

# Community-University Engagement: Case Study of a Partnership on Coast Salish Territory in British Columbia

Margaret (Mali) Bain

**ABSTRACT** In the context of expanding community engagement efforts by universities and growing awareness of the past and current impacts of settler-colonialism in Canada, this study explores one Indigenous-settler, community-university partnership. Building on a framework of community-university engagement and decolonization, this case study explores a partnership between Fraser Valley Aboriginal Children and Family Services Society (Xyolhemeylh) and the Division of Health Care Communication at the University of British Columbia (UBC-DHCC). This partnership, called the “Community as Teacher” program, began in 2006 and engages groups of UBC health professional students in three-day cultural summer camps.

This qualitative case study draws on analysis of program documents and interviews with Xyolhemeylh and UBC-DHCC participants. The findings of the study are framed within “Four Rs”—relevance, risk-taking, respect, and relationship-building—which extend existing frameworks of Indigenous community-university engagement (Butin, 2010; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). Committed to a foundation of mutual relevance to their missions, both community and university partners undertook risk-taking, based on their respective contexts, in establishing and investing in the relationship. Respect, expressed as working “in a good way,” likewise formed the basis for interpersonal relationship-building. By outlining the findings in relation to these four themes, this study provides a potential framework for practitioners and researchers in Indigenous-university partnerships.

**KEYWORDS** community engagement, decolonization, community-university engagement, Community as Teacher, relationship-building

This paper brings a decolonizing lens to research about a community-university partnership between a Stó:lō community services agency—the Fraser Valley Aboriginal Child and Family Services Society, called Xyolhemeylh (“hyoth-meeth” or “yoth-meeth”)—and a unit at the University of British Columbia—the Division of Health Care Communication (UBC-DHCC).<sup>1</sup> Established in 2005, the “Community as Teacher” program creates an opportunity for UBC health professional students to learn about and engage with Indigenous culture by immersing them in community-led youth cultural camps for three to four days and nights. Existing qualitative research indicates that the program has an impact on students’ later practice as

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper is a revised portion of my M.A. thesis.

physicians because they learn about cultural differences, build self-awareness of values and stereotypes, and consider ways to improve communication (Kline, Godolphin, Chhina, & Towle, 2013). This paper adds to the study of the program by providing insight into the ways in which the UBC unit and the Stó:lō community agency interacted during their eight-year partnership, thus contributing to an understanding of how to build successful, respectful, and mutually beneficial Indigenous-university relationships. The research questions were as follows:

1. How did the relationship between Xyolhemeylh and UBC-DHCC come into being and how has it changed over time?
2. How do the partners describe this relationship, its purpose and objectives?
3. How do partners consider and engage with notions of Indigenous-settler relationships?
4. What are the implications of this program for undertaking respectful community engagement between universities and Indigenous communities?

### **Decolonizing Approach**

This paper takes a decolonizing approach to a case study of community-university engagement. Conversations around decolonizing research owe much to Linda Tuhiwei Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999), which challenges researchers "to demystify, to decolonize" (p. 16). Smith, a Maori scholar, takes a clear look at the ways in which imperial thought and colonial realities are implicated in research methodologies, and how the very acts of writing history and building theory tend to silence Indigenous voices. Decolonization, according to Smith (1999), is a process that takes "a more critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations and values which inform research practices" (p. 20).

Building upon the work of Smith among others, Paulette Regan (2010), a white settler Canadian, describes her personal path toward decolonization. She advocates for the importance of "truth-telling" by debunking the myth that Canada's history of relations with Indigenous peoples has been peaceful or benevolent. In her view, settler-allies have the important role of educating themselves about settler-colonialism and the histories of settlers and Indigenous peoples in Canada: "As allies, we learn to listen with humility and vulnerability to the history of dispossession, racism, and oppression that is still alive. We critically reflect on those stories as a catalyst for action" (p. 230). Following Regan, I kept an open ear throughout this study in order to hear the ways in which settler-colonial practices and assumptions shape contemporary relationships.

Barnhardt and Kawagley (2005) stress the importance of taking time to "understand Native worldviews and ways of knowing as constituting knowledge systems in their own right" (p. 9). Awareness of and connection with Indigenous Knowledges is important not just because all communities live as, or in relation to, Indigenous communities (Findlay, 2000, p. 308), but because Indigenous Knowledges provide a lens through which to understand the world. As Battiste (2002) puts it, "Indigenous Knowledge benchmarks the limitations of Eurocentric theory—its methodology, evidence, and conclusions" (as cited in Barnhardt & Kawagley,

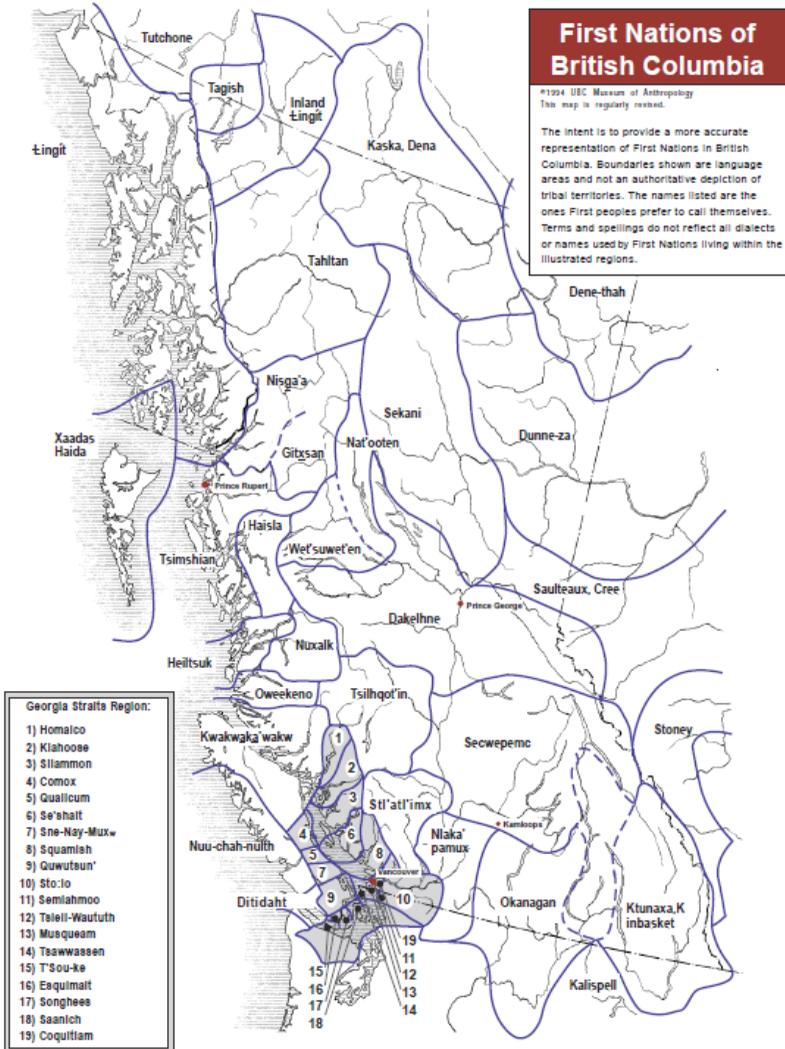
2005, p. 16). Given my own complete “marination” in colonial ways of thinking (Battiste, 2012), I acknowledge that I can begin to learn from Indigenous Knowledges but cannot claim to centre my research within that realm. I seek to work in solidarity with Indigenous practices and to contribute to decolonization efforts. As a non-Indigenous researcher, I remind myself that a significant part of decolonizing research involves the examination of my own settler-colonial assumptions.

A decolonizing framework can contribute significantly to both the study of interactions between Indigenous and settler-colonial peoples, and to community engagement work on Indigenous lands.<sup>2</sup> A decolonizing approach acknowledges place and history (Reagan, 2010), recognizing colonialism “as an ongoing process...in Canada and other ‘former’ colonies across the globe” (Haig-Brown & Nock, 2006, p. 6). The partners in my case study are located on Stó:lō territory in the Fraser Valley and at UBC’s Vancouver campus, which is on the traditional, unceded, and ancestral territory of the Musqueam people (“About UBC’s Vancouver Campus,” 2013). Historian Cole Harris (2004) refers to British Columbia, depicted in Figure 1, as the “edge of empire” (p. 167), the furthest extent of imperial reach. Coast Salish land, like so many other non-European lands, has been dominated by settlers only in the last few centuries, a settlement that has been “justified” by the colonial construction of Indigenous lands as *terra nullius*, “empty land” (Haig-Brown & Nock, 2006). In Canada, federal and provincial governments dispossessed Indigenous peoples of their land, without or in spite of treaties, and subjected autonomous peoples to racist policies such as those enshrined in the Indian Act (Lawrence 2004).

Colonization has had and continues to have significant impacts on settlers and Indigenous peoples on Coast Salish territory, in particular in relation to education. Indigenous children were often coerced into attending residential schooling away from their homes and communities. Residential schools were framed by some as part of the duty of white people to “raise [Indigenous peoples] to the level of civilization” (Furniss & Cariboo Tribal Council, 1995, p. 107). However, residential schools did not provide an adequate basic education, and they were designed based on the paternalistic, racist assumption that Indigenous peoples were inferior. Given this history of Indigenous-settler relations in British Columbia, it is important to carefully examine the ways that university units engage with Indigenous communities.

In keeping with the work of Haig-Brown (2006) and Reagan (2010), which suggests that scholars looking to do decolonial work must reflect on their personal historical and present-day connections to Indigenous peoples, a significant part of this research has involved developing a personal understanding of myself as a settler living on Indigenous land. This process has literally been “unsettling”—it has challenged the ways that I see myself, my family, and my place as a resident on the traditional, unceded, and ancestral lands of the Musqueam (x<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əyəm), Tsleil-Waututh, and Squamish (Skwxwú7mesh) peoples.

<sup>2</sup> I use the term Indigenous, as used by the global movement for Indigenous rights, and the term “settler,” in keeping with Reagan’s (2010) call for Canadians of non-Indigenous descent to acknowledge the destructiveness of settler-colonialism.



**Figure 1. First Nations of British Columbia. Reproduced courtesy of the Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia.**

Like Freeman (2000), when I began the work of personal and family research, I had an unspoken sense that my “ancestors were essentially decent and well-intentioned people... [and] had simply inherited the aftermath of an already accomplished dispossession” (p. xvi). As part of my research I began to ask questions of my family members about family connections with Indigenous peoples and land; I read or re-read books related to my family history (Bain, 2006; Palmer, 1998), Coast Salish history (Stó:lō Heritage Trust, 2001), and B.C. History (Barman, 1996, 2005; Furniss & Cariboo Tribal Council, 1995).

On my mother's side, the Jelly family, my great-great-grandparents Harry and Mary-Anne Foote<sup>3</sup> moved to Vancouver and purchased several islands off of the Sunshine Coast<sup>4</sup> soon after the land was first given as a Crown Land Grant in 1885. The land was "owned" by a government which did not have the legal right to sell that land—Indigenous land that had never been ceded to the British crown or the Canadian government. Indigenous peoples' residency on, stewardship of, and relationship with the land was invalidated by their status as less than fully human, as prescribed by the Indian Act (Lawrence, 2004); at the time my ancestors purchased the lands, Indigenous peoples were unable to purchase or occupy those lands.

On the other side of my family, my great-great-grandfather Jacob Bain moved to British Columbia in the 1920s. He settled first in Vancouver, and then moved to purchase a home on unceded Stó:lō territory in Fort Langley. In the course of my research, my grandmother shared with me a letter from Jacob Bain containing this passage: "The lumber mills are dispensing with their Oriental labour and taking on white men, they say that white men are more satisfactory although their wages higher and it is a good thing for the labouring man" (Letter from Jacob Bain to Will Bain, 1920s). The "labouring man," from Jacob's perspective, was a white man, not an "Oriental" man, revealing the deep racism of the time and the ways that it shaped the lived economic realities of my family at the expense of other families. While the institutionalized racism of the past can seem distant, reading this letter helped me recognize my personal connection to my family's privilege as settlers.

Colonialism is not a "legacy" of the past—it is an undeniable present-day reality for all those who reside in what is called Canada. I have benefitted and continue to benefit from settler-colonial occupation of Coast Salish territory. It is my hope that by connecting my research to my own and my family's identity, I might be able to move beyond an essentially colonial exploration of the "Other" to a meaningful, self-reflexive study of settler-Indigenous relationships here on Coast Salish lands. Decolonizing approaches implicitly recognize the violent and racist systems of colonial power and eschew the idea of an "Indigenous problem," focusing instead on seeing a broader set of problems, which includes a "settler problem" (Regan, 2010), or "the problem of settler-colonialism."

### **Community-University Engagement and Community Service-Learning**

Although universities' commitment to serving communities is not a new topic or concern, in the past twenty years, universities have increasingly sought to engage with community. Ernest Boyer (1996) popularized the term "engagement," defined as "connecting the rich resources of the university to our most pressing social, civic, and ethical problems" (p. 32–33). Weerts and Sandmann (2008) review ten years of engagement literature emerging after Boyer's call for universities to renew their civic mission. They suggest that enablers of community-university engagement include strong interpersonal relationships, flexible and shared governance

---

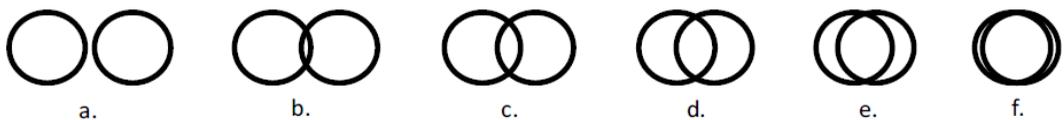
<sup>3</sup> Harry Foote was born in London, England; Marry-Anne Brook was born in Straford and grew up in Portage La Prairie.

<sup>4</sup> Jedediah, Bull, Rabbit, Round and Sheer Islands.

structures, institutional commitment to engagement, and institutional culture and mission. Weerts and Sandmann's later work (2010) introduces the concept of "boundary-spanners." They suggest that, among other things, boundary-spanning individuals play key roles in building interpersonal relationships between university and community and translating knowledge and ideas.

One aspect of community engagement is service-learning or community service-learning (CSL), a credit-bearing activity which combines organized community volunteering and course-based reflection (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995). Recent research into community partner perspectives has shown that community partners benefit through fostering positive relationships with post-secondary institutions, increasing capacity to fulfill their missions, and expanding existing services or programs (Blouin & Perry, 2009). There can be costs of service-learning for partners, however, including wasted time, inadequate student commitment, and requirement of supervision and project management (Stoecker, Tryon, & Hilgendorf, 2009; Hitchings, Johnson and Tu'Inukuafe, this issue; Kline et al., this issue). Some suggest that service-learning is a service provided by communities to the university, not solely the reverse (Mitchell & Hennig, 2012; Stoecker et al., 2009). Other studies show that service-learning can reinforce existing cultural and social biases or stereotypes (Dunn-Kenney, 2010), and critiques of non-reflexive forms of community engagement have led some to disassociate themselves from CSL.

Clayton et al. (2010) developed a scale of community-university relationships, ranging from "transactional" relationships, where each partner benefits, to "transformational" relationships, where each partner grows. From that scale, they developed a series of Venn diagrams (see Figure 2 below), which provide a "short, nonverbal, and user-friendly" representation of closeness (Clayton et al., 2010, p. 15). This series was used during interviews, as described later in this article.



**Figure 2.** Venn depiction of closeness (Machek, Cannady, & Tangey, 2007, as cited in Clayton et al., 2010).

### Decolonizing Community Engagement

There is very little research that explores community engagement or community service-learning with Indigenous communities. John Guffey (2008) brings together four service-learning pillars—commitment, learning, reflective thinking, and reciprocity—with the Lakota Way as described by Joseph Marshall.<sup>5</sup> McNally (2004) lays out several points of connection between Ojibwe pedagogy and service-learning: an emphasis on orality, experience, reflection,

<sup>5</sup> Connected to the CSL pillar of "commitment" are Lakota concepts of love and sacrifice; to "learning," perseverance, honour, and bravery; to "reflective thinking," truth and wisdom; and to "reciprocity," humility, respect, compassion, and generosity (Guffey, 2008).

and responsibility. Steinman (2011) explores the ways in which Indigenous-university collaborations can allow for relationships and ways of knowing that are deeply counter-hegemonic and decolonizing.

In this paper, I discuss the partnership between Xyolhemeylh and UBC-DHC in terms of what I call the “Four Rs” of relevance, risk-taking, respect, and relationship-building, which I propose are central principles for Indigenous community-university engagement. This concept builds on existing literature in the fields of decolonization and community-university engagement. Educational theorists Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991), for example, suggest that Indigenous students ask to be treated with “The Four Rs”—relevance, reciprocity, respect, and responsibility. Service-learning scholar Dan Butin (2010) similarly suggests a set of “Four Rs” for service-learning: relevance, reciprocity, respect, and reflection.

My research builds on the above work in several ways, expanding the principle of “respect” to include the idea of “working in a good way,” which stresses the importance of recognizing the voices of community members and respecting protocol, including reciprocity, as will be explored later in this paper. I also expand on the principle of “relevance,” which in existing frameworks is often used to describe how a program or partnership is relevant with respect to community needs. In this study, I unpack how the partnership between Xyolhemeylh and UBC-DHCC was relevant to both partners’ motivations and goals. I add the principle of “risk-taking,” which in its ideal form, happens in an environment of relevance to both partners. In the context of this study, risk-taking refers to how individuals within both Xyolhemeylh and UBC-DHCC took the time and overcame perceived risks in order to prioritize and build their partnership. And finally, I discuss what I call the “hidden R”—relationship-building, which underlies many existing frameworks of community-university engagement, and takes on added significance in the context of Indigenous community-university partnerships.

### **Case Study: Partnership between Xyolhemeylh and UBC-DHCC**

Xyolhemeylh is a child protection agency set up by the provincial government with the mandate of providing “culturally appropriate and holistic services through prevention, community development and child welfare programs” (FVACFSS, 2012). Stó:lō elders gave the agency the name Xyolhemeylh, a Halq’eméylem name which describes a relationship based on caring, respect, and love (C-C;<sup>6</sup> FVACFSS brochure). Xyolhemeylh’s summer cultural camp program was started in 1996 by a Stó:lō elder who saw the need for youth to experience and learn Stó:lō culture, history, and ways of being. Cultural camps are one of many cultural programs offered through the agency, intended to “[p]rovide the opportunity to experience many of the healthy and contemporary and traditional lifestyles of Aboriginal Peoples including all aspects of the medicine wheel (spiritual, mental, physical, and emotional)” (FVACFSS camps brochure). Overnight camps, usually three to four days and nights, include a “warrior camp” for young men 12-18 years old, a “natural changes” camp for young women 10-16 years old, a “family spirit camp” for families, and a youth camp offered in its most recent version as

<sup>6</sup> Please note that, throughout this paper, remarks and thoughts of community participants have been assigned an in-text citational code that begins with “C-“ whereas university participants have been assigned the prefix “U-”.

three day trips throughout the summer. The camps are offered free of charge to Aboriginal people and FVACFSS participants (FVACFSS camps brochure) as part of what has been called “prevention services.” The camps, building on Stó:lō traditional practice, include activities such as drum-making, playing traditional games, evening storytelling, shared meals, and early-morning spiritual baths. Xyolhemeylh staff coordinate the cultural camp program in collaboration with Stó:lō community groups.

This paper seeks to understand the intricacies of community-university partnerships within the context of UBC-DHCC’s partnership with Xyolhemeylh. The Community as Teacher program was developed by building on to and extending the audience of the above-described camps; UBC students engaged as participants and learners, along with Indigenous youth, within the Xyolhemeylh-run camps. The program was hosted by the Division of Health Care Communication (DHCC), a unit of the College of Health Disciplines at the University of British Columbia (UBC). UBC-DHCC aims to “train health professionals in effective and efficient ways of helping patients take an informed and shared role in making decisions about their healthcare” (Division of Health Care Communication, 2013).

From a Xyolhemeylh perspective, the Community as Teacher program is the culmination of decades or generations of work by carriers of Indigenous culture and tradition. The desire to partner with non-Indigenous organizations was inspired in part by the work of Dr. Cindy Blackstock,<sup>7</sup> and was seen as part of an overall understanding of the role of Xyolhemeylh as an educator and leader within society. After an initial email was sent by UBC-DHCC staff expressing interest in a partnership of some kind, Xyolhemeylh staff proposed the idea of including UBC students as participants in cultural camps.

From a UBC-DHCC perspective, the Community as Teacher program grew out of a research project funded through the Faculty of Medicine “Special Populations Fund.” Beginning in 2001, initial research involved interviews with doctors, Aboriginal patients,<sup>8</sup> and members of the Aboriginal community. After this initial study, UBC-DHCC researchers went back to Indigenous participants to ask about possible educational interventions and were told that students should “spend time in community” to “get to know them as an individual and as a member of their community” (McConnell Award Attachment, p. 2). In response to a call for assistance with that goal, a partnership emerged between Xyolhemeylh and UBC-DHCC.

While the idea to place UBC students in summer youth camps came from Xyolhemeylh, very quickly UBC-DHCC came to see the ways in which this program was a good fit, allowing students to learn in a pre-existing cultural education program. The Community as Teacher program takes place outside the formal curriculum of health professional students,<sup>9</sup> as part of an inter-professional learning opportunity. Each year UBC students participate in one of four already existing cultural camps. Since 2006, 136 students from 12 health professions have

---

<sup>7</sup> Blackstock is a member of the Gitksan Nation and the Executive Director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada.

<sup>8</sup> While this study uses the term Indigenous, prior research on this program used the term Aboriginal.

<sup>9</sup> Health professional students include students within medicine, nursing, occupational therapy, social work, pharmacy, pre-medicine, midwifery, dietetics, dentistry, land and food systems, and psychology

participated in the program. The costs of the camps, including food, supplies, honoraria, and coordination are covered by Xyolhemeylh. On the UBC-DHCC side, the cost of coordination, student project assistants, staff and student transportation for meetings, and other research costs<sup>10</sup> such as transcription have been funded through the UBC Faculty of Medicine Special Populations Fund.

## The Study

### *Methods*

This study drew upon the perspectives of Xyolhemeylh and UBC-DHCC staff through analysis of 13 documents, interviews with seven participants from both Xyolhemeylh and UBC-DHCC, and field notes from ongoing conversations. Initial interviews included a total of five participants, including a total of four staff from Xyolhemeylh and three UBC-DHCC staff and faculty. Graphic elicitation, in this case the use of a visual to spark dialogue or response, was employed within the interviews; this approach helps expand participants' interpretation of questions and allows participants to "investigate layers of experience that cannot easily be put into words" (Gauntlett, 2007, as cited in Bagnoli, 2009, p. 548). Interviewees were invited to respond to Venn diagrams (illustrated earlier and developed by Clayton et al., 2010) as a way to describe partnership closeness. In addition to interviews, thirteen documents provided by Xyolhemeylh and UBC-DHCC participants were analyzed. These documents included organizational background information, reports, and a collaboratively written award proposal. Field notes and transcript-like notes from interviews and interactions with UBC-DHCC and Xyolhemeylh participants were also generated. While this study began by proposing a simple "interview" process, the process of data generation, interaction, and member-checking led to a dialogic, relational, and active process.<sup>11</sup>

The interviews, follow-up interviews, and member-checks took place from approximately November 2012 to December 2013. Themes from the data emerged in an iterative process throughout the data collection, analysis, and writing. During the first cycle of coding, open codes consisting primarily of action codes and descriptive codes (Saldaña, 2013) were assigned to approximately every 10 words of interview, document, and field note text (Charmaz, 2006). In the beginning of the analysis stage, Xyolhemeylh and UBC-DHCC data were analyzed separately. Additional cycles of coding (Charmaz, 2006) compared codes and confirmed emerging clusters and themes. Using the visual mapping software provided by Atlas.ti 9, I took this smaller group of codes and created a visual map of the connections that I saw between codes. As data analysis and early writing continued, it became apparent that the data should not be treated as separate narratives, but rather as branches that became part of the same stream. I thus merged the data and coding sets from Xyolhemeylh and UBC-DHCC, and worked to tell a complete story including both community and university voices.

The ethical accountability for this study comes from two vastly different epistemological contexts—one institutional, based in settler-colonial society, and one Stó:lō or Indigenous. The study passed the

<sup>10</sup> Note that existing research conducted by UBC-DHCC focuses on what students have learned and the impact of the Community as Teacher program, as reported in Kline et al. (2013).

<sup>11</sup> In some ways, this dialogic process could be seen in keeping with a community-based participatory research approach. In this study, although a participatory process was not an integral part of designing the research, study participants were involved, through multiple conversations and member-checking, throughout the process of data generation, analysis, and writing.

UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB) process and was also registered with the Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Centre (SSRMC). The Stó:lō ethical review process aligned with principles known as OCAP (Ownership, Control, Access and Possession), which were developed in response to a history of colonial and exploitative research. These principles were developed for “all research, data, or information initiatives that involve First Nations” (First Nations Centre, 2007, p. 2).

### ***Findings***

Four central themes emerged from this study of the partnership between Xyolhemeylh and UBC-DHCC: relevance, risk-taking, respect, and relationship-building—the “Four Rs” mentioned earlier. These constructs developed from the analysis of the data for this study; however, the naming of these themes was inspired, at least in part, by the work of scholars in both decolonization and service-learning, as discussed earlier. Below I discuss each theme, as well as their interconnection, including relevance as a foundation for risk-taking and respect as key to relationship-building.

*Relevance: “Why” partner?* As one Xyolhemeylh participant described it, the partnership was informed by independent “thoughts on each side” (C-B). Xyolhemeylh participants came into the partnership as long-standing educators with an openness to partnership based on prior research, and a goal of finding role models for Indigenous youth. UBC-DHCC participants came with a focus on informed shared decision-making, research into doctor-patient relationships, and a funding opportunity.

Despite these distinct motivations, participants from both groups described a sense that, right from the early meetings, they were able to share a common vision of student learning: “The objective of it in many instances is just . . . how do we engage young students, who are probably non-Aboriginal, right, to come in to an Aboriginal context, which is completely foreign to them, and open themselves up to learning” (C-B). Both partners saw a focus on student teaching and training as a part of the core mandate of their respective organizations. As one Xyolhemeylh participant observed: “It’s good for our agency to be involved with students, and we are involved with students year-round . . . it allows us to remember that we’re also in a teaching role as an agency” (C-A). UBC-DHCC participants had a desire to focus on training health professionals, in particular on teaching “informed shared decision-making” in doctor-patient relationships, and Xyolhemeylh participants spoke to the need for UBC students, health professionals-in-training, to break down their stereotypes of Indigenous peoples: “Even if two of them changed their minds by coming to camp we’ve changed the Aboriginal experience for ever . . . [it] breaks down stereotypes” (C-D).

Each partner saw the program as significantly relevant in that it connected to their past work, was a part of core organizational mission, had ties to prior UBC and Xyolhemeylh research, and fit well with future ambitions. Xyolhemeylh and UBC-DHCC found ways to create and maintain dialogue about shared vision in new and sometimes unexpected ways—in this case, through a shared focus on UBC student learning. In summary, the partnership came into being and persisted because it was relevant to the mission and vision of both Xyolhemeylh

and UBC-DHCC, and because the Community as Teacher program in itself continued to generate relevance to a shared vision of student learning. Relevance is the foundation for the risk-taking required to undertake such an endeavour.

*Risk-taking: Bridging the Indigenous-settler divide.* Given historical realities, relationship-building between Xyolhemeylh and UBC-DHCC involved risk-taking, but while there was certainly risk for both parties, it is important to note that the risk was not equally shared. For Xyolhemeylh in particular, a significant part of the risk of building a relationship was in addressing the pervasive influence of the past and continuing colonial reality.

Xyolhemeylh participants spoke about the colonial past and how, as a result, staff were hesitant about taking a “risk” in building a new partnership with a non-Indigenous organization. As one Xyolhemeylh participant put it, “there has been a history with our Aboriginal First Nations people with large institutions, mainstream institutions” (C-A). This negative legacy explains the initial wariness felt by Xyolhemeylh, as one participant commented: “I do remember



Photo by: UBC Patient & Community Partnership for Education

now... [the camp founder] was really unsure about the partnership at the beginning, really unsure” (C-D). Another participant drew a butterfly to represent the overall partnership, adding the note, “[h]ow is it going to fly?” This hesitancy sprung at least in part from wondering, “[i]s this engagement going to be balanced?” (C-B). Another spoke to the ways that the research process has been frustrating for Indigenous people, who have experience with researchers who “come in and take their information” (C-C). As this participant explained, “[a] lot of that is historic... concern about what’s going to happen in this relationship . . . are you going to be like Columbus and come in and take over everything?” (C-C). Xyolhemeylh participants, most of whom were Indigenous, spoke about the potential for damage from the settler population. As one person suggested, “[y]ou always have to be a little bit guarded, because it’s not everybody

has good intentions” (C-B). The participants shared stories of extreme ignorance, insensitivity, and racism from members of settler society—newly trained social workers, non-Indigenous partner organizations, health professionals, and students. Xyolhemeylh staff thus took a significant risk in establishing a partnership with UBC-DHCC, given the possible stereotyping and imbalance that has typified Indigenous-settler relationships.

UBC-DHCC participants expressed the difficulty of making connections with Indigenous communities and the lack of success in creating partnerships. From a UBC-DHCC perspective, there was a sense that “we were very different people around the table” (U-C) in those early meetings. The original meetings were described as “patchy” (U-C), that it “seemed to take more effort” (U-C). As one interviewee explained, “I wouldn’t say they were difficult conversations, they were really quite interesting, but there was a lot of back and forth because... first of all I guess it took a while for them to even—install a bit of trust in us” (U-B).

UBC-DHCC participants recognized that it took time to build trust between themselves and Xyolhemeylh, but they did not connect that lack of trust to the Indigenous-settler relationship within a settler-colonial context. While UBC-DHCC participants did not identify as settlers or as being a part of past and ongoing settler-colonialism, they were aware of stereotypes held by settler health professional students and medical professionals through earlier research into communication between doctors and health professionals (Towle et al., 2006). One participant, reflecting on a previous experience with a trained health professional, located the origins of those stereotypes in education:

I was astounded that someone close to my age, working in health professions, would have such a limited lens in looking to the impact of the residential schools. . . . [That person is] a very good person, but I think it’s a consequence of the way [he/she] was educated. (U-A)

UBC-DHCC staff identified the impact of colonialism on the relationship between health providers and patients, but did not identify the ways in which their own perspectives might be part of a “settler problem.” I would argue that taking the additional risk of naming and acknowledging the complicity of universities in colonialism is an important part of decolonizing work within community-university engagement.

Risk-taking for UBC-DHCC was also mitigated by funding structure and job security. Both Xyolhemeylh and UBC-DHCC identified that the ways in which UBC-DHCC engaged in partnership were not the norm in academia. The initial funding provided to the UBC-DHCC partnership was program- rather than project-based; this type of funding, along with the security of tenure, allowed UBC-DHCC faculty and staff to take risks in establishing a partnership with Xyolhemeylh. Given the challenges involved in partnership-building, including the significant time required to build trust, a partnership like this would likely not be taken on by faculty seeking tenure and/or promotion due to the lapse between relationship-building and peer-reviewed publications. This is in keeping with Weerts and Sandmann’s (2008) review of research-intensive universities, which found that the devaluing of engaged scholarship

and fiscal or structural constraints on faculty members are barriers to faculty involvement in community-university engagement.

*Respect: Working in a good way.* It is clear that for almost all the participants in this study, the key to working “in a good way” involved building upon and listening to the leadership of Stó:lō community members. Xyolhemeylh participants saw their organization as facilitating the involvement and leadership of members of the Stó:lō community. The intention for the Community as Teacher program was to have community members actively involved in determining educational content, location, and community connections. One UBC-DHCC participant spoke to this when describing the extent of Xyolhemeylh’s responsibility for both the content and method of instruction: “The community should develop the objectives, and decision about... not only what they thought the students should learn about them, and their culture, but the way in which they wanted to teach it” (U-B).

Respectful relations also involve humility. Xyolhemeylh participants commented on the “down to earth” (C-A) approach of UBC-DHCC. They described having had to engage in “teaching moments” (C-D) with other non-Indigenous partner organizations, but noted that in the case of UBC-DHCC, they “didn’t seem to go through that” (C-D): “I would think not coming in as... this large institution... I never got that sense from [U-B] and [U-C], I just think you have to have that real down to earth kind of approach” (C-A). They also noted how UBC-DHCC staff and faculty were “humble” (C-B), both in their physical presentation, in terms of having open body language, and in the sense that they were open to new ideas: “They didn’t come with any preconceived ideas—I mean I think they did, everybody has a preconceived idea, but they weren’t driven to having it their way. They were open to whatever we think is going to work” (C-B). This approach of humility and openness to cultural protocols falls in line with Xyolhemeylh organizational values: “We do our work in a good way and practice humbly” (FVACFSS brochure).

Just as Xyolhemeylh facilitates the involvement of Stó:lō community members in cultural camps, UBC-DHCC staff and faculty can be seen to facilitate Xyolhemeylh’s involvement in health professional education. This is a parallel pointed out by a Xyolhemeylh participant:

We go to [the community] and say this is the camp we’re trying to do, what do you want—the same way [a UBC-DHCC representative] does to us, we do that in our communities, and then we listen to what they say. So we don’t go in with a camp, we go to them to partner for the camp. (C-D)

Listening to community voices, both in the sense of UBC-DHCC listening to Xyolhemeylh and Xyolhemeylh listening to the Stó:lō community, is a key element of respect or “working in a good way.” Participants demonstrated respect by listening to community voice and leadership throughout the entire process, following cultural protocol, and considering reciprocity as a practical demonstration of respect.

Gift-giving was an important part of reciprocity, particularly in relation to ceremony. On one



*Photo by:* UBC Patient & Community Partnership for Education

occasion, two UBC-DHCC participants participated in a ceremony marking the end of one of the camps. As a Xyolhemeylh participant put it, “[f]or the one year when [two UBC-DHCC participants] came out at the last day of camp, family camp, and there was gift-sharing... that was meaningful because it was recognition of [five] years” (C-C). One UBC-DHCC participant in particular became aware of this “need to reciprocate” (U-A) and brought a set of blankets to a graduation ceremony, hoping they would be used in some way. While the blankets were not used for the ceremony, they were appreciated and remembered by Xyolhemeylh staff and community members. This is an example of how a UBC-DHCC participant listened carefully, built upon the information they had available, and looked for significant ways to reciprocate.

It is important to note that reciprocity was not by any means an exchange or payment for services. Giving a gift was, instead, one way of honouring all that had been given and demonstrating that “what I received was important” (C-C). By giving gifts at the end of the camps, for example, Xyolhemeylh staff showed their appreciation and respect for the contributions of visitors. Reciprocity here manifests as gift-giving, as a part of respectful approach.

Respect is core to the “Four Rs” described by Butin (2010), as well as Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991), and is a key element of community-university engagement. As Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) observe of the experience of Indigenous university students: “The university represents an impersonal, intimidating and often hostile environment, in which little of what they [i.e., Indigenous students] bring in the way of cultural knowledge, traditions and core values is recognized, much less respected” (p. 5). This description could apply equally well to Indigenous organizations’ experience of the university. Given the multiple and overlapping ways in which Indigenous people and organizations are disrespected in society,

through stereotypes, racism, and systemic oppression, respectful relationship-building must be at the core of community-university engaged work. A foundation of respect, or working in a good way, is the basis from which Xyolhemeylh and UBC-DHCC approached the work of relationship-building.

*Relationship-building: A hidden “R”.* In the Community as Teacher program, relationship-building is central. One Xyolhemeylh participant explained its value as an educational approach for working with non-Indigenous students: “It’s the only thing that really... works is always that human interaction... looking eyeball to eyeball is really the only way that you can actually get it” (C-B). In addition, both Xyolhemeylh and UBC-DHCC participants observed that relationship-building between individuals was the core of the institutional relationship:

We always tend to look at organizations like they have the end discussion—how’s the relationship between UBC-DHCC and Xyolhemeylh. Well the relationship between me and [U-B] and [U-A] was great, do you know what I mean? So it’s not about UBC or Xyolhemeylh, it’s about people. (C-B)

Within the partnership, Xyolhemeylh and UBC-DHCC members built strong interpersonal relationships, and over the years made it a priority to build face-to-face, “eyeball-to-eyeball” relationships. Participants from both organizations stressed the importance of meeting face-to-face, both at the beginning of the relationship and as part of its ongoing development. In fact, in-person meetings were the first step in exploring a potential relationship. As one Xyolhemeylh participant described it, “[t]hey just came out here and met us... we just started talking” (C-B). UBC-DHCC staff and faculty drove out to Chilliwack, a drive of approximately 1.5-2 hours each way, for in-person meetings: “A lot of things are done via emails and telephone. But face-to-face is really important, regardless” (C-A). As described by one participant, putting in the ongoing effort to set up face-to-face meetings is an important part of relationship-building, especially in a Stó:lō context: “It’s a long drive, but they came in person to us every time, that’s huge” (C-D). The importance of physical meetings to the partnership between Xyolhemeylh and UBC-DHCC echoes Steinman’s (2011) suggestion that “novel personal interactions and ‘witnessing’ can emerge to transform... the relationship between university and community partners” (p. 5).

Most participants indicated that the partnership between Xyolhemeylh and UBC-DHCC falls in the “middle” range of the series of Venn diagrams described earlier, which indicates that the partnership lies somewhere between what Clayton et al. (2010) call a “transactional” relationship, in which each party benefits, and a “transformational” relationship, in which each partner grows. It is clear that both partners value the partnership and engage in ongoing and deliberate work to maintain the relationships that sustain it.

Service-learning scholars Bringle and Hatcher (2002) also describe the significance of building personal relationships, paralleling the ways that universities relate to community partners with the ways personal relationships function. In a subsequent article, they further

explain that they “view interactions between persons as being critical for establishing the character and capacity of the activities in a relationship” (Bringle and Hatcher, 2009, p. 14). The importance of individuals to the quality of a relationship is also shared by Weerts and Sandmann (2010), who identify the key role that university staff can play as “boundary spanners.” Boundary spanners build relationships within and beyond the institutions; they listen with an open mind.

In the Community as Teacher partnership, relationship-building was the basis not just of the partnership, but also of the program’s educational approach. Relationship-building as an approach to teaching and learning builds upon thousands of years of what Barnhart and Kawagley (2005) refer to as Indigenous Knowledges. The Community as Teacher program itself could be seen as the type of program that Barnhart and Kawagley (2005) advocate for—one that asks Westerners to “understand Native worldviews and ways of knowing” (p. 9). This suggests the importance of valuing relationship-building both within the content and the process of community-university relationships.

### **Limitations**

This paper is based on a qualitative case study of a single Indigenous-university partnership; the findings are thus limited in scope and context. There are many layers of context that are important to consider, some of which have been explored: the geo-political context of unceded Coast Salish Territory; the institutional contexts of a research-intensive university and an Indigenous family services agency; and the funding context, in which funding for “Indigenous issues” is made available to select actors within society. In addition, my social location as a settler scholar and as an employee and graduate student at UBC significantly impacted my ability to understand and capture potential nuances and aspects of this study.

As a settler scholar, I have taken a decolonizing approach to the extent that is possible, and have tried to deconstruct and become aware of my colonial assumptions. One example of this learning has been my growing understanding of the importance of relationship-building, what this study calls the “hidden R” because it underlies many existing principles of community-university engagement (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Butin, 2010). My research began with a chance encounter with a Xyolhemeylh participant outside a building in Saskatoon, followed by conversations, meetings in Vancouver and Chilliwack, and eventually a decision to focus this study on the Community as Teacher partnership. While the study began with a connection that evolved into a relationship, throughout the process of conducting this research, I experienced a tension between building relationships and “getting it done” in accordance with the institution’s timeline. The following story illustrates this tension.

In February 2013, I booked a lunch meeting to reconnect with a Xyolhemeylh staff person. The morning of the meeting, I received a call from the staff person, cancelling our lunch meeting and passing on some surprising news: the cultural camp program was in jeopardy, and given the organizational turmoil it would be unlikely for me to interview anyone at Xyolhemeylh until June or later, much later than my original research timeline. Rather than thinking about the pressures on the organization, I leapt to the conclusion that Xyolhemeylh

was no longer interested in the research, and I even considered pursuing another research project. In retrospect, this reflected my position as a privileged researcher who can, when the going gets tough, pick up and move to another place to “do” research (Smith, 1999). Such a move, after over six months of collaboration and planning with Xyolhemeylh and UBC-DHCC participants, would have been in many ways an abandonment of the relationships built so far. I realized that I needed to respect the process that Xyolhemeylh was going through, while also living up to my responsibility to continue with what I had said I would do “in a good way”. I decided to relax my research timeline. A few months later, I had completed several community interviews and was in contact with Xyolhemeylh participants.

This example is only one of many moments during which I reflected on the process of data generation and research coordination work. As a novice researcher studying the process of community-university engagement, I discovered that being self-reflexive was an important part of the research process and also a source of data about the process of building relationships between community and university (Rausch, 2012; Stoecker et al., 2009).

### **Implications and Conclusions**

In the course of this study, many additional questions have come to light. One priority for further research is an Indigenous-led study of the Community as Teacher program and partnership. Further research could also expand the scope of this study to explore the ways in which UBC overall, not just UBC-DHCC, engages in partnerships with Indigenous organizations and communities. Another avenue for further research might “focus the mirror” (Marker, 2006) on settler health professional students, exploring ways for such students to understand their own histories and positions as settlers and how that historicity and positionality has contributed to the erosion of trust between doctors and Indigenous patients.

For Indigenous-university partnerships more generally, this study suggests several conditions that are necessary for decolonizing community-university engagement work and enabling community-university partnerships. Community and university partners must ensure that their partnership is relevant to both parties and carries a shared vision; they must also acknowledge the risks inherent in embarking on a partnership; work in a good way; and recognize and nurture relationships. This study also has particular implications for the funding of Indigenous-university partnerships. Working in a good way, defining “relevance” in collaboration, investing in ongoing relationships, and taking risks all require time and a long-term commitment. Funders and partners must acknowledge that risks are not equally shared and find ways to allow space for university and community risk-taking.

Xyolhemeylh and UBC-DHCC have worked together to develop a mutually relevant partnership that involves significant but unequal risks. Working from a foundation of respect, they have found ways to build relationships into the core of their work. I hope that I, and others, find ways to do the same.

## About the Author

**Mali Bain** is a settler on Coast Salish territory. She is a facilitator, community developer, and former high school teacher with an M.A. in Adult Learning and Education. She continues to ask questions about her own family history, global solidarity, and working in a good way. Email: malibain@gmail.com

## References

- About UBC's Vancouver Campus. (2013).
- Bagnoli, A. (2009). Beyond the standard interview: The use of graphic elicitation and arts-based methods. *Qualitative Research*, 9(5), 547–570. doi:10.1177/1468794109343625
- Barnhardt, R., & Kawagley, A. O. (2005). Indigenous knowledge systems and Alaska Native ways of knowing. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 36(1), 8–23.
- Battiste, M. (2012). *Aboriginal education*. Unpublished manuscript. Saskatoon, SK, Canada.
- Blouin, D. D., & Perry, E. M. (2009). Whom does service learning really serve? Community-based organizations' perspectives on service learning. *Teaching Sociology*, 37(2), 120–135. doi:10.1177/0092055X0903700201
- Boyer, E. L. (1996). The scholarship of engagement. *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 49(7), 18–33.
- Bringle, R. G., & Hatcher, J. A. (1995). A service-learning curriculum for faculty. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 2(1), 112–22.
- Clayton, P. H., Bringle, R. G., Senior, B., Huq, J., & Morrison, M. (2010). Differentiating and assessing relationships in service-learning and civic engagement: Exploitative, transactional, or transformational. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 16(2), 5–21.
- Division of Health Care Communication. (2013). Informed shared decision making: An overview.
- Dunn-Kenney, M. (2010). Can service learning reinforce social and cultural bias? Exploring a popular model of family involvement for early childhood teacher candidates. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 31(1), 37–48. doi:10.1080/10901020903539655
- Findlay, L. (2000). Always Indigenize! The radical Humanities in the post-colonial University. *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, 31(1 & 2), 307–326.
- First Nations Centre. (2007). OCAP. Ottawa: National Aboriginal Health Organization.
- Fraser Valley Aboriginal Children and Family Services Society (FVACFSS). (2012). Mandate & statements.
- Furniss, E. M., & Cariboo Tribal Council. (1995). *Victims of benevolence: The dark legacy of the Williams Lake Residential School*. Vancouver, BC: Arsenal Pulp Press.
- Guffey, J. (2008). Embracing an Indigenous understanding of service-learning. Presented at the NWIC Second Summit on Indigenous Service-Learning. Keynote Address.
- Haig-Brown, C., & Nock, D. A. (2006). Introduction. In C. Haig-Brown & D. A. Nock (Eds.), *With good intentions : Euro-Canadian and Aboriginal relations in colonial Canada* (pp. 1–31). Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.

- Kirkness, V. J., & Barnhardt, R. (1991). First Nations and higher education: The four R's – respect, relevance, reciprocity, responsibility. *Journal of American Indian Education, 30*(3), 1–15.
- Kline, C., Godolphin, W., Chhina, G., & Towle, A. (2013). Community as teacher: health professional students learn cultural safety from an Aboriginal community. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, 20*, 5–17.
- Lawrence, B. (2004). “Real” Indians and others: Mixed-blood urban Native peoples and Indigenous nationhood. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.
- Marker, M. (2006). After the Makah whale hunt: Indigenous knowledge and limits to multicultural discourse. *Urban Education, 41*(5), 482–505. doi:10.1177/0042085906291923
- McNally, M. D. (2004). Indigenous pedagogy in the classroom: A service learning model for discussion. *The American Indian Quarterly, 28*, 604–617. doi:10.1353/aiq.2004.0102
- Mitchell, T., & Hennig, J. (2012, May 11). Reconsidering the direction of community service-learning. Presented at the Canadian Association for Community Service-Learning, Saskatoon, SK.
- Regan, P. (2010). *Unsettling the settler within: Indian residential schools, truth telling, and reconciliation in Canada*. Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.
- Steinman, E. (2011). “Making space”: Lessons from collaborations with tribal nations. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, 18*(1). Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.3239521.0018.101>
- Stoecker, R., Tryon, E. A., & Hilgendorf, A. (2009). *The unheard voices: Community organizations and service learning*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Towle, A., Godolphin, W., & Alexander, T. (2006). Doctor–patient communications in the Aboriginal community: Towards the development of educational programs. *Patient Education and Counseling, 62*(3), 340–346. doi:10.1016/j.pec.2006.06.006
- Weerts, D. J., & Sandmann, L. R. (2010). Community engagement and boundary-spanning roles at research universities. *The Journal of Higher Education, 81*(6), 632–657.