The Rural Educator

Volume 45
Number 1 *Joint Special Issue Between The Rural Educator and Journal of American Indian Education*

Article 6

Winter 2024

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Recommended Citation

Simeonoff, S., Simeonoff, J., Simeonoff, T., Simeonoff, S., Haakanson, S., Simeonoff, C., Haakanson, B., & Sabzalian, L. (2024). Healing and Connectedness at Akhiok Kids Camp. *The Rural Educator, 45*(1), 44-62. https://doi.org/10.55533/2643-9662.1464

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Cover Page Footnote

The author order for this article respects the long-standing contributions of Elders and community members who founded Akhiok Kids Camp, and have organized and sustained the camp for decades.

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Promising Practice Article

Healing and Connectedness at Akhiok Kids Camp

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Each August, Sugpiaq Elders, community members, and educators gather in Cape Alitak to host Akhiok Kids Camp, a week-long culture camp that provides a space for local Sugpiaq youth to learn and carry forward traditional lifeways and promotes youth's self-esteem, identity, and healthy choices. This article traces the legacy of the camp and outlines its ongoing vision and curriculum, including the Indigenous values and principles of education that guide camp activities. Of particular focus is the role of camp in fostering Sugpiaq youth's sense of connectedness to their homelands, waters, community, and culture, a focus that promotes healing, cultural resurgence, and well-being for Sugpiaq youth. This description of Akhiok Kids Camp highlights the valuable role that culture camps play in turning Indigenous youth toward the brilliance of their lands and lifeways, and the importance of respecting the knowledge and leadership of Indigenous families in this work.

That's one of the nicest things about this camp: its freedom… You give them freedom.

—Judy Simeonoff, cofounder of Akhiok Kids Camp

For the past two decades, the Sugpiaq community of Akhiok has gathered with Elders, youth, researchers, educators, doctors, and community members at Cape Alitak, a remote site on Kodiak Island in Alaska, to host Akhiok Kids Camp. Akhiok is one of the most remote communities on Kodiak Island, located on the southern tip and accessible only by plane or boat. Rich with plants and wildflowers in the summer, as well as with fish and marine life, the land and waters support the traditional ways of the community. To attend Akhiok Kids Camp, families travel to Cape Alitak by boat.

Akhiok Kids Camp is named after a location, but the long-standing community area itself is tied by Sugpiaq generations in Akhiok, as well as the present villages of Old Harbor, Kodiak, Ouzinkie, Karluk, and more. These generational ties also cross the Shelikof Strait and into the Bristol Bay Sugpiaq communities. Akhiok is tied to many historical communities, including Kaguyak, Aiaktaliak, Sitkinak, Ayakulik, and many more. The week-long culture camp aims to be a space for local Sugpiaq youth to learn and carry forward traditional lifeways and promote youth's self-esteem, identity, and healthy life choices. As a camp that serves Sugpiaq youth from a rural and remote village, it presents a meaningful example of rural Indigenous education led by Indigenous educators and community members.

In this article, we describe Akhiok Kids Camp and how its ongoing vision fosters Sugpiaq youth's sense of identity, belonging, and land- and water-centered literacies. Of particular focus are the Indigenous values and principles that ground the camp in everything it does, including understanding and utilizing the land and seas as the framework and curriculum for teaching and hands-on learning. The camp emphasizes the strength of community as a collective responsibility and uses an invitational and consensual approach to education. Moreover, the camp curriculum nurtures the interests and gifts that each child brings within an intergenerational learning environment that gives youth an opportunity to learn from skilled mentors and Elders in pursuit of projects that matter to them.

This article situates the camp within a broader framework of resurgence. We do so to highlight the valuable role that culture camps play in openly celebrating and turning Indigenous youth toward the brilliance of their community's lifeways. Our story is

of one family's efforts to design and sustain a camp to foster Sugpiaq youth's connectedness to their homelands, communities, and cultures. We hope to inspire educators to learn from and support the Indigenous families in their regions who are likely already engaged in resurgent education. We hope the story and lessons learned from creating and running Akhiok Kids Camp support other community members, Elders, educators, and scholars interested in fostering educational spaces that promote healing and cultural revitalization within rural Indigenous communities. To engage in this work meaningfully and responsibly, we remind rural educators and scholars to center Indigenous families and leaders in this work and to pay attention to Indigenous studies scholarship, which offers generative theories and practices to support rural Indigenous education.

The Purpose of and Need for Culture Camps

When Judy and Mitch originally founded Akhiok Kids Camp in the 1980s, they designed camp as a safe space for youth from the village of Akhiok to go for one week and be kids—a place where Sugpiaq children could have fun, play, experience joy, freedom, and make decisions for themselves. Importantly, Akhiok Kids Camp was intentionally designed to be a space free from drugs and alcohol, where children could have positive experiences and develop relationships with trusted and sober adults. Judy and Mitch, whose childhoods had been impacted by alcohol and who had become sober themselves later in life, felt that it was important to create a space for youth from the village to experience daily life without the presence of alcohol or drugs. Judy's sobriety was prompted, in part, by a memory of a promise that she made to her grandmother that she would not drink. That memory and her commitment to find healthier ways to cope and heal fueled her and Mitch's commitment to create a context where youth from the village could interact with people choosing healthy lifestyles. They wanted children to have positive experiences, create memories that did not involve alcoholism, and see that they could make healthier life choices for themselves. They envisioned camp as a space to foster health, healing, and more vibrant futures for their community.

Over the years, the community and Akhiok Kids Camp have grown to serve a larger purpose more specifically focused on strengthening Sugpiaq identity, knowledge, and culture. The intentional cultural focus, as we describe later, was the result of decades of work to return and restore Sugpiaq knowledge to the community. The growing camp community provided local youth with a diverse network of role models and mentors with whom to be in relationship, and an array of college and career opportunities to consider. Despite the growth, Akhiok Kids Camp remains focused on providing a safe space for Sugpiaq youth to feel good about themselves; to feel pride in who they are and where they come from; to be knowledgeable about their people, culture, and homelands; and to see themselves as strong and capable—knowledge that stays with youth wherever they end up. Judy and Mitch now take a more supporting role at camp and have transitioned leadership to their family members: Speridon, Cheri, Teacon, and their children. They continue to create a community-centered space for Sugpiaq youth rooted in joy, relationality, and Indigenous education.

Creating safe spaces to promote health and healing for Indigenous youth is vital, particularly for youth from communities that have been, and continue to be, impacted by colonialism and historical and intergenerational trauma (Brave Heart et al., 2011; Duran, 2006; Jacob, 2013). Alaska Native communities have experienced successive waves of colonialism, by Russians and later by Americans, the effects of which our communities are still dealing with today. The issues with alcoholism that Judy, Mitch, and their community face are, as Judy notes, a way some Native people have dealt with the pains and losses from colonization, a way to cope with harmful experiences in mission school, sexual or physical abuse, or the death of loved ones by suicide, among other traumas. We acknowledge that sharing stories of alcoholism within Native communities risks reinforcing deficit narratives that blame Native people for the problems they may face today. Native people should not be blamed for or defined by our struggles to cope with or overcome historical and intergenerational trauma, yet the language of historical and intergenerational trauma can be "helpful" by situating the adversities and disparities some Native people experience, including poverty, health issues, violence, or substance abuse, within a longer legacy of colonialism (Jacob, 2013).

For Judy and Mitch, overcoming alcoholism is an important part of the origin story of Akhiok Kids Camp, and speaking about their struggles with alcoholism and trauma has been a way to diminish a sense of shame that often accompanies those struggles. They have turned their story of struggle into a strength and used it to create an educational

space to foster health and healing within their community, reflecting what Unangax̂ scholar Jordan Lewis (2022) describes as *Indigenous cultural generativity*. When Elders reflect on and share their experiences with adversity, including important turning points in their lives, motivations, supports, and meaningful connections they have made with their family, culture, and community, they engage in Indigenous cultural generative acts. These acts of sharing their stories and pathways to reclaim their identity and "becoming who they were meant to be" (Lewis, 2022, p. 182) with younger generations improves the mental health, well-being, and recovery of Elders, who become stronger and healthier through this process. More importantly, "heightened consciousness and spirit of self-determination in improving one's health and well-being is a positive force for Indigenous mental health movements rebuilding healthy families and communities" (Lewis, 2022, p. 191). In this light, Mitch and Judy's openness and transparency about their struggles and sharing their stories of recovery and healing support the health and well-being of themselves, their families, and their community.

Creating educational spaces to sustain and revitalize Indigenous youth's identities, sense of belonging, cultural knowledge, and place-centered literacies are also vital to countering the effects of settler colonialism, which has sought to sever Indigenous peoples' connections to our lands, communities, and lifeways (McCarty & Lee, 2014). Beyond boarding and mission schools that literally removed Indigenous children from their homes and homelands, Western education systems have also dispossessed Indigenous youth from their identities, languages, and knowledge systems. Imposing Western religions and value systems, socializing children into capitalist economies, characterizing Indigenous languages and knowledge systems as primitive, and privileging English and Eurocentric knowledge in curriculum are just several ways schools have undermined Indigenous youth's identities, knowledge systems, and connections to land (D. W. Adams, 1988; Battiste, 2013; Calderón, 2009; Grande, 2015; Simpson 2017). In the wake of assimilative schooling dedicated to erasing, undermining, and dehumanizing Indigenous identities and knowledge systems, there is a dire need for educational practices that restore, sustain, revitalize, and foster the resurgence of Indigenous identities, knowledges, and cultures (McCarty & Lee, 2014; Simpson, 2017).

Akhiok Kids Camp is part of a growing movement of culture camps throughout rural Alaska that focus on rural Indigenous education for Alaska Native youth (Dick, 2004; Fienup-Riordan, 2003; Kawagley, 2006). Helping students become "culturally knowledgeable" is an important aspect of camp (Alaska Native Knowledge Network [ANKN], 1998). Centering Sugpiaq knowledge and processes at camp reflects resurgent education, an educational project within the broader political project of resurgence, which centers Indigenous lands, relationality, and processes to support healthier and vibrant Indigenous nations and futures (Aikau, 2015; Corntassel, 2012; Corntassel et al., 2018; Simpson 2014, 2017). Resurgence offers a generative framework for understanding the possibilities of Indigenous education in rural areas, including culture camps, given its focus on perpetuating Indigenous lifeways (Corntassel & Hardbarger, 2019) and "those things that restore a sense of individual and communal responsibility for our language, histories, territories, ceremonial cycles, and intellectual practices" (Aikau, 2015, p. 656). Resurgent education emphasizes "turning our children inwards toward" the brilliance of their own lands, communities, and cultures and supporting their capacity to "think and live inside their own intelligence systems" (Simpson, 2017, pp. 80–81). The term *intelligence* is intentional and "a strategic intervention into how the colonial world and the academy position, construct, contain, and shrink Indigenous knowledge systems" and more fully encompasses "all of the associated practices, knowledge, and ethics" that make us Indigenous (Simpson, 2017, p. 23).

At Akhiok Kids Camp, resurgent education involves centering Sugpiaq intelligence and inviting youth and community into the stories, practices, and processes that have sustained their communities for millennia. This approach to rural Indigenous education upends the idea of structured Western schooling to more appropriately reflect an Indigenous way of learning. Encouraging youth to recognize the brilliance of their community and lifeways helps restore a sense of dignity, humanity, and pride. The Indigenous values taught during the camp are dynamic and abundant, and they stem from our relationships with land, water, and one another. Further, efforts to center Sugpiaq presence, intelligence, processes, and practices also provide crucial "context in which what is taught and the process by which it is taught make sense" (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001, p. 84). Providing an "Indigenous context using Indigenous processes" is core to

resurgent education, which is "concerned with re-creating the conditions" in which Indigenous practices make sense, "not just the content of the practice itself" (Simpson, 2017, p. 154).

The goals of Akhiok Kids Camp also foreground valuable learning outcomes that are typically disregarded within mainstream schooling. Achievement within a standardized Western system of school should not be the only measure of learning. Although leaders at camp encourage youth to be academically successful in school, they also foreground a variety of other learning outcomes that are equally as meaningful. Camp leaders want children to laugh, play, experience joy, freedom, and engage in learning that feels meaningful and relevant to them without the structure and expectations that conventional school imposes on them. They want children to have a space where they can develop healthy relationships with adults, other Sugpiaq youth, and community members. They want youth to be seen, feel valued and good about who they are, and develop pride in their culture and community. At camp and in life they want youth to understand the ingenuity, brilliance and resourcefulness of our ancestors and appreciate the skill and problem-solving they embodied to thrive for thousands of years. Youth who can engage in problem-solving and ingenuity and recognize that mistakes are vital to learning bring a strong sense to self and community. Camp leaders want youth to build the skills, patience, perseverance, and confidence to create challenging projects that are meaningful to them and feel a sense of accomplishment and pride in their work. They want youth to thrive and develop respect and a sense of responsibility to care for one another and the land.

Mask making is one example of a camp activity that embodies the principles and practices of resurgent education (see Figure 1). Carving masks connects Sugpiaq youth to living carvers in the community as well as to ancestors across generations. They may recreate masks made by their ancestors or design their own mask that tells their own story. Whether the designs are ancient or contemporary, at a deeper level, Sugpiaq youth are invited into the context and processes of their ancestors and the Sugpiat values of traditional arts, skills, and ingenuity, or piciipet uswituu'uq: the value "our ways are wise," that Alisha Drabek (2013) learned from Sugpiaq Elders. Carving cultural items like masks invites youth into the dynamic processes Sugpiaq people "*have always done*" (Simpson, 2017, p. 247), including storytelling and problem-solving, which youth can learn from, apply, and adapt to their own lives.

Figure 1: Youth carving at camp. Copyright 2023 by C. Simeonoff. Reprinted with permission.

More broadly, the goals and hopes for youth align with holistic conceptions of success identified by Alaska Native leaders: "(a) knowing and accepting who you are; (b) being able to provide for yourself and your family; (c) contributing to the community; and (d) making progress in achieving goals" (Villegas, 2009, p. 50). Moreover, camp culture is designed to support what Villegas (2009) refers to as "role-centered success," which focuses on "students' sense of belonging at various levels: belonging as a human being in terms of one's responsibility to natural and spiritual realms, belonging in community in terms of one's responsibility to others, and belonging in an individual role in terms of one's own unique skills and talents" (p. 49). Framing success holistically and in the context of belonging aligns with the idea that success is not just about "making a living," but also "making a life" (Villegas & Prieto, 2006, p. 16). At Akhiok Kids Camp, success involves how you feel about yourself and your community, the sense of pride and accomplishment in your creations, the commitment to making healthy life choices, and the desire to care for and contribute to the community.

A Note on Learning and the "Nourishing the Learning Spirit"

Before more fully describing activities at Akhiok Kids Camp and the connections camp leaders hope to nurture among youth, the land and waters, their community, and their culture, we highlight a key theory of learning that grounds camp, reflected in Mi'kmaw scholar Marie Battiste's (2010, 2013) conception of the *learning spirit*. The conception of

the learning spirit recognizes learning as an ongoing personal and spiritual journey to find our gifts, purpose, and vision. In this theory, learning is "holistic, lifelong, purposeful, experiential, communal, spiritual, and learned within a language and a culture," a process that cannot be forced, but rather is personal and guided by our learning spirits who help us discover our unique gifts and purpose (Battiste, 2010, p. 15).

This theory of learning, the drum beat of the Akhiok Kids Camp, emphasizes the joy of learning and finding one's gifts in a context of community (Battiste, 2013; Cajete, 2015), a context free from "coercion and authority" (Simpson, 2017, p. 150). Learning is recognized as children's natural instinct, and "readiness to learn" is key to successful teaching and learning (Cajete, 2019). At camp, curriculum focuses on "nourishing the learning spirit," which guides each of us in "our search for purpose and meaning," and children's gifts are thought to unfold in learning environments "that sustain and challenge us as learners" (Battiste, 2013, p. 18).

Western education has not prioritized Indigenous ways of learning (Battiste, 2010), and formal schooling is often coercive and does not respect children's dignity, intelligence, or agency (Simpson, 2014, 2017). Creating a camp that respects children's capacity to learn and that nourishes their learning spirit is an important remedy to compulsory, coercive, and colonizing schooling that has sought "control over the minds, bodies, and lands of Native children, peoples, and communities" (Hopkins, 2020, p. 3). Schooling, including boarding, mission, and even public schools, has often eroded Indigenous children's learning spirit (Battiste, 2010). At Akhiok Kids Camp, however, learning and curriculum are guided by children's curiosity and interest rather than a fixed schedule. Moreover, love, play, and joy are foundational to learning.

When Mitch and Judy started camp, they wanted children to be with trusted adults and in community with one another on the land of their ancestors and experience cultural healing, freedom, joy, laughter, and wonders of childhood. They wanted the camp to foster a culture of learning that is organic and child centered, driven by children's interests and curiosities. Every day and nearly every hour into dusk, children are running through camp chasing one another, playing hide and seek in the tall grass, or creating forts. Smiles and laughter are evidence of the type of camp culture Judy and Mitch have helped to create, and these expressions of freedom and joy are inherently anticolonial. Freedom of choice, self-determination, responsibility for oneself, and play are foundational to camp, and children learn experientially through play and in community with one another and the land.

A variety of activities are also prepared and available, though children are not forced into them. Instead, they are offered an array of options and are encouraged to choose the activities that interest them. Learning is not on a schedule; it happens at the pace of a child's interest. An impromptu language session around the fire happens when someone asks an Elder questions about the language. Dancing is taught when someone asks about a song or wants to practice a dance. Youth are given autonomy to learn on their terms, and learning at camp is rooted in questions about which children want knowledge, skills they want to learn, and projects they want to complete.

Akhiok Kids Camp leaders believe that a foundation in cultural arts is important for youth, and as such, carving, beading, sewing, painting, singing, drumming, and dancing are featured activities during camp. Learning how to create cultural pieces, perform songs, or dance are important ways to connect with one's culture to develop a sense of awareness, pride, and accomplishment within themselves. Moreover, the arts can also provide youth foundational skills to support them later in life, even if they never choose to do the activity again. For Speridon, a current camp organizer, creating art felt like work when he was younger, but now carving masks and creating art are the very skills on which he draws to relax. Camp is designed to facilitate an appreciation for and skills in the arts, but youth are given freedom to decide which activities to pursue (see Figure 2).

To facilitate a context that allows youth flexibility, choice, spontaneity, and self-determination, learning opportunities are prepared and await the children who seek them out—a carving tent full of tools, wood, and project templates for those who wish to carve, or watercolors for those who wish to paint images of petroglyphs they visited. The ability to offer these opportunities also requires the involvement of educators well-versed in teaching the skills offered throughout the week, such as carving or subsistence hunting or gathering, which aren't acquired from school or textbooks, but learned through time, experience, and a lifestyle of valuing and practicing those skills. Camp educators must be open and prepared to support the varied interests and inquiries of youth participants. Ensuring that youth have a say in what they create is key to their feeling excited about learning and developing the stamina to

complete projects that matter to them and make them feel proud. A child may also begin carving a mask from driftwood, and then set it down, getting distracted, to play tag or start another art project. That is okay—it will be there for when they are ready to continue. The freedom to determine the focus and pace of their own learning enables the patience and persistence needed to complete challenging projects and, ultimately, the pride of creating and accomplishing something that matters to them, something that they will carry with them forever.

Figure 2. A youth camp participant carving a mask. Copyright 2023 by S. Haakanson. Reprinted with permission.

Importantly, children's freedom is not boundless. Akhiok Kids Camp takes place in a remote environment that without preparation and caution can be dangerous. Children are taught about water safety and survival skills, how to be always bear aware, to use the buddy system, of the importance of listening to adults for environmental safety, and to look out for smaller children. Freedom takes place in an Elder-guided and intergenerational learning community, designed to foster children's collective sense of responsibility among the community to one another and the places in which we live and learn. Swimming is one of the children's favorite activities, but they are only allowed to swim in the presence of at least one adult. Because we are in the bears' territory, children are taught never to wander off alone. Children are also expected to pitch in and share in the responsibilities of chores to keep the camp clean and running. Picking up after themselves, helping younger ones in need, taking their turn helping in the kitchen, serving food, and washing dishes are shared responsibilities in which each youth must participate. Designing a context to foster children's joy and self-determination does not mean that children are always happy. Intermixed with sounds of laughter are the occasional tears when a child falls, or a grumble of frustration about chores or a carving project that is giving them a hard time. These expressions of emotion are all healthy and a part of community and camp life, but after initial safety talks and between their various chores and responsibilities, children are given a great deal of leeway to play and to be kids.

The transition away from learning as a prescribed scope and sequence may feel foreign or uncomfortable to those educated within rigid, structured Western educational systems. For participants used to being told what to learn or when to move between activities, the unstructured approach may take time to adjust to, and for some educators, it may require work on their part to relearn how to offer a more natural learning environment. In many ways, however, camp curriculum exemplifies "the ideal education," which Cajete (2015) offers "is like air: it is natural, spontaneous, original, and naturally spiritual. Natural education unfolds like play—indeed it is a form of play. It draws sustenance from the natural interplay of [humans] and nature and the spirit inherent in both. It is not bounded, weighed down with dogma—it is free!" (p. 15). Providing youth a sense of autonomy within the context of a safe, loving community supports them in learning to "find their face, find their heart, and find their foundation" (Cajete, 2000, 2015), where face reflects one's identity, heart reflects one's passion and purpose, and foundation reflects the knowledge and skills needed to pursue those passions.

Beyond the child-centered approach to teaching and learning that recognizes the inherent value of joy and play, Akhiok Kids Camp is grounded in practices based on Indigenous values, ways of learning, and relationality with everything around them (land,

water, air, and each other). In the next section, we describe these practices in terms of connectedness.

Fostering Healing and Resurgence Through Connectedness

Helping youth connect to their gifts and inherent "learning spirit" (Battiste, 2013) is one of the many connections that leaders hope to foster among youth at camp. Connectedness offers a powerful antidote to dispossession and a framework for fostering healing, well-being, and resurgence (Jacob, 2013; Simpson, 2017; Ullrich, 2019, 2020).

Just as substance abuse within Indigenous communities must be understood within a broader framework of colonialism, "healing approaches must look at health and social problems in terms of land loss, genocide, warfare, assimilation, termination, and relocation" and must also be viewed "in terms of its long-term communal effects" (Jacob, 2013, p. 12). Describing efforts in her community to heal the "soul wound," a concept developed by Duran (2006) to describe the unresolved grief and trauma that many Indigenous peoples experience directly or vicariously from settler colonial violence, Yakama scholar Michelle Jacob (2013) notes that healing is an intergenerational process rooted in connectedness:

> To heal oneself is to help heal ancestors' soul wounds, and to help protect future generations from soul wound suffering. This view of healing and suffering resonates well with traditional indigenous teachings that view each generation as connected to another. Intergenerational historical trauma is a well-received theory within indigenous communities today because it centers the fact that suffering and healing are connected across generations; it reaffirms an indigenous belief in connectedness. (p. 12)

Framing healing in terms of connectedness also recognizes that "the power needed to heal our soul wounds *already exists within our people and traditions* [emphasis added]" (Jacob, 2013, p. 12). Our role, then, is to facilitate children's connections with those teachings embedded within our lands and ways of life.

Connectedness provides a powerful counter to dispossession. As Simpson (2017) notes,

> the opposite of dispossession is not possession, it is deep, reciprocal, consensual *attachment*. Indigenous bodies don't relate to the land by possessing or owning it or having control over it. We relate to land through connection—generative, affirmative, complex, overlapping, and nonlinear *relationship.* (p. 43)

Cultivating children's relationship with and sense of connectedness to their lands and lifeways is core to resurgent education and an important source of healing and power for Indigenous youth and communities (Simpson, 2017).

The Indigenous Connectedness Framework developed by Iñupiaq scholar Jessica Saniġaq Ullrich (2019, 2020) highlights the power of connectedness in promoting the restoration of Indigenous knowledge and culture, and most importantly, the health and well-being of Indigenous children. Children are at the center of the framework and are viewed as sacred and deserving of healthy relationships and a connectedness to their family, their community, their environment, and their ancestors and future generations. Cultural and spiritual connectedness form an all-encompassing backdrop to the framework, "which makes all other relationships possible":

> These relationships can help children develop and maintain healthy relationships with others and, most importantly, themselves. All these relationships involve action, intention, love, boundaries, safety, trust, and respect for each other's sovereignty and unique expression. To *know who you are and where you come from* is to recognize that you are a human being who is related and connected with everyone and everything on this planet and in this universe. (Ullrich et al., 2022, pp. 253–254)

Helping children develop connections to their family and community, the environment, their ancestors/future generations, and spirit promotes the well-being of children as well as the collective well-being of the community (Ullrich, 2020).

The following sections draw on the Indigenous Connectedness Framework to highlight the various relationships and connections fostered at camp. Given the holistic nature of learning and Indigenous knowledge systems, and the interrelatedness of the components of the Indigenous Connectedness Framework, we contextualize these components and describe examples of how camp fosters *connectedness to the environment* and *connectedness to family and community*, which work in tandem to foster children's intergenerational, cultural, and spiritual connectedness.

Connectedness to the Environment

Environmental education is the heart of Akhiok Kids Camp and a foundational way in which leaders foster children's connectedness to the environment and their culture, which are not separate, but rather are deeply intertwined as the environment—including our lands, waters, skies, and the various forms of life they sustain—provides the context for Indigenous knowledge systems and culture.[1] Moreover, culture is understood as a dynamic and adaptive "way of life" practiced by our people for generations. As such, supporting children's environmental connectedness fosters their sense of connectedness to their ancestors across generations and strengthens their spirits.

At camp, families leave their homes and communities to gather in a remote location where they can rebuild their social structure and live as a family. Youth learn and practice subsistence skills that include hunting, harvesting, gathering, and processing isuwiq (seal), tuntuq (deer), sagiq (halibut), iqallut (salmon), qaryat (fish eggs), sakuuq (crab), amikuq (octopus), uutuq (sea urchin) and uriitaq (bidarki/chiton), among others (see Figure 3). They learn to identify, gather, and cook with plants such as petrushki, yarro, or angelica. They take walks to the beach and spend time looking at and learning from the petroglyphs, images pecked into the local granite by Sugpiaq people over the past millennia. They learn about the archaeological sites where their ancestors lived. Children comb the beach to learn about the different types and uses of driftwood. They differentiate and gather the wood for carving tools, masks, gaming pieces, starting and keeping a fire going. Children find dry grass and birchbark to start fires, rocks and shells for their artwork. Each activity is guided by the weather and tides as the environment determines the best times to hike, visit the petroglyphs, go hunting or harvesting, or gather supplies.

Learning looks like a group of children and adults sitting near the water, gathered around a teenager to observe how they skin a seal. The teenager might share how one needs to be careful not to cut the intestines or bladder, which can be used for regalia after it is processed or damage the hide for later projects. Curriculum here is the youth and adults kneeling in the rocks just off the shore, learning to fillet salmon, sometimes praised for a precise cut, or sometimes guided with an encouraging hand to slice the flesh more gently from the bones. Curriculum is children creating art inspired from the petroglyphs; a group of young people sitting in the grass, processing the deer they helped get for dinner; or an auntie sitting near the fire, helping a young one scoop freshly made octopus salsa onto their pilot bread. Curriculum is trial and error, as children and adults learn that certain wood is good for creating a lot of smoke in the fire or that they have to get the right rhythm with their bow drill in order to start a fire. The curriculum is founded in learning to live communally again, rather than within rigid nuclear family units.

Figure 3: Community member teaching youth at camp how to fillet salmon graciously donated by the Rozelle family. Copyright 2023 by C. Yee. Reprinted with permission.

At Akhiok Kids Camp, activities and curriculum vary each year, depending on timing, the weather, access to materials, and the knowledge and skills of participants who teach. Teachers bring materials to be prepared for a variety of situations but allow the reality of camp to dictate the lessons. Whether one learns how to process seal meat and seal skin is determined by whether one successfully completes a hunt. If the tide is low, sometimes everything is paused to pry uriitaq off the rocks and then work together to clean and prepare them. This approach stands in stark contrast to Western schooling's focus on decontextualized knowledge and standardizing the scope and sequence of curriculum. Environmental education at camp is place based and locally responsive, offering children an important interrelatedness of land- and water-based education and an emphasis on kinship (Bruce et al., 2023; Lees & Bang, 2023).

[1] We use the term "environmental education" as it holistically encompasses lands, waters, skies, and life; however, our approach aligns with Indigenous pedagogies that foreground the importance and

experiential understanding of their interconnectedness to the lands, waters, and life around them and how it enables or limits what they can do or learn.

Cultural arts are understood as ways to reflect and express our relationships to land and place. Teaching children and adults to carve is an important method of fostering connectedness to our environment and culture. Carving curriculum at the camp has involved large-scale collective efforts to carve and build an angyaaq (open boat) and qayaq. Smaller projects have included carving masks, halibut hooks, paddles, miniature angyaat, spears for augca'aq, bows and arrows, spoons, bowls, toys, boats, throwing boards, and drums (see Figure 4). After selecting a project they want to pursue from materials available, youth are led by skilled carvers in a process of building the skills needed to complete their carving.

You will see children and adults also gather in a craft tent to learn to bead (piuqucirluku), sew (mingqelluku), paint (kraaskaaq), weave (ninarluku), and make salve. Children bead jewelry for their friends and family, learn how to sew salmon skin or fur. They make pouches or use rocks and small items from the beach to embed in necklaces. Older youth and adults learn to weave using beach grass, collected during prior camps and dried and cured during the year, or using modern sinew. Here, rubbings from field trips to the petroglyphs are transformed into art. Children create drawings and paintings that reflect other aspects of camp: pictures of sunsets, seals, fireweed, and other life sustained in the lands around them. The craft tent is a place where people gather, not only to bead and sew together, but also to be together. They tell stories, laugh, and talk about families and futures. Here, environmental education looks like aunties swapping recipes for tanning salmon skins or mothers sharing stories of trying to raise children. Resurgent education at camp is intergenerational as everyone at camp, children and adults alike, are strengthening their connections to Sugpiaq lands, waters, community, and culture. Connectedness stems from reviving the love in themselves and where they come from.

Daily learning involves listening to Elders and adults about how the environment has changed and is changing now, sharing stories of fishing or hunting trips, language lessons around the fire, learning the history and meaning of the petroglyphs, drumming, dancing, and singing songs. Learning is someone sharing a story of their first hunt, or a person humming kaputiin quietly to themselves, followed by a call for someone to grab a drum, turning the camp community into an impromptu dance group. Stories strengthen children's connections to place and the values that have sustained Sugpiaq lands and waters for millennia. Dr. Haakanson, telling a story about the holes in the hand of Sedna/the spirit of the sea/Imam Sua, which allow enough animal spirits to pass through so humans can survive, is a reminder to never take more than we need. When students use petroglyph images on their masks, paintings, drums, and jewelry, they are reminded of those stories, values, and connections. The camp involves activities out on the lands and waters—at the petroglyphs or the beach, in a skiff or angyaaq, around the fire or a freshly killed deer, under a tarp or the stars—immersed with stories and songs that strengthen youth's connectedness to their environment and sense of belonging to the community, fostering their relationship with and responsibility to their place and people for the future.

Figure 4: Drum frames drying by the fire that were bent through a natural process using traditional steaming techniques. Copyright 2023 by C. Simeonoff. Reprinted with permission.

Leaders and educators at Akhiok Kids Camp model a variety of principles and pedagogies that support promising practices in rural Indigenous education. The camp is grounded in Indigenous pedagogies of place, which center land and water not only as an important context in which to learn, but also as an important teacher in and of itself (Cajete, 2015; Kawagley, 2006; Lees & Bang, 2023; Simpson, 2014; Styres, 2017; Tuck et al., 2014). Learning is an active, dynamic, and relational process that is intentionally experiential. Students learn in, with, and from place as they play, help, observe, hunt, and harvest. At camp, carving, weather watching, cooking, sewing, weaving, painting, singing, drum-making, and dancing are not isolated expressions of Sugpiaq culture, but rather meaningful

expressions of Sugpiaq relationships with the land and water. The cultural values and place-based experiences in which youth engage at camp provide them an important foundation to draw from in their daily lives outside of camp. The places that have sustained the culture for millennia support youth in "learning about the natural world and coming to know one's place in the world" (Marin & Bang, 2018, p. 89), including knowing and understanding where Sugpiaq ancestors roamed, played, and supported their families.

Fostering environmental connectedness also involves supporting youth's land-centered literacies, which Goodyear-Ka'ōpua (2013) describes as "a range of critically engaged observational, interpretive, and expressive practices that put land and natural environment at the center" (p. xvi). Indigenous-centered literacies at camp involve reading the lands, skies, and waters: skills such as observing tracks on a walk, identifying plants and animals, observing weather patterns, or understanding the tides and when it is safe to travel. For Sugpiaq youth from Kodiak Island or other areas in Alaska, Indigenous activities serve to value and affirm the cultural literacies and subsistence skills in which they may already be versed but that are typically disregarded in schools which foreground a "narrow focus on conventional literacy" (Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, 2013, p. 12). The ability to understand when to travel because of the tides, how to identify petrushki by the red stems and edges around the leaves, how to track and hunt deer, or where to gather and harvest uriitaq are valued as forms of literacy that rarely show up in mainstream curriculum or tests (see Figure 5). At Akhiok Kids Camp, children from villages are respected for their brilliance and skill, an important antidote to deficit framing that often characterizes Indigenous youth, in particular those from rural areas or villages (R. Adams & Farnsworth, 2020; Biddle & Azano 2016; Lipka, 1986; RedCorn et al., 2021). Moreover, camp curriculum affirms important connections between rural places, identities, and literacies (Donehower, 2021), recognizing that supporting children in "reading their world" also supports them in "learning their histories, ideologies and identities" (Hare, 2012, p. 407).

Environmental education provides a context for Sugpiaq youth and communities to "experience and remember their culture," a phrase used frequently by camp leaders, educators, and families. In this phrase and framing, culture is not a way of life that has disappeared or been lost. Rather, our lifeways are always there in the place, waiting for us to reconnect and remember them. At camp, culture is embodied and practiced through subsistence and as "a way of life." This framing of rural Indigenous places as rich sites for remembering and practicing our culture and lifeways counters deficit narratives of culture and rurality, instead foregrounding the dynamic nature of Indigenous culture (Kawagley, 2006) and the power of place (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001). Here the camp aligns with cultural standards for educators and schools, which aim to provide "opportunities for students to engage in in-depth experiential learning in real-world contexts" and foreground "teaching/learning *through* the local culture" rather than "about" culture (ANKN, 1998, p. 3).

Figure 5: Judy Simeonoff showing the petrushki she gathered for dinner. Copyright 2018 by L. Sabzalian. Reprinted with permission.

Culture can be viewed as a dynamic relational practice and youth can carry their roots with them, wherever they go (Lyons, 2010). For Akhiok Kids Camp leaders, providing kids the opportunity to practice subsistence skills is important. Providing a strong foundation to hunt, fish, and gather berries as well as process meat, smoke fish, and prepare jams are skills they will always carry with them in life and adapt to whatever lands and communities they end up living in. Subsistence skills promote pride and self-reliance. It feels good to be in community harvesting or hunting and providing for your family. It is comforting to know you can be less reliant on a store to get food. Subsistence skills can be seen as a

powerful counter to the assimilative focus of colonialist and capitalist schooling, which emphasize individualism and accumulation (Grande, 2015; Simpson 2017; Villegas, 2009). Sugpiaq youth from urban areas in Alaska or the lower 48 are provided opportunities to re/connect with their homelands and practice their culture, which may not always be present or affirmed within urban educational settings (Sabzalian, 2019). Despite the various locations where camp participants reside, everyone at camp engages in Indigenous-based learning designed to perpetuate Sugpiaq life (Corntassel & Hardbarger, 2019). Sugpiaq people have always been mobile, traveling great distances across the lands and seas for subsistence, trade, or visiting, and sustaining their identities regardless of their location. Environmental education is a catalyst that connects us. This strong connectedness supports Sugpiaq youth and adults to practice their way of life wherever they live.

Connectedness to Family and Community

Akhiok Kids Camp centers family and community, in particular the intergenerational learning community in which youth, adults, and Elders all learn from and support one another. Family and community provide the context in which to learn about our relationships and responsibilities to care for the places we live (see Figure 6). At camp, the community is expansive: children, adults, Elders, pets, as well as the lands and waters with various forms of life. Those lands and waters sustain the community. The theory and practice of community at camp aligns with literature on the value and role of Indigenous community and community-based education. As Cajete (2015) notes, “Indigenous community is both content and method, message and medium, what we know and our way of knowing” (pp. 59–60). Moreover, the learning practices of finding one’s face, heart, and foundation take place “within the context of community and proper relationship with the natural world” (p. 21).

Within the small community at camp, everyone shares responsibility for taking care of it. This practice models responsibility for children, but also helps them see and understand they are an important part of the community. Children will feel pride in chopping wood for the fire, grabbing a cup of coffee for an Elder, or gathering water for the dishes. Creating an expectation of community invites everyone to contribute according to their age and ability. This approach can instill pride in youth, strengthening their lived experiences and understanding of relationality, responsibility, and reciprocity (Cajete, 2015). Sharing is a practice and expectation in the camp community. While youth may have their own knives and bags to gather uriitaq, for example, what they harvest is always combined, prepared, and shared with the community. Everyone at camp benefits from the hunt or the harvest, modeling for youth how sharing is a crucial part of the process of hunting or harvesting first foods. Situating these values within a small camp community and in a remote place heightens the importance of these values, as well as the consequences and impact we have when we ignore our responsibilities and obligations to community and to place. Youth learn to care for one another, the lands and waters around them, and the animals and plants they hunt, harvest, and process. It shows and teaches an important life lesson: “Learning how to be in a place in a good and responsible way” (Cajete, 2015, p. 46).

Figure 6: Hunter and his father Teacon Simeonoff at Akhiok Kids Camp. Copyright 2021 by C. Simeonoff. Reprinted with permission.

The camp participants are connected through an intergenerational learning community, which is an integral part of camp experience (see Figure 7). This community values the roles, responsibilities, and contributions of everyone, including Elders, adults, and importantly the youth. Children are respected for

the gifts of joy and laughter they bring to the community as well as their fascination with the wonders of life. Elders benefit from being in a community with youth and witnessing their joyful approach to learning and reclaiming cultural lifeways. This interaction fosters emotional healing and hope among the Elders. The ancestral generations are included in the camp community, present through stories, language, songs, and ways of life. Children are also encouraged to think about younger generations, a reminder to them that they have responsibilities to future generations.

Figure 7: Youth and adult camp participants drumming and dancing together. Copyright 2023 by S. Haakanson. Reprinted with permission.

Elders have a meaningful role at camp and teach invaluable life lessons to youth that are not typically learned in school today. As an example, Judy, who cofounded the camp and has served as the camp cook for many years in a motherly role, routinely reminds youth that the energy you put into something shapes the outcome. As a healer, Judy talks about the power of her healing hands and how the good energy she puts into cooking is an important ingredient that helps nourish the community. She reminds youth that their actions as well as their thoughts can impact community and encourages them to remember to put good thoughts and energy into their cooking, art, or carving. This lesson connects children to the spiritual energy that circulates in our world, and she hopes they will apply it to life outside of camp as well.

Elders and experienced knowledge holders are vital in supporting youth to learn the abilities needed to complete challenging projects (see Figure 8). Learning at camp is experiential and involves apprenticeship and directed learning (Cajete, 2000, 2019). Carving projects, for example, require patience, skill, and the guidance of experienced carvers to help develop skills and competencies that build on each other. Carving a mask requires learning to use a knife properly, then learning to make different cuts on soft woods, knowledge then applied to harder woods. Youth must demonstrate they have developed competencies before moving to more advanced projects. Experts and Elders wait for youth to ask them questions, for guidance and encouragement, they then await the return of the youth to check their work. This rhythm of learning continues as skills are developed and scaffolded, reflecting the "organic development" of Indigenous teaching, which Cajete (2019) suggests is "planted like a seed and then nurtured and cultivated through the relationship of teacher and student until it bears fruit" (p. 841). Laboring through the slow, precise process of carving in a context of sustained and guided support from experienced carvers and Elders who have high expectations for them helps youth complete challenging projects that are meaningful to them. Carving is an intergenerational and community-based activity that fosters family and community connectedness. Carvers sit together under a tarp-covered shelter and carve, telling stories, sharing strategies, and learning from and supporting one another.

Figure 8: Speridon "Mitch" Simeonoff, Sr., and Speridon Simeonoff, Jr., carving paddles. Copyright 2016 by M. Blaine. Reprinted with permission.

Though Elders are regarded for their knowledge and experience, in the context of camp, "teachers" can refer to anyone who has relevant knowledge to pass on to anyone else, which is why the teenagers are often the teachers for the youngest. The strict hierarchy of degrees and age are completely disassembled by this type of camp. A college kid attending camp for the first time with their cousins from the village may become the student, and the 12-year-old the teacher, showing their cousin how to catch an octopus or fillet salmon. This practice contrasts with more conventional camps that utilize the western construct of "classes" that put the "teacher" in the power role. At camp, everyone is

recognized and valued as a learner and a teacher with knowledge or skills to share with the collective.

Akhiok Kids Camp also embraces an inclusive conception of identity and kinship. Sugpiaq youth are valued and taught that they belong, whether from a village or a city. This lesson counters conceptions of identity designed to diminish Indigeneity, community, and solidarity among Indigenous peoples (Goeman, 2013; John & Ford, 2017). Moreover, regardless of biological relations to one another, at camp everyone is treated like a family, which reflects the value and practice of Indigenous kinship and community. Sugpiaq youth and their relationships to Sugpiaq identity, culture, and homelands are centered, but many people, Sugpiaq and non-Sugpiaq, have a role to play in supporting this vision. Non-Native people invited into camp share their knowledge, skills, experiences, and stories to support this beautiful vision and become part of the beloved community that supports Sugpiaq youth. Meeting and learning from new people are important and exciting aspects of camp for many of the children and adults from rural villages. These connections provide opportunities to learn from and share stories with people all over the United States (and world), where relationships are established and sustained through social media. While it is vital that Sugpiaq youth have Sugpiaq role models, the emphasis on relationality and kinship, rather than a focus on race or nationality, broadens the opportunities available to Sugpiaq youth. Importantly, the diverse community at camp, regardless of each member's identity, shares a commitment to supporting Sugpiaq youth and practicing Sugpiaq culture and lifeways, a collective commitment that supports Sugpiaq resurgence.

Cultural and Spiritual Connectedness

Collectively, environmental, family, and community connectedness strengthens the cultural and spiritual connectedness of camp participants. Our "cultural way of life and spiritual connectedness seem to be synonymous" and many of our "cultural practices are spiritual practices" (Ullrich, 2019, p. 125). When students learn to carve, sing, dance, create art, or subsist, they are strengthening their cultural connectedness and spiritual connectedness, which are "interchangeable" and always waiting for us to connect because "[w]hile culture and spiritual practices change over time, culture and spirit never cease" (p. 125).

Curriculum at camp also recognizes the inherent and spiritual power of places (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001) and the intimate relationship between the environment, people, culture, and spirit. As Battiste (2010) offers,

> We come to know ourselves in place, and by its depth of beauty, abundance, and gifts, we learn to respect and honour that place. All Indigenous peoples have, then, a land base and ecology from which they have learned, and it is there that they honour the spirit of that land in ceremonies, traditions, prayers, customs, and beliefs. (p. 14)

Being in a community out on the land or in the water has inherent value, as do running, swimming, playing in the tall grass, throwing rocks in the water, telling stories by the fire. Being outside with less technology and fewer digital distractions offers youth and community a chance to slow down, recalibrate, and value simple pleasures in life—a brilliant sunset, a conversation with an Elder around the fire, a cup of hot cocoa after the rain settles, the power of imagination which can turn sticks into swords or forts. Cape Alitak is a special place. Being with the lands, waters, and feeling and hearing the pulse of the wind and waves, rather than traffic, are calming and relaxing, another outcome with inherent value. Recalibrating and remembering the joy and gifts that time on the land and water and in community provide us can also provide youth with an important foundation to help them protect and defend their lands and communities, as these commitments often stem from people's relationships, love, and gratitude for their people and the places they call home (Wilson & Laing, 2018). Creating a context for children to remember their culture on the land and in community strengthens their minds, bodies, hearts, and spirits, and promotes healing and well-being among youth and community. Moreover, children's cultural and spiritual connectedness is strengthened by creating a supportive and loving environment that respects children's capacities to learn, nourishes their "learning spirit" (Battiste, 2010, 2013), and encourages them to find their gifts in the context of community.

The story and lessons from camp offer important guidance for those seeking to create spaces that promote healing, cultural revitalization, and resurgence within rural Indigenous communities. Creating a space that values play and joy is both the origin story of the camp and its guiding philosophy, but it also offers important reminders for all educational spaces to be more child centered and less coercive. It reminds us as educators that learning is a personal and spiritual journey for each of us, and the land and a loving community offer a powerful

network to facilitate learning. Moreover, creating place-based curriculum that respects and reflects Indigenous knowledge systems requires flexibility, patience, and the leadership of people with intimate knowledge of the local environment and culture.

Respecting Families as Leaders in This Work

Akhiok Kids Camp reflects the important role of Indigenous families in fostering educational resurgence and creating meaningful learning environments for Sugpiaq youth beyond the confines of "school" (Bang et al., 2019; Battiste, 2010; Corntassel et al., 2018; San Pedro, 2021). Education at the camp takes place on the land and in the context of family and community. Many participants are related to one another. Moreover, the families from the village who created and sustain the camp have a wealth of knowledge, skills, and experience to support a rich education for their family members and other youth from the village and beyond, rooted in connectedness and resurgence. The meaningful educational experiences created at Akhiok Kids Camp emphasize the roles of Indigenous families as "the foundation for healing and education" and as "nation-builders and changemakers" (Bang et al., 2019, p. 789).

Research has documented the deficit views educators in rural areas often hold about Indigenous families (R. Adams & Farnsworth, 2020; Lipka, 1986; RedCorn et al., 2021) and, more broadly, Indigenous families' experiences with racism, tokenism, and assimilative and coercive forms of engagement when they interact with and seek to transform schools (Bang et al., 2019). The story of Akhiok Kids Camp, however, underscores the important experiences, theories, and practices that Indigenous families can contribute to support the well-being and success of their young ones. As Battiste (2010) notes, Indigenous families

> have a special role in this journey—to foster a strong collective identity and provide wisdom for their children and youth as they engage in lifelong learning. Through our families, peers, and communities, we come to learn about ourselves through our ecologies, land, and environments. Our Elders and families share their knowledge of place in their daily personal and communal adventures on the land, in traditional tales, timed with the seasons, and in the context of everyday life. (p. 14)

Family leadership at Akhiok Kids Camp highlights the special role families can play in resurgent education.

Behind the scenes of the Akhiok Kids Camp is a legacy of loving labor to renew Indigenous relationships to lands and lifeways. Many activities at camp are the result of Sugpiaq community efforts to rematriate Indigenous knowledges (Tuck, 2011), an effort led and supported by several of the coauthors over decades to expand and strengthen the opportunities available to youth at camp (e.g., Blaine et al., 2022; Haakanson, 2002; Haakanson & Steffian, 2009; Koniag, 2008). The work of family and community members who have participated in the camp, such as Speridon, Cheri, Teacon, Jennifer, and Walter Simeonoff; Jim and Bonnie Dillard; Sven and Balika Haakanson; Alfred Naumoff; and Hanna Scholl, has been vital to these efforts, highlighting the important roles that family and community members play in restoring and renewing Indigenous knowledges. Family, friends, and community members have fostered relationships and respectful collaborations that support and sustain camp. Inviting the youth and community to visit and spend time with the petroglyphs has required the permission from the land caretaker, Akhiok-Kaguyak, Inc. (AKI). The support received from AKI, the Native Village of Akhiok, and Koniag, Inc. is greatly appreciated, as it has helped restore camp participants' generational relationship with the petroglyphs within Sugpiaq communities.

We hope that the story of one family's efforts to design and sustain a camp to foster Sugpiaq youth's connectedness to their homelands, communities, and cultures inspires educators to learn from and support the Indigenous families in their regions who are likely already engaged in resurgent education.

Conclusion

The ongoing legacies of colonialism and intergenerational trauma with which many of our Native communities are dealing are centuries old. As such, the work to heal and restore connections to lands, communities, and cultures will take time. The story of Akhiok Kids Camp is an example of rural Indigenous education that fosters healing and cultural resurgence. Like other Indigenous communities, we "recognize the importance of our communities' resilience to understand and address our own problems—that the power needed to heal our soul wounds already exists within our people and traditions" (Jacob, 2013, p. 12). Though we described

one Indigenous-led effort that foregrounds community-based healing and cultural revitalization, we view the camp as "part of a larger social movement to reclaim our bodies, cultural practices, foods, and educational institutions. It is a movement that works toward a healthier future for our people, relatives, and our homeland" (Jacob, 2013, p. 122). Moreover, Akhiok Kids Camp highlights the generative possibilities for rural Indigenous education when local families and communities determine and shape their children's education (Faircloth, 2009).

For rural educators and scholars to play a part in countering colonialism and promoting healing and cultural resurgence, they must look to and learn from local programs like Akhiok Kids Camp, as well as scholarship on Indigenous studies and Indigenous education, which challenges Indigenous erasure within the discipline and practice of rural and place-based education (Greenwood, 2009, RedCorn et al., 2021; Stanton et al., 2022). Too often, educators and scholars view themselves as "perfect strangers" to Indigenous people and realities (Dion, 2008), which allows them to ignore Indigenous experiences, issues, and insights. This erasure is compounded for students in "rural Native America" who are often "'twice invisible' due to a lack of familiarity with both rural areas and Native American communities" (Dewees & Marks, 2017, p. 8). Educators must also challenge deficit views of rural and Indigenous communities (R. Adams & Farnsworth, 2020; Biddle & Azano, 2016; Hammack et al., 2023; Lipka, 1986; RedCorn et al., 2021; Tuck, 2009) and the mistaken presumption that rural educational spaces are "racialized as white" (Baker et al., 2023, p. 64), leading educators to believe diversity is irrelevant to their work as teachers (Anthony-Stevens et al., 2017; Anthony-Stevens & Langford 2020; Pini & Bhopal, 2017). Fortunately, Indigenous studies scholars have generously shared and published theories and frameworks to foster promising practices in rural Indigenous education.

As one example, in *Yakama Rising: Indigenous Cultural Revitalization, Activism, and Healing*, Jacob (2013) offers three case studies of cultural revitalization in a rural Indigenous reservation community, which provide generative examples of educators and activists engaged in Yakama decolonizing praxis and "'making power' to reclaim indigenous traditions, bodies, languages, and homelands" (p. 107). Likewise, numerous published books by Indigenous scholars foreground Indigenous pedagogies of place and community and are relevant to rural education (Cajete, 1994, 2015; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Garcia et al., 2022; Kawagley, 1995). Moreover, several special issues have highlighted the ways Indigenous studies scholarship productively challenges and extends conventional theories of place-based and environmental education (Lees & Bang, 2023; Tuck et al., 2014; Wildcat et al., 2014). Fostering more respectful and responsive education in rural Indigenous communities will require that rural educators and scholars regard Indigenous educational theories and practices as central, rather than peripheral, to their work. This scholarship reflects the many ways Indigenous communities are countering legacies of colonialism within rural areas and promoting healing and the restoration of their collective capacities (Elliott & Bang, 2023). As we have shared, it will also involve looking to local Indigenous families, leaders, and educators who have a wealth of knowledge and expertise about their own communities' experiences, priorities, and aspirations.

Akhiok Kids Camp, as envisioned and initiated by Judy and Mitch and now carried on by their children and grandchildren, highlights the healing power of community-based education in a rural Indigenous community. As Cajete (2015) writes, "By creating an empowering, healing process of learning and educating through community—*a pedagogy of Indigenous community*—our communities gain new energy for the revitalization work ahead" (p. 65). By embodying and modeling how to heal from historical and lived trauma, the camp has led to a clear vision and commitment to creating a safer community for Sugpiaq youth, rooted in the choice of a healthy lifestyle, freedom, and joy. Moreover, the camp they created and sustained for decades has provided Sugpiaq youth with a sense of kinship and connectedness to their lands, family and community, culture, and ancestors, strengthening their spirit and well-being. Speridon and Cheri, Teacon, and Sven, and now their children, carry on this work, and have nurtured and sustained a healing and restorative educational space for youth in their homelands. Their efforts highlight the meaningful role that Indigenous families and educators can play in rebuilding vibrant Indigenous communities.

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Suggested Citation:

Simeonoff, S., Sr., Simeonoff, J., Simeonoff, T., Simeonoff, S., Jr., Haakanson, S., Jr., Simeonoff, C., Haakanson, B., & Sabzalian, L. (2024). Healing and connectedness at Akhiok Kids Camp. *The Rural Educator*, *45*(1), 44–62.

[2] The author order for this article respects the longstanding contributions of Elders and community members who founded Akhiok Kids Camp and have organized and sustained the camp for decades. Leilani Sabzalian is the corresponding author for this article.