I gu.aa yáx xwán

Alice Taff  alicetaff@gmail.com
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Linking Language and Wellness
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Land, language, and health

Image Laura Tice Wiener, 2016
Minus land

Image Laura Tice Wiener, 2016
Minus language

Image Laura Tice Wiener, 2016
The restorative power of language is a new field of study.
Language and culture as protective Factors for at-risk communities
Why is establishing a link important?

Encourage language transmission within language communities

Encourage Health-Medical-Insurance industry to support language use
Our working definition of “language”
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A language
Our working definition of “language”

A language is an agreement
Our working definition of “language”

A language is an agreement among a community of users
Our working definition of “language”

A language is an agreement among a community of users that certain symbols (sounds/signs)
Our working definition of “language”

A language is an agreement among a community of users that certain symbols (sounds/signs) have certain meanings.
Definitions of “health”

“a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (World Health Organization 1948)
Definitions of “health”

Daryl Baldwin of the Myaamia people describes his culture’s concept of health as living well or living properly, and having awareness, wisdom, and knowledge (Baldwin 2013).

http://www.healingthroughlanguage.org/advisory-board/
Definitions of “health”

“Western Desert Aborigines see “health” not only in the absence of sickness, but more positively: on the physical side, in the presence of coldness and dryness in the body, and on the spiritual side, in having one’s spirit in the area of the stomach. Conversely, when the spirit moves to the back of a person or leaves the body altogether, when the body is hot and wet, then the person is considered sick”  (Peile 1997, xxxi)
Definitions of “health”

“‘Aboriginal health’ refers to the social, emotional and cultural well-being of the whole Community in which each individual is able to achieve their full potential as a human being thereby bringing about the total well-being of their Community” (National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation 2011, 5)

“Hallucinations do not necessarily imply organic pathology but operate within a kind of lucidity that not only has mystical and religious dimensions but also is expressive of the micro- and macro-politics of a given sociality” (Cox 2009, 100).
Definitions of “health”

The Ojibwa people’s health model is *bimaadiziwan*, ‘balancing one’s relationship with the surrounding environment, with one’s surrounding living beings, and the inner physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual needs of the human condition’” (Turtle Islands Productions 2002, 1).
Definitions of “health”

Tlingit people’s wellness includes toowú’ latseen ‘inner strength,’ ‘strength of mind or heart, courage, resolve, or power’ (Edwards 2009, 247, 248), and the concept of wujax at kulidáal ‘to make things weigh the same’ or ‘balance’ (Story and Naish 1973, 283). To enable the health and well-being of the whole community, respect is manifested in the balance of reciprocity among clans, individuals, and the environment.
Definitions of “health”

“not everything that Indigenous peoples perceive can be measured.” (Calma 2007, 10).
Evidence

- Correlation vs. Causation
- Qualifiable and Quantifiable evidence
- Symptoms
  - Alzheimer’s disease
  - Suicide rates
  - At risk factors for youth
  - School absenteeism
  - Mechanisms from trauma to symptoms
- ACEs
- Epigenetics
- Future work
Correlation vs. Causation
Eyewitness accounts of the health benefits from ancestral Indigenous language use
Alayna Eagleshield and Tipiziwin Tolman Lakota

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=52jReWuyvv8
Jaeci Hall
Tututni
Wellness in general isn't just physical. It's mental. It's emotional. It's spiritual. Having a connection, a core that connects us to who we are, to our identity, helps create that balance. What creates sickness is not just colds; it's not just bacteria; it's emotions like shame and anxiety. Where do those emotions come from? Maybe from spiritual maladies being manifested as stress and anxiety. When we target those emotions through language, through these cultural practices, through being really balanced and centered, I believe that stress and that anxiety can decrease. I made a commitment for four years to not drink because I wanted to be a good language learner. I wanted to be able to look at my elder and speak to him and not feel ashamed of myself. I'm thirty-three now and I haven't drunk since I was twenty. I think that's a pretty big sign of wellness. I seek out balance with the conscious thought that I am working on this language and that I have this responsibility and if I treat myself badly then I'm treating this language badly. If I treat myself badly then the spirits might know and maybe they won't talk to me.
Alfie Price
Sm’algayax
“Learning our languages is healing. It’s healing to the languages. It’s healing to our grandparents and uncles and aunties who were punished for speaking their languages. It’s healing to us. An unexpected side effect of learning Sm’algyax especially, is I felt my own healing. The hurts and the things that make me bitter in my life are falling away. They’re becoming light on my shoulders. Walking into a room full of people who are not my people, I don’t get that feeling of, “Gee, do I really belong here? Am I a little less than?” Those feelings are going away. These are unexpected side effects of learning the language.
Dale McCreery
Linguist
Through the time that I’ve been working in Klemtu, and continuing into Bella Coola, another factor started to figure more and more prominently in my evaluation of what I was doing, health. I won’t go into too much detail, but I’ve had more than one elder show clear signs of reversing mental aging for want of a better word, having their short term memories improve, and the like. Beatrice Elliot in particular went from constantly falling asleep while recording, constantly forgetting the question or topic being discussed, and her family widely considered her to being already going into dementia or already being in dementia, to the point six months later she translated an entire story she’d never heard before in one go, before I could even start repeating it sentence by sentence and she had entirely stopped losing her train of thought while recording, stopped nodding off. Was always focused in there. And these abilities have extended into the entire rest of her life to where her family and friends and those who have known her thought, considered her to have woken up again.
Quantitative data
Bilingualism and the onset of Alzheimer’s disease
Bilingualism and the onset of Alzheimer’s disease

On average, bilinguals begin to show symptoms of dementia 3 - 4 years later than monolinguals.
Better executive function correlates with greater bilingual experience for adults and children, even in six- and seven-month-old infants.
The neuroprotective effects of bilingualism upon the inferior parietal lobule: A structural neuroimaging study in aging Chinese bilinguals.

Abutalebi et al. 2015
“Cultural continuity as a protective factor against suicide in First Nations youth”
Michael Chandler and Christopher Lalonde 2008

• Self-Government
• Land claims
• Education
• Health Care
• Cultural Facilities
• Police and Fire Services
• Language
“Cultural continuity as a protective factor against suicide in First Nations youth”

‘...youth suicide rates
“Cultural continuity as a protective factor against suicide in First Nations youth”

• ‘…youth suicide rates **effectively dropped to zero**
“Cultural continuity as a protective factor against suicide in First Nations youth”

• ‘...youth suicide rates effectively dropped to zero in those few communities in which at least half the band members reported "Cultural continuity as a protective factor against suicide in First Nations youth"'}
“Cultural continuity as a protective factor against suicide in First Nations youth”

‘...youth suicide rates effectively dropped to zero in those few communities in which at least half the band members reported a conversational knowledge of their own “Native” language.’
“Cultural continuity as a protective factor against suicide in First Nations youth”

‘…youth suicide rates effectively dropped to zero in those few communities in which at least half the band members reported a conversational knowledge of their own “Native” language.’
Percent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth living in their homeland aged 15-24 engaging in risk factors

**Victim of physical or threatened violence in the last 12 months**
- Non-speakers: 37%
- Speakers: 25%

**Used illicit substances in the past 12 months**
- Non-speakers: 26%
- Speakers: 16%

**Binge drinking in the last 2 weeks**
- Non-speakers: 34%
- Speakers: 18%
School attendance

2001-2008 JDS Elementary Students: Average Number of DAYS MISSED in the School Year

- TCLL
- All other Native students
- All elementary minus Native students
- Linear (TCLL)
- Linear (All other Native students)
- Linear (All elementary minus Native students)
School attendance
ACEs and Epigenetics
Adverse Childhood Experiences

- Emotional abuse
- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Mother treated violently
- Household substance abuse
- Mental illness in household
- Parental separation or divorce
- Criminal household member
- Emotional neglect
- Physical neglect
Adverse Childhood Experiences lead to adult

- Ischemic heart disease
- Myocardial infarction
- Asthma
- Stroke
- Diabetes
- Liver disease
- Health-related quality of life
- Alcoholism and alcohol abuse
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease
- Depression

- Fetal death
- Illicit drug use
- Poor work performance
- Risk for intimate partner violence
- Mental distress
- Smoking
- Disability
- Lowered educational attainment
- Financial stress
- Reported income
- Unemployment
Adverse Childhood Experiences

- Language Loss
- Emotional abuse
- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Mother treated violently
- Household substance abuse
- Mental illness in household
- Parental separation or divorce
- Criminal household member
- Emotional neglect
- Physical neglect
Epigenetics
Trauma of Land loss

Trauma of Language loss

Inherited epigenetics

Epigenetic effects

Symptoms: Alcoholism, Diabetes, Obesity, Suicide

Enriched Environment

Language
Kawenniyóhstha Nicole Martin
Mohawk
So our children, maybe even from the age of about ten to the age of about forty, that whole area is they’re lost, they’re completely lost. They’ve got no roles. We've always had roles as a society. We’ve always had those responsibilities. And when we don't know those responsibilities we feel like we don't fit in anywhere. We just kind of exist. If you know the language, and the cultural is tied into the language, it explains all that. When it comes to adults experiencing relearning their language, it's a connection that is so deep-rooted so to the core; it touches their core and they get so emotional; it's unbelievable how emotional one can get when they’re able to speak their mother tongue. It’s like our bodies, our blood memory remembers all that and sometimes it’s just like it opens the flood gates for dreams. It opens the floodgates for emotions it’s like generations just all bottled up inside of people sometimes that just cannot, cannot describe why it is that they’re so emotional, so grateful and so just overwhelmed with the relearning of their mother tongue. I think that when we’re spiritually in balance, when we’re in balance with Creation, I mean you might always not see it scientifically but you can feel it. The more well we are for ourselves, the more we exemplify wellness and it radiates into other people's spaces and our families, our clan families. And so, if one can relearn their language and begin to clean out the generations of trauma, it can create a ripple effect within their bodies, within their communities, within their Nation.
Action

• Document
  • the ways your language expresses the concept of ‘health’.
  • the ways your language expresses the concept of ‘disease’.
  • how to live a healthy life.
  • traditional cures and wellness practices.

• Assess
  • Health benefits from language use in any program you engage with
  • Design and implement research projects looking specifically for Language health links
  • Collaborate with neurolinguists and epigeneticists.
  • Work with Super Learners
Relearning. Super learners

Annie Johnston
Tlingit
Does it affect my health? Not using my language affects my health. I'm a residential school survivor. I was taken when I was five. The elders in my community say they remember me talking. Even if it was just Lingít baby talk. But that's all I spoke. Didn't take long for me to lose it. To speak in public is very hard. And I talk with other residential school people. Some of them are fluent speakers; they speak. But there's others like me that understand but don't speak. And we talk about what happens when we're trying. You get the lump in your throat. Your stomach starts churning. And all the other emotions that come in there. Can we heal along with the language? I think we can. Can we heal in the language? We can. Because to me, the most powerful thing, when I look at my elders, I look at my auntie and I can tell her *ixsixán*. ‘I love you’
Restoring indigenous languages key to preventing youth suicides, Trudeau says

The prime minister also said that closing the gap for First Nations is “not a problem that is going to be fixed quickly.”

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau told a virtual town hall with the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network in Winnipeg on Friday that languages are at the core of indigenous culture and identity. (JOHN WOODS / THE CANADIAN PRESS)

By CHINTA PUXLEY The Canadian Press
Fri., June 3, 2016
SB2: Beginning January 1, 2018, requires all health plans in the State, including EUTF health plans and medicaid managed care programs, to provide coverage for the treatment of homelessness.
SB1: Beginning January 1, 2018, requires all health plans in the State, including medicaid managed care programs, to provide coverage for the treatment of Language Loss.
Cultural Wounds
Demand Cultural Medicines

Michael Chandler and William Dunlop 2015
Náakw áyá haa yoo x'atángi

Our Language IS Medicine

Náakwx layéx haa yoo x'atángi

Use Our Language AS Medicine
I gu.aa yáx xwán

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References 3


• Lakota Immersion Nest https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=52jReWuyvv8


References 4


References 5


