (LL) offered cultural expertise and knowledge to refine the Indigenous keyword terms for the search strategy. Sample keywords include: beading, weaving, bannock, cooking, intergeneration, multigeneration, cross-generation, women, nohkom (my grandmother), and kohkom (your grandmother). No language or date limits were applied. A Canadian Indigenous MEDLINE search filter [13] was applied to comprehensively identify all relevant literature in the Canadian context. This search filter was subsequently adapted for other databases. Keywords for crafts, keywords for the generational and teaching aspect, and Indigenous-related keywords were combined with "AND" in the search strategy to select for papers that include all topics. Refer to the appendices for full-text search strategies and keywords (Appendix A: Search Strategies and Keywords).

A total of 873 results were retrieved and collected in a web-based tool called Covidence [14] and when all duplicates were removed, 666 unique results remained. In addition to subscription databases, the research team searched grey literature and reviewed the first 200 results from a search with similar keywords in Google Scholar. Bibliographies from included studies were also reviewed.

Article selection and data extraction

The initial screening by title and abstract was independently conducted by two reviewers (BCS, LL) and resulted in 34 articles for full text screening. These were supplemented by 26 handpicked articles from a Google Scholar search and additional articles from their bibliographies. Sixty articles were read by three reviewers (BCS, LL, SR) and were subjected to data extraction. Of the 60 full text reviews, 16 articles were found not to be relevant to our search criteria and discussing political engagement of Indigenous women artists and/or more general Indigenous women's rights; 17 articles did not include the topic of intergenerational cohesion and/or a teacher-

learner relationship involving Elders, relatives, community members or community establishments such as schools as the teaching body; and 13 articles were excluded because they did not report on a specific craft. Two articles were excluded because of a duplication of contents. Twelve papers were selected for in-depth scrutiny [15–26]. Data were gathered on setting, the study design type, participant-groups and study involvement, teacher-learner relationship, type of traditional craft, purpose and outcome of the craft teaching and learning intervention, and aspects on intergenerational cohesion, cultural connectedness, and health and wellbeing.

Findings

All selected papers described the process of learning, re-learning, or presenting characteristics and information about an Indigenous craft or activity that was typically transferred from Elders or other older community members to children or youth, promoting connectedness to their heritage and community to maintain wellness and wellbeing.

Participants and workshop settings and topics are summarised in Table 1.

Article characteristics by delivery mode, participants, and craft type (Table 1)

Participants

Most of the papers, 8 of 12 or 66% [16,17,20–22,24–26], included children or youth under the age of 18 as the learner. The teachers in these studies were females who were Elders, older relatives, or other community members. The women who led these sessions were viewed as expert crafters. The other papers [15,18,19,23] included female adults, age 18 or older, as the learner; in most of these four papers, teachers and learners belonged to the same participant group, learning from each other. A mutual learning effect was also emphasised between the youth and seniors in the paper by Gabel et al [21]. Nevertheless, even the process of re-learning or learning from each other was associated with guidance from female Elders and/or craft experts or was connected with historical learning from memories of older family members.

Settings

The settings for the workshops included the mode of delivery which could be online or in-person workshops.

Workshop settings included community settlement [18–24], schools [25], and virtual forums via online initiatives [15]. Workshops or craft initiatives described in these papers ranged from 10-day programmes to scheduled meetings over several months (Table 1).

Craft/activity type

While our aim was to identify papers describing a specific craft, our data revealed limited information about the workshops, the learning process, or skill and knowledge transfer about a specific Indigenous craft. The crafts taught at these sessions included: traditional grass basket weaving [18], beading [15,17,23] including moccasin tops (vamps) and charm bracelets. Sewing traditional Inuit garments and clothing such as pualuks (mitts), kamiks (Inuit style winter boots), kihiks (seal skin bottom shoes), tuattugalaaks (moccasins or slippers), ipegaoteks (seal skin waterproof shoes), attigi (winter parka) with added puhitaaq (fur ruff around hood), or assorted crafts such as tea cosies, dolls, and fur animals was the topic of the paper by Emanuelsen et al [19].

As a wider field of traditional teachings, we also included native language instruction [16], traditional song and dance [22], storytelling [16,20,21,24], and more contemporary forms of artistic expression such as photography, theatre and film production [16,26]. Participants used sketchbooks to record and explore the value and origin of traditional food [25]. Storytelling may not seem a natural fit in this research about crafts; however, storytelling is a recognised traditional method of transferring Indigenous knowledge and ways of life [16]. Theatre and film in this context provided a modern medium for communicating those traditional ways of being [26].

Other workshop activities

In most cases, while conveying a specific traditional skill is the reason for coming together, many other topics were discussed at the gatherings. These include learning about traditional foods, ways of life, Medicine Wheel teachings, and the meanings of sacred colours and symbolism. However, discussions sometimes turned to cultural and traditional approaches to counteract historical trauma and colonialism. Participants were interested in knowing more about Indigenous identity, pride in community, self-esteem, spirituality, healing, and trust (Table 1). Indeed, the primary objective for most papers was not necessarily the craft-making itself but exploring the influence on Indigenous people's health and wellbeing by either teaching or learning a specific traditional skill

Table 1. Article Characteristics by Delivery Mode, Participants, and Craft Type.

Reference	Delivery Mode/Setting	Participants	Instructors	Craft/Activity Type	Outcomes/Other Information
Anderson 2016 [15]	Online forum via Facebook and Twitter	Females age not provided	artist initiated; family members can teach craft, community members share techniques and encouragement	hand beading vamps (moccasin tops)	recognition, commemoration, support, awareness, engagement (contextualised with violence against Indigenous women)
Blair 2011 [16]	In person – 10-day summer programme over 2 years	18 females 11–18 years of age	2 Elders and specialists (language) with cultural knowledge & lived experience	language, creative theatre, storytelling, traditional and contemporary art, computer literacy, woodworking	medicine wheel, sacred colours, symbols, honour, respect, self-esteem, team building, trust, pride, identity
Cooper 2019 [17]	In person – 2–3 hours weekly 7-week activity-based workshop	36 females 8–12 years of age	24 female caregivers (mother, grandmother, female relative, foster mother)	empowerment bracelet, charm bracelet, Photos (Who-I-am pictures)	pride, empowerment, self-determination, self-identity, intergenerational perspective
Cowan 2005 [18]	In person Sewing college Sanikiluaq,	6 females 48–60 years of age	learners as “re-learners” with a college artist, Elders, older female relatives & community members	traditional Sanikiluaq grass basket weaving	traditional knowledge, learning experience, rituals, symbols, art, music, colonisation, marginalisation
Emanuelson 2020 [19]	In person Sewing groups winter months Inuit community	n/a	30 Inuit women, age 18 to 80+	sewing	pride, sense of accomplishment, cultural identity, spirituality, healing from trauma, satisfaction, self-worth, value
Fletcher 2016 [20]	In person 3-day workshop (18 days total) Vancouver Island	60 youth participants, 170 youth workshop participants	youth research team (8 youth, aged 13–25), 14 elders	digital storytelling (story development by youth about community)	pride in community, self-esteem, identity, capacity building, skill development, a sense of belonging
Gabel 2016 [21]	In Person Labrador Inuit community	5 youth *	5 Seniors *	teaching general skills, storytelling	Acquire knowledge and skills, personal and social development, self-esteem, social isolation
Good 2021 [22]	In person 8 weeks 2X week K-12 traditional school programme small Yukon community	35 youth	Teachers, traditional dance group members and Elders	traditional song and dance	personal development (increased self esteem and confidence), cultural development (increased connection to cultural identity), social development (stronger social bonds with the school and community), student engagement, transferring cultural knowledge
Hanson 2018** [23]	Saskatchewan and Chile communities	12 women and 2 researchers	women shared their experience and knowledge	beading	symbolism, cultural practices and ways of knowing, memories and life histories, identity and pride
Hausknecht 2021 [24]	In person 10 sessions over 6-weeks Indigenous community	31 students grades 6 & 7	13 Elders	co-creation of digital stories of personal experiences, legends, local knowledge of hunting & medicine	local Indigenous knowledge, digital literacy
Islam 2017 [25]	In person 3-month project senior high art class Norway House	8 grade 9–12 students	Art teacher	acrylics on canvas, sketchbooks while exploring traditional food & food security	Grounding traditional food in culture and values, day-to-day lives of the people
Robbins 2017 [26]	10-session programme during a 6-week period	youth	program facilitators including Elders	film-making processes (production & acting)	rebuilding trust, healing from historical and intergenerational trauma

* No explicit teacher/participant relationship; both shared their life experiences on intergenerational relationships and teaching

** For this review we focus on the study's Canadian setting

(Table 2). Traditional and cultural teachings from mothers, grandmothers, and other female family members was part of their community socialisation prior to colonialism and the harms inflicted by residential school experiences. It is especially important because of the need to heal the disruption of intergenerational cohesion.

Intergenerational cohesion

The primary aim cited by many authors of the selected papers was to bring people of different generations together to give them the opportunity to immerse themselves in Indigenous traditions and strengthen the relationship among the generations (Table 2 and Table 3). By spending time together working on crafts or by listening to the stories being told, the Elder and youngsters were able to form stronger and more intimate bonds [21,26]. Many papers reported a mutually-beneficial sense of contentment and happiness as palpable between the two generations. Elders were excited to share their stories and were delighted in the finished craft projects of the younger generations [19,24]. The younger generation was proud to learn about their culture and traditions from the Elders and to share their newly acquired skills [16,22].

Cultural connectedness

For many learners, participating in the workshops had a deep impact beyond mere family connections (Table 3). Engaging in traditional crafting and/or storytelling helped foster an awareness of culture and tradition. It also facilitated an enhanced sense of connectedness, responsibility, and solidarity with their Indigenous heritage [15,25]. Some papers reported a heightened interest by the whole community in learning or maintaining the knowledge of a specific traditional craft. The authors also highlighted the role of schools in teaching cultural arts in addition to learning them from Elders and family members [22,25].

Wellness aspects

All papers that described wellness outcomes associated with cultural activities were in agreement that engaging in cultural activities had a profound impact on health and wellbeing (Table 3). For some participants, engaging in the crafting process itself, such as beading or sewing, had a therapeutic and healing power on them. The creative activity was believed to connect the mind, body, and spirit [15,19,26]. In other studies, the connection with other participants, or the strong teacher-learner

relationship was believed to promote wellness through a sense of pride, belonging, and kinship [18,20,26]. Having a “safe” place to learn and express their Indigenous identity through crafting and/or storytelling was central for some participants’ sense of feeling well and overcoming anxiety and fear [17,21].

Discussion

Our narrative review set out to explore the links between teaching and learning Indigenous traditional crafts and the significance and value of traditional crafting with respect to increasing Indigenous identity, intergenerational cohesion, and spiritual and emotional wellness. We identified ample evidence that engaging in traditional crafting inspires pride in Indigenous identity, has the potential to increase intergenerational cohesion, can boost wellness, and aid in healing from trauma.

Role of crafting in Indigenous culture

Gathering together to make crafts provides an opportunity to develop powerful connections between people and has an important part in the way of life for Indigenous people. While doing crafts, individuals interact with each other by talking and sharing ideas, their thoughts and experiences. Indeed, engaging in various types of traditional crafts has been considered a form of storytelling [9] and has been used to express feelings, emotions, and pain [27]. Crafts, with their symbolism, metaphorical presentations and allegory, provide a means to transmit traditional knowledge and convey Indigenous understandings of heritage, kinship, and family [28].

In recent times, traditional craft-making has suffered a variety of threats: colonialism, residential schools, and state-legislated policies have disrupted the process of passing on traditional skills [29,30]. The time the instructor (mostly older family or community members) and the learner (generally younger family or community members) spend together is important. Although each is focused on different parts of a task, they are both part of the finished product. Crafting is an opportunity for older knowledge holders to talk to the youth and transfer cultural and traditional knowledge about the values, beliefs and culture. Crafting is about learning specific skills but also serves as a conduit for learning life lessons about identity, belonging, community norms and personal responsibility. Fewer individuals are available to teach traditional skills including craft-making due to intergenerational disruption. Thus, this role has been increasingly filled by community workshops, online learning, and schools. Newly accessible,

Table 2. Study Objectives and Outcomes.

Reference	Purpose/Objectives	Outcomes
Anderson 2016 [15]	To explore the complex relationship between processes of making, memory, healing, and social activism to foster awareness for missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada	The vamps beading initiative is a platform to begin a process of healing through personal, intimate moments of learning, mourning, and connecting.
Blair 2011 [16]	To provide young women with the opportunity to be warriors, to learn the language, and thus, preserve their culture and free themselves from the grip of colonialism	The young women saw themselves as essential and as contributing members of the community, who were proud of their culture and who could face challenges and problems.
Cooper 2019 [17]	To host workshops that provide opportunities to promote relationship building and provide space for growth, and explore women health and happiness	Women and girls assert their desire for a happy, healthy and safe future and are working towards to make it a reality.
Cowan 2005 [18]	To describe the story of the revival of the art of grass basket-weaving	The study illustrates the empowering results that can be achieved when a community college validates traditional art knowledge as a relevant and meaningful form of learning.
Emanuelson 2020 [19]	To examine the role of sewing in Inuit women's health in the Canadian Arctic	Sewing is an important cultural practice that helps Inuit women nurture social relationships, support cultural traditions, and maintain subsistence activities.
Fletcher 2016 [20]	To provide opportunities for intergenerational knowledge sharing for healthy lifestyles	The digital storytelling process was an experiential and effective way to create positive change.
Gabel 2016 [21]	To explore one southern Labrador Inuit community's intergenerational relationships with a focus on seniors' perspectives	Knowledge transmission contributes to community well-being. Seniors were proud to transfer traditional knowledge and culture to the next generation.
Good 2021 [22]	To evaluate whether the traditional song and dance programme had a positive impact on youth	Students enjoyed learning, performing, and expressing happiness following programme activity.
Hanson 2018 [23]	To explore informal adult learning and textile production in an Indigenous context	The sharing and learning from the gathering demonstrated the strength of beading practices and the way it could bring people together.
Hausknecht 2021 [24]	To design and evaluate the first iteration of an intergenerational digital storytelling workshop that brought Elders and school children together to co-create digital stories and share local Indigenous knowledge.	Digital storytelling offers the preservation of story, song, and art. Digital storytelling is a suitable approach to preserve cultural knowledge.
Islam 2017 [25]	To explore the understanding of Indigenous youth about traditional food system through art and to engage them in revitalising culture towards long-term food security	The project connected youth using art as a medium to encourage them to share their traditional ecological knowledge with each other.
Robbins 2017 [26]	To examine the effects that a grassroots film creation and production programme had on participating Indigenous youth	A small film creation and production programme demonstrates a community ability to facilitate the healing process of intergenerational trauma.

Table 3. Articles by Gained Cultural Assets.

Reference	Intergenerational cohesion	Cultural connectedness	Individual Wellness
Anderson 2016 [15]	Many vamps were made by family members to commemorate lost loved ones	Making the vamps was an intensely emotional process for the participants, it enhanced their sense of connectiveness, responsibility, and solidarity with the community	Beading is medicine, healing
Blair 2011 [16]	Youth were proud to learn from Elders and present to parents and relatives	Crafting sessions incorporated the medicine wheel, sacred colours, symbols and increased sense of belonging	Not discussed in detail
Cooper 2019 [17]	Younger women learned the meaning of being a female in their community, including overcoming hardships and having realistic expectations	Traditional teaching was central to many discussions	Workshops encourage learning about harm reduction, overcoming anxiety, and fears
Cowan 2005 [18]	Not specifically discussed; however, education moved from the margins of Inuit life and became embedded in the life of the community	The community involvement provided greater social justice for Inuit, whose knowledge and systems of learning have been marginalised through the imposition of the Euro-Canadian educational systems	Confirmation of community interest in relearning basket weaving techniques and resulted in self-empowerment and greater self-confidence
Emanuelson 2020 [19]	Sewing is important for cultural continuity; elders delight in the finished sewing products of the younger generation	Sewing contributes to cultural identity, harmony with others, the environment, and the spiritual world	Sewing contributed to health through relaxation, meditation, socialisation, and cultural healing
Fletcher 2016 [20]	Storytelling increased intergenerational interactions through knowledge sharing by Elders	Storytelling aids critical reflection on historical, cultural, spiritual matters and helps to strengthened community relationship	Storytelling was a powerful and health promotion tool
Gabel 2016 [21]	Grandparent to grandchild relationships were stronger; demonstrated pride in relationship	Seniors wish to maintain traditional skills by transferring them to the next generation	Participating in cultural activities led to better health and wellness
Good 2021 [22]	Parents and community members made traditional costumes and were proud and moved by the experience	High community engagement promotes and encourages preserving traditional activities of this kind	Culturally appropriate programmes in school settings are an effective way to promote wellbeing for Indigenous youth
Hanson 2018 [23]	Multi-generational relationships were formed as they learned about Indigenous history. Younger people learned by watching and interacting with older family members	Indigenous and decolonising methodologies led to important learning about intergenerational knowledge sharing and ways of being	Doing crafts increased individual pride and wellness
Hausknecht 2021 [24]	Students connected with Elders. Sharing stories led to increased social connectiveness; Elders were happy and excited to share their stories	Combined traditional forms of knowledge, sharing and learning within the school system, while preserving the stories in digital form for future generations. An effective and beneficial approach to community engagement and student success	Not discussed in detail
Islam 2017 [25]	Highlights the critical role of the schools in supporting Indigenous culture and traditional knowledge transmission with families and Elders	School incorporated education on cultural values into its curriculum thus, fostering awareness of culture and traditions	Not discussed in detail
Robbins 2017 [26]	Elders emerged into the Kokum's (grandmother) role. The intergenerational group dynamic fostered mentorship, knowledge transfer, and the formation of more intimate bonds	Offered culturally safe programmes that built upon Indigenous understanding of kinship, as part of the process of healing historical trauma	Creativity connects the mind, body, and spirit and promotes wellness

online technologies provide easy access to entertainment and games have impinged upon the time people would spend together and have changed the ways that people connect. As well, creating craft items for personal, home or work use, or to supplement family income, is less essential than it was in the past because they can now be easily purchased [31].

The COVID-19 pandemic forced people to distance themselves from others and that separation prevented gatherings used for storytelling, performances or creating art.

Nevertheless, Indigenous traditional craft-making should “not be dismissed as an art from the past”, as declared about traditional sewing [6]. Our literature review shows, there is a great interest among Indigenous people to retain, learn, or revive lost crafts [15,18,23]. Indigenous crafts are not always resistant to changes. New initiatives such as digitalisation of cultural crafts might be a challenge to traditional practices, but might enable new forms of sharing traditional knowledge [32]. This can include learning crafts from other cultures [8]. Other changes might involve using new materials. Traditional materials such as leather, shells, bone, feathers and natural dyes made from fruits might be harder to find and collect. New materials such as watercolour or oil paint, modern modelling clay, synthetic fabrics, ribbons, and glass beads might have to serve as a substitute depending on availability of traditional materials and the individual maker’s design [4,8,19,33].

Crafting can also be used for political activism by raising awareness for social change or advocacy for campaigns of Indigenous interest [34]. For example, an article by Shelly Johnson and Alessandra Santos [35] explores the intersections between art, activism, and advocacy. The authors describe an example of an art installation (red dresses hanging on simple wooden hangers) as a campaign to raise awareness for the murders and disappearances of Aboriginal women across Canada. Another example is a powerful exhibition which included 1725 pairs of moccasin vamps made by 1372 artists that honoured the murdered and missing women [15,36]. The exhibition travelled around Canada and the USA from 2013 to 2019. With the pairs of vamps laid out on the floor, it provided a striking physical representation of the lost women and girls.

Intergenerational cohesion

As highlighted in the selected papers, crafting is a crucial element in connecting different generations to traditional culture. The loss of intergenerational connectedness due to residential schools has caused a gap between generations. Craft can be an important bridge to connect youth to Elders and older community or family members. Before colonisation, children would

experience their traditional culturally-based education from the entire community [29]. Craft skills were adversely affected by the disruptive effect of residential schools. For example, Ohmagari et al. noted that, “women of the younger generations are familiar with a [craft] skill, but the level of mastery of the skill tends to be low compared to that of the older generation” because there was incomplete transmission of skills from family members to children [31].

To address this issue, schools have begun to teach some traditional Indigenous skills. Our findings demonstrate that schools can successfully teach cultural traditions by engaging students in craft projects [22,25]. However, the importance of Elders’ involvement in school settings has also been highlighted [37,38]. Involving Elders throughout educational craft programmes not only facilitates a greater understanding of the craft, the symbolism, and the skills involved, but also fosters new relationships between generations [37].

Cultural connectedness

Motivated by the experience of a loss of learning cultural traditions, many Indigenous people are inspired to learn or relearn about their heritage, including language, stories, art, and craft. Engaging actively in crafting provides the opportunity to learn about traditional methods, art forms, and symbolism that aims in reconstructing an Indigenous identity [33]. Women in particular, are remembering and reclaiming their historic roles as home makers and teachers when conveying traditional teachings through craft-making [8,29]. For Indigenous people, engaging in craft is intimately connected with cultural identity and tradition and, thus, is a powerful way of expressing emotions and resilience.

Participating in crafting has been used as a means to connect to youth. For example, as part of a therapeutic outreach programme [39] or to express their feelings through digital storytelling [40]. It allows youth to forge strong relationships with their Native cultures and traditions. Learning new skills is empowering and satisfying and the creation of a craft item can bring about pride in community belonging and contributes to a sense of cultural connectedness.

Crafting has also been used to reconcile the challenge of balancing two opposite cultures: Non-Indigenous versus Indigenous ways of knowing. The combined use of Non-Indigenous and First Nations materials in craft-making synergised a notion of bicultural identity, such as the acceptance of two values, beliefs and community affiliation, and acculturation [4]. Engaging in a craft project with different art forms

may allow Individuals to process and reconstruct their Indigenous Identity through material interactions [4].

It has become clear through numerous research studies and workshop reports where traditional teachings were evaluated, that engaging in various forms of craft confers, “a sense of belonging and community which is integral to Indigenous people’s identities specifically because of colonization, racism and oppression of the past and present” [41].

Wellness

Findings from our literature review confirm that engaging in crafting is beneficial for health and wellbeing. This can happen in various ways; for one, crafting can be a means to connect with people, to allow them to open up and to describe their feelings and pain. For example, using art as a medium is considered a traditional way to express emotions and worries – especially through the use of colour and shapes in drawings [27]. Similarly, digital storytelling workshops allowed participants to come to a holistic understanding that integrated both thoughts and emotions about First Nations women’s experiences with breast cancer [34]. In this way, crafting can be used as an effective communication tool to bridge the rift between non-Indigenous health care systems and Indigenous understandings of health.

Engaging in the crafting and creative process evokes happiness and joy for both the teachers and learners. Intergenerational cohesion can be strengthened in spaces where community members of various generations come together for mutual benefit. In this situation, the young learn from the Elders or other older community members, which brings pride not only for the learners as makers of the finished product but also for the teachers who are proud to transfer their traditional and cultural knowledge [17,19,20]. Therefore, the health benefits of teaching and learning traditional crafting can be attributed to skill and knowledge acquisition, improved self-worth, satisfaction, and pride [42].

The healing aspect of engaging in the Indigenous crafting process is not restricted to physical wellbeing but it expands to the spiritual, emotional, and mental realms [10,41]. The connection to cultural practices stimulates increased spirituality, thus promoting wellness through a sense of resilience, survivance and improved healing from historical trauma [9]. Indeed, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada recognised that “promoting the teaching of traditional knowledge and practices in accordance with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples adopted in 2007 (United Nations 2008) could be part

of a holistic approach and contribute to equity in health” [43,44].

Study limitation

Although our review is based on a wide-ranging literature search, the papers identified and included in this narrative review are limited by the selection of keywords and the databases. While there is vast literature on the impact of Indigenous people practicing traditional skills and cultures on health and wellness, cultural connectedness, and intergenerational cohesion, we aimed to emphasise the learning aspect of acquiring traditional skills. We wanted to grasp the effect of engaging in crafting in three areas (intergenerational cohesion, cultural connectedness, wellbeing) through the lens of the teachers and learners themselves. Important for the selection of our papers was the transfer and/or sustainability of traditional crafting through generations. We concentrated our search on Canadian Indigenous groups, which may limit generalisation to other Indigenous groups; however, we included a range of various crafts and settings including rural and urban communities, short term workshops, school courses, and online learning settings.

Because of our experience with Indigenous women instead of with male community members, and the guidance from Maskwacis women and Elders highlighting the importance of craft in maintaining Indigenous traditions, we focused on crafting and skills traditionally transferred by women. Nevertheless, many of the workshops included youth of both sexes, especially when workshops included performing arts and storytelling.

Despite our careful search strategy, we did not identify papers that specifically discussed within-family craft learning: this may be because of our choice of search terms, or because families tend to keep their teachings and traditions within their specific family circle. Given the disruption to intergenerational cohesion, it is possible that some family craft traditions, particularly those associated with performing arts, might be unrecoverable.

Conclusion

Sustaining and preserving Indigenous skills and traditional knowledge through engaging in crafting is important for wellbeing and healing. The inclusion of Elders in school and community learnings is key to meaningful learning, resulting in increased pride, confidence, and Indigenous connectedness.

Our research highlights the value of teaching traditional Indigenous crafting skills, which were disadvantaged by so many adverse conditions associated with colonisation and

intergenerational trauma. Nonetheless, Indigenous craft skills and practices have survived those threats and the value of craft skills is increasingly recognised for its benefits to health, wellbeing, and community connectedness. The introduction of school and other group teaching environments is strengthening the scope of the Indigenous craft movement by increasing understanding about, and access to, these traditional and cultural skills. They rejuvenate skills that were lost as a result of colonisation and residential schools' experiences.

In addition to the skills themselves, it brings various facets of the community together to showcase culture, tradition, and allows Indigenous skills to be available to those who did not know that they were capable of creating beautiful ceremonial or practical items for individual and community use. It seems that Indigenous craft and skills will become more valuable over time by building upon the existing strengths of Elders' and women community members' knowledge and skills. It helps inspire younger people to take an active interest in maintaining traditional craft and sustaining those skills for "seven generations" into the future.

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ORCID

Beate C. Sydora  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8686-2255>

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