

Mi'kmaq Family Resource Centre's Creation Stories: A step by step Guide: Part 1: how to collect all the information you will need.

Introduction to the project

Story telling has been described as a foundational component of Aboriginal history and culture (2009). Traditional stories can play an important role in providing direction and insight into the daily lives of individuals and groups by making connections to a broader community and a wider vision. Combining this traditional way of knowing and teaching with relevant cultural experiences from the recent past and the daily lives of current community members allows for the possibility of unifying the old and the new in the hope of transmitting important information designed to support parents as they strive to facilitate the development of their young children. Such an approach can provide the opportunity to expose new parents to an opportunity to reframe their life stories and the life stories of their communities by helping to forge links between traditional knowledge, recent historical events, and everyday life in an attempt to help support cultural identity during a critical period of transition. The goal of this project is to establish a program grounded in stories, that will facilitate each individual's journey toward braiding and integrating the three strands, or sweetgrass model... traditional knowledge, recent history and everyday experiences of living. *Creation Stories* aims to be an urban Aboriginal based catalyst designed to help parents, communities, and service providers create a sound start for new parents and their children.

The importance of prenatal and early years programming is well established. Expectant parents and new parents participating in parental education programs create a positive potential for children to experience success during formal schooling. Although federal, provincial, and territorial governments have introduced numerous policies and programs advocating increased early childhood education, care, and accessibility for the general Canadian population, Aboriginal peoples have not obtained equivalent opportunities to participate in and benefit from these programs and services (Preston, 2008). Friendly and Beach (2005) expressed the urgent need for Aboriginal early learning programs when they highlight the fact that, all Aboriginal groups have larger than average child populations, which make early childhood education and care within these groups an especially important issue.

Two key components of a successful program are ensuring cultural appropriateness and respecting Aboriginal culture and beliefs (Bucharski, Brockman, & Lambert, 1999). Successful programs aimed at Aboriginals recognize the importance of having community elders involved in the entire process and engaging in dialogue and evidence-based research to improve prenatal care in the Aboriginal population (Smith & Davies, 2006). Established programs tend to address: culture and language, prenatal care, labour and delivery, breastfeeding, baby and mother care after delivery, infant growth and development, education, health, nutrition, social support, and parental involvement. However, a key element in any processes of education and transition is the readiness and openness of the target clientele.

As David Newhouse and Trice McGuire-Adams write in the preface to *Well-Being in the Urban Aboriginal Community*, over 54 percent of Aboriginal peoples now live in urban areas.

With this growth, there is a significant need within the urban Aboriginal population for prenatal and early childhood parenting education but there is also a need to establish a context through which delivery of such material can be more successful by facilitating the learners' readiness. We view our program as the first step in helping individuals move toward this readiness. We hope to support this readiness by using the collected stories of a group of urban Aboriginals to help frame traditional Aboriginal teachings in a manner that will stimulate thoughtful reflection and discussion in reference to recent history and daily living. Through this, participants' in this program may take steps toward recognizing how each of these strands can be braided to create a personal story that brings strength and leads to an openness to learning and change.

Project History

This process took our team over 5 years to finalize, with many false starts. At one point, years into the process, we had to scrap a finished curriculum because it ended up not being based in Aboriginal ways of knowing and being. It was a learning process based on trial and error. The step by step guide presented here only outlines how the final product was achieved. This means that steps presented here do not reflect our projects true process. We are proud of the finished project and understand that our communities can not be put into "one-size-fits-all" constraints. After reading through this guide, please read our finished booklet, pick and choose and discard, and ultimately, decide for what will work best for your community.

Cost

Creation Stories cost us \$5000. However, this number is deceiving because the vast majority of that money went to the cost of hiring a consultant to create the curriculum we inevitably threw out. Once we re-did the program, we wanted it to be replicable, so that anyone could do this project. This meant that we had to keep costs low. Ultimately, whatever is right for your community is right for the project. You do not need a consultant to do this work. Your community will already have all the skills and resources necessary to manage this project from start to finish. The only word of warning I would give is around transcripts. Depending on how many interviews you collect, and the length of the stories contained in each interview, transcription can take a long time. Transcription is important, which will be explained in a later section, so this is where you may want to pay for transcription services, whether it be a University student looking to make a few extra dollars or the use of a professional service like <https://www.transcribeme.com>.

Ownership

In order to properly engage your community in a safe and transparent manner, the community must maintain ownership of their stories and the final product. This means following OCAP standards. All aspects of OCAP can be found here: <https://fnigc.ca/ocap> . Ultimately, the community should be allowed to edit, add or delete, any aspect of their interview, permission

must be gained to use their words in a printed booklet, and the final product is owned by the community.

Create a team

This is an excellent group project that will help bring together a community. For our team we had Dr. Greg McKenna, Research Consultant with Holland College, Sharon O'Brian, Director of The Mi'kmaq Family Resource Centre, and myself, an Education Director for Lennox Island First Nation. Each member of our team brought a number of skills to the project and our team create something that far exceeded our individual abilities. Scan your community or organization to assess what skills are already in your community, more than likely, you already have everyone you need to complete this project.

Assign jobs

Before assigning jobs, please read through the entirety of parts 1 and 2. Once everyone has a sound understanding of the path, assign the below jobs:

Interview: _____
Transcription: _____
Research traditional knowledge: _____
Interview Analysis: _____
Booklet assembly: _____

Interviews

Interviews should be conducted by a person(s) who the community feels comfortable with and who has the type of personality that can draw the best out of people. Being interviewed is an odd experience, so you want to create an environment that is comfortable and open. The questions provided are open ended so it is ok to ask follow up questions. Let the interview become a conversation and let it go wherever it needs to. The interviews need to be conducted in a quiet place because they need to be recorded. All smartphones have the ability to record audio. You can also buy or rent a wide range of records. Again, whatever best suits your community's situation. Once an interview is completed, it is important to upload and save your audio file to a computer. Saving and sharing the audio files is a good way to prevent loss of interview. For recording and saving audio files, it is best to have the help of someone who is comfortable with technology.

Below are the questions we used:

1. What stories did your parents tell you about their school experience?
2. Tell us the story of your earliest learning memories before starting school?
3. Tell us a story about your early school days?
4. Tell us the story of your greatest challenges in school?
5. Tell us the story of your greatest success in school?
6. Are there any other stories you would like to tell us about school and learning?

Transcription

For our project, we initially hired a community member to do the transcriptions. We wanted to support the community we were working in and wanted to build capacity. Because the community members had no experience transcribing interviews, they quickly became overwhelmed and were only able to finish a few interviews at a slow pace. We eventually hired an Aboriginal University students who had experience in transcription. She was fast and accurate which is important. Companies like <https://www.transcribeme.com> offer transcription services where you upload an audio file and it returns as a word document. At this point you will be swimming in a lot of content. This amount of stories can be overwhelming. Make sure you take steps to make sure all your work is saved and backed up. The worst thing is to lose someone's story.

Research

At some point in the process, someone can be responsible for researching traditional knowledge, stories and poetry from your community and territory. Our project took place in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, and even though the Mi'kmaq Family Resource Centre serves all urban Aboriginals, Charlottetown sits on unceded Mi'kmaq Territory. Therefore, we used traditional knowledge from the Mi'kmaq community. We used poems from Rita Jo, quotes from traditional Mi'kmaq leaders, Senators and elders. You want to find anything that rings true to your community and creates a context of who your people are and how they got there. Please read through our booklet for further examples.

