Indigenous Connectedness For Child Wellbeing

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Who I Am, Where I Come From

- Descendant of Kingigin- Native Village of Wales
- My happy place is in the mountains and ocean
- Inupiaq/Swiss/German/French
- Mother of 2 Daughters
- Previous OCS worker, supervisor and trainer
- Storyteller, author, researcher and educator
- Grew up poor, experienced childhood trauma
- A lifelong learner
- Ever Evolving
- Healer of my heart
My Teachers Along the Way

- Nuna, Imiq, Siqiniq, Siḷa
- Paniit, uiġġ, aŋayuĝgaġiit
- Previous Co-workers
- Tribal Child Welfare Leaders
- Indigenous Scholars
- Elders
- FFCA and ACRF
- IWRI, MFP, NCRE scholars
- 25 Knowledge Bearers- Alumni (9), Relative Caregivers (10), and Foster Parents (6)
Why I Do This Work
BRACKEEN V. BERNHARDT – INDIAN CHILD WELFARE ACT

Attorney: Erin Dougherty Lynch, Dan Lewerenz

CASE UPDATES:

August 9, 2019
Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals Reaffirms the Constitutionality of ICWA

So Many Questions

Supreme Court of Alaska.


No. S-14670.

Decided: September 12, 2014
Highest number of children in OOH care

Count of Children in Out-of-Home Placement during each reporting period.

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<td>Anchorage</td>
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<td>1,281</td>
<td>1,293</td>
<td>1,314</td>
<td>1,304</td>
<td>1,289</td>
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<td>1,310</td>
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<td>Southeast</td>
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<td>Western</td>
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<td>221</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>252</td>
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<tr>
<td>Native Children</td>
<td>1,927</td>
<td>1,925</td>
<td>1,947</td>
<td>2,004</td>
<td>1,979</td>
<td>2,022</td>
<td>2,029</td>
<td>2,001</td>
<td>2,026</td>
<td>2,055</td>
<td>2,084</td>
<td>2,085</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-Native Children</td>
<td>1,074</td>
<td>1,084</td>
<td>1,082</td>
<td>1,087</td>
<td>1,089</td>
<td>1,092</td>
<td>1,124</td>
<td>1,112</td>
<td>1,129</td>
<td>1,145</td>
<td>1,146</td>
<td>1,106</td>
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</table>

From Office of Children’s Services Statistics website
Breaking the Cycle by Studying Wellbeing
Hypothesis: Indigenous Ecological Framework and Relational Worldview

Similar to Social Ecological Model

Relational Worldview: Terry Cross
- Consultation with Student Colleagues, Mentors, Professors, poster presentation,
- 3 conferences, one 4th grade class, wrote, presented, wrote, presented, wrote
Wellbeing frameworks

Kawagley (2006): Yupiaq Worldview

Priest, Mackean, Davis, Briggs & Waters (2012): Socioecological Model of Child Wellbeing
Wellbeing frameworks


INDIGENOUS CONNECTEDNESS FRAMEWORK

- Environmental Connectedness
- Community Connectedness
- Family Connectedness
- Intergenerational Connectedness

Inner Circle:
- Spiritual Connectedness
  - Leadership
  - Subsistence
  - Language
  - Togetherness

Middle Circle:
- Child Wellbeing
- Collective Wellbeing
- Historical knowledge
- Ceremonies
- Sharing
- Art
- Stories
- Humor

Outer Circle:
- Dancing
- Mentoring
- Names
- Roles
- Love

Conceptual Framework

God, Creator, Universe—all encompassing, the backdrop to everything
Alaska Native Context

- 229 Federally Recognized Tribes
- 20 languages
- 12 Regional Corporations
- 20 Groups of Real Human Beings
  - Inupiaq, Yup’ik, Tling’it, Cup’ik, Dena’ina, Sugpiaq, Unangax, Haida, Tsimshian, Gwich’in, Koniag, etc.
Methods and Research Aims

Indigenous Methodology
Power, Ethics, Community, Relationality, Storytelling

Qualitative Methods
Directed Content Analysis and Indigenous Storying or Storywork

Aim 1
Identify and compare Alaska Native foster care alumni, relative caregivers and foster parents’ concepts and mechanisms of child wellbeing with the Indigenous Connectedness Framework.

Aim 2
Describe how child wellbeing was promoted or impeded within Alaska child welfare and Alaska Native relative and foster home placements.
Spoke with 25 Knowledge Bearers

9 Alumni
10 Relatives
6 Foster Parents
Results

Four Cycles of Analysis
1. Hypothesis and Descriptive Coding
2. Identification of Common Concepts
3. Indigenous Storying
4. Wholistic Story Excerpt

Aim 1
Aim 2
Hypothesis Coding

Family Connectedness
Community Connectedness
Environmental Connectedness
Intergenerational Connectedness
Spiritual Connectedness
Mechanisms of Wellbeing
Descriptive Coding

Examples of Descriptive Codes: n=22
Assumption of Responsibility
Barriers to Wellbeing
Caregiver Supports
Cultural Connectedness
Grief and Loss
Relational Continuity
Sense of Safety/Stability
Trauma as a Challenge
Identification of Common Concepts and Merging Codes

Main Codes: n=9        Sub-Main Codes: n= 19
Community Connectedness
Environmental Connectedness
Family Connectedness
Intergenerational Connectedness
Spiritual Connectedness
Concept of Wellbeing
Cultural Connectedness
Mechanisms of Wellbeing
Trauma as a Challenge
Table 11. Frequency of Main Codes

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<th>Main Codes</th>
<th>Total Times Applied</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mechanisms of Wellbeing</td>
<td>405</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trauma as a Challenge</td>
<td>269</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family Connectedness</td>
<td>154</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural Connectedness</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept of Wellbeing</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Connectedness</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Connectedness</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Connectedness</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intergenerational Connectedness</td>
<td>37</td>
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</table>
Indigenous Storying

Lesson 1: Acknowledging Children’s Trauma, Disconnectedness and Relational Wounding

Lesson 2: Maintaining Relational Continuity and Connectedness for Child Wellbeing

Lesson 3: Internal/External Relational Healing and an Updated Indigenous Connectedness Framework
Indigenous Storying

Lesson 1: Acknowledge Trauma, Disconnectedness and Relational Wounding
“People should have the right to know what is going on with little ones in our communities.” - Sarge
“Those traumas are living things, and there’s no use in suppressing them.” - Allen
“I never really got to know my culture...[it wasn’t] until kinda recently I even started learning little tidbits of who I was.” - Brienne
“I was nine when I started raising my siblings and it stopped...when OCS permanently separated my siblings from me” - Temperance
“[OCS] just ripped them out from us. They were with us almost two years. I went into a deep severe depression from that.” – Kuiui Flower
Lesson 2: Maintain Relational Continuity and Connectedness for Child Wellbeing
“And so teaching these kids that were my nieces and nephews that they actually belong to this huge group of people was really nice...” - Sadie
“It’s not a ‘it takes a village to raise a child,’ it’s being connected to that community.” - Kious
“It’s like what did I do to get here? What did I do wrong? Why am I here? And to be able to...get out and be one with nature, it was very soothing.” - Sarge
“The biggest help for us is their ICWA workers.” - Betty
Lesson 3: Facilitate Relational Healing to Come Back to our Relational Identity
I think wellness means...having...cultural ties and being happy and having lots of good gatherings with family and friends. - Elmira
“Her namesake ____, he was a drummer. He passed away and I gave her that name and she just took to the drums just like that. I was like wow.” - Apee
“The importance for me is to know where I came from and to know who I am, and just being me, because in this world without my culture, and without my language, and without the stuff I know, I feel lost. Who am I? Was I supposed to be someone different? Then I should learn those things and it’s just really important to me to know that stuff so I can pass it down to my children, because it’s who we are. And it’s really important to have with us.” - Sarah
Relational Identity

Knowing Who You Are

An “Inner Ecology”
(Kawagley, 2006)
## Internal Connectedness Mechanisms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Body/Earth</th>
<th>Mind/Knowledge</th>
<th>Spirit/Heart Wisdom</th>
<th>Emotions/Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food as medicine</td>
<td>Internal dialogue</td>
<td>Prayer</td>
<td>Compassion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting out on the land</td>
<td>Perceptions</td>
<td>Connection to higher self</td>
<td>Empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gratitude</td>
<td>Stories</td>
<td>Purpose in life</td>
<td>Protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>Memories</td>
<td>Dreams</td>
<td>Connection</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>Relational thinking</td>
<td>Bridging dualities</td>
<td>Emotional intelligence</td>
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<tr>
<td>The body as Earth</td>
<td>Discernment</td>
<td>Relational being</td>
<td>Sense of safety</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Life-long learner</td>
<td>Mindfulness</td>
<td>Trust</td>
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<tr>
<td>Imperfect perfection</td>
<td>Forgiveness</td>
<td>Love</td>
<td>Allowed to feel</td>
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<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Language</td>
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</table>
“So I think it’s really case by case.”
-Marianna
So Many Considerations

- Who Do You and Systems Serve?
- Safety, Permanency, Wellbeing
- Child Maltreatment
- Social History
- Trauma
- Family Engagement
- Policies and Funding
- Power, Authority and Responsibility
- Moral Distress
How to come back to balance...
A relational identity connectedness plan

• Parents, Caregivers, Helpers- do your own healing work
• Stop the relational wounding
• Listen
• Share truth
• Provide teachings and opportunities for children to learn about WHO THEY ARE, WHERE THEY COME FROM
• Help a child build, rebuild or maintain connectedness relationships
• Connect with the Earth
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Child</strong></td>
<td>No more removals, separations and disconnect</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Every relationship should be therapeutic</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Education about connectedness</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Parent</strong></td>
<td>Parents and Child as inseparable unit</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Truth, transparency, patience, compassion</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Family</strong></td>
<td>Ending sibling separations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Allow family to be decision makers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Don’t make assumptions</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Community</strong></td>
<td>Community driven wellness efforts</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Allowed to exchange information, ideas and resources</td>
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<td>Children are shared responsibility</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Land/Environment</strong></td>
<td>Keep children connected to places where they belong</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Earth is a healer</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ancestors/Future</strong></td>
<td>Connection with source of truth, knowledge and history</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Moving from individual focus to collective focused and relational CPS work</td>
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Love comes from the light inside.