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Mitho Pimachesowin through Education

Celebrating Our Path of Ahkamimoh in Northern Saskatchewan: Developing Resiliency in Youth through Education

Emocikihtayak Ahkamimohwin meskanaw Ote Kiwetinohk Saskatchewan: Sohkeyimowin Oskayak Ekiskinwahamacik

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Abstract: This article defines *ahkamimohwin* and how it can be practised in education. Ahkamimohwin is a Northern Cree word that means resilience (*ahkameyimowin* in Plains Cree, y dialect). It is a word that is commonly used to describe “persistence” or “never giving up.” Residential school trauma has affected northern Canadian communities such as Beauval, Saskatchewan, and it has continued even years after the school was closed. Today, many communities in Northern Saskatchewan suffer from addictions, poverty, and other challenges that impact negatively on ahkamimohwin and *miyo-pimatisiwin* (living a good life). By incorporating knowledge of traditional culture into our schools, as shared by Elders and Knowledge Keepers in the community, along with incorporating an awareness of place and belonging through connections to the land, family, community, and spirituality, ahkamimohwin will be integrated into education and will lead to miyo-pimatisiwin. Through this integration I believe our Beauval community can heal from the trauma of the residential school experiences and can build resiliency with our youth. This article is a chapter in the open textbook *Indigenous Self-Determination through Mitho Pimachesowin (Ability to Make a Good Living)* developed for the University of Saskatchewan course Indigenous Studies 410/810, and hosted by the *Northern Review*.

Introduction

This article focuses on *ahkamimohwin* and how it can be enacted and practised in education to strengthen youth in northern communities. Ahkamimohwin is a Cree word that means resilience (*ahkameyimowin* in Plains Cree).¹ It is a word that is commonly used by Cree speakers to describe persistence or never giving up. By incorporating knowledge of traditional culture into our schools, as shared by Elders and Knowledge Keepers in the community, along with incorporating awareness of place and belonging through connections to the land, family, community, and spirituality, ahkamimohwin will be integrated into education and will lead to *miyo-pimatisiwin* or “living a good life.”

Residential school trauma has affected the entire community of Beauval, Saskatchewan, even years after the school was closed in 1983. Today, many communities in Northern Saskatchewan suffer from addictions, poverty, and other challenges that negatively impact on ahkamimohwin and *miyo-pimatisiwin*. I believe the community of Beauval can heal from the trauma of the residential school experiences, and that together we can build resiliency in our youth by integrating ahkamimohwin into our education system and schools.

I begin by defining and discussing the importance of ahkamimohwin, as far as building and sustaining youth development through revitalizing traditional culture, ways of life, and connections to the land. I will describe the importance of ahkamimohwin to our way of life in Beauval. I will then provide a short historical and contemporary profile of the community to illustrate how Métis and First Nations Peoples in northwestern Saskatchewan have lived *miyo-pimatisiwin*, and the challenges they have overcome to maintain their way of life. Second, I will discuss the elements of ahkamimohwin and its contribution to building self-identity through family and community, and the strengthening of spirituality and the connection to the Creator and Traditional Knowledge. Third, I will examine the impact of residential schools on education for Indigenous individuals and communities, and the need to heal and create a new model for education based on Indigenous ways of knowing and being. Finally, I will advocate for the application of ahkamimohwin to education in my community of Beauval.

Background

Beauval is a Métis community in northwestern Saskatchewan. The village is home to about 700 people whose ancestors are French and Cree. Beauval was founded by the Catholic Church in 1895 when it built a residential school to which students from surrounding communities were forced to attend. In spite of the destructive era of the residential school, the community of Beauval still continues to practice

ahkamimohwin, as demonstrated by many people still speaking the local Michif language and carrying on the traditional and life-sustaining activities—hunting, fishing, gardening, and gathering medicines—for food security and sovereignty.

Ahkamimoh

In Beauval, ahkamimoh is a Cree term that, when translated to English, means resilience. In trying to discover what ahkamimoh means in my community, I asked Elders to explain their definition of the concept. They replied by stating that it means “to have persistence,” “to try harder,” “to stay focused,” and to “never give up.” At the same time, scholars state that ahkamimoh—self-determination or being resilient—is based on the following concepts: self-identity, spirituality, holism, achieving balance and well-being, the land, relationships, kinships, epistemologies, communities, community-based education, natural resources, social capital, cultural knowledge, storytelling, and reliance on other people (Beatty, 2012).

Being resilient is often measured by having a successful life, which includes a steady income, stable marriage, and having a good life (*miyo-matsibitowin*) despite all the challenges of oppression (Kirmayer et al., 2009). Resilience is also linked with the ability to adapt to one’s surroundings and to face stress rather than avoid it (Kirmayer et al., 2009). Additionally, resilience is developed by finding ways to cope, adjust, thrive, and not give up. Resilience is defined as being brought back to the original state after being bent or compressed. Some writers state that it is the ultimate goal of the individual, family, community, nation, global system, and any ecosystem (Kirmayer et al., 2009).

The concept of ahkamimoh or resilience is an emerging one in academic literature. In the mental health field, resilience is defined as a “person’s ability to overcome stress and adversity” (Kirmayer et al., 2009, p. 63). Fleming and Ledogar (2008a) claim that many mental health practitioners retain the view that resilience is an individual asset. While the concept of resilience in this field is often “individual-centred,” there is an emerging focus on “community resilience” and how people use social networks and practices to manage stress, trauma, and challenges (Kirmayer et al., 2009, p. 63). Kirmayer et al. further describe the importance of community resilience for Indigenous health and well-being. In an Indigenous world view, the importance of family and community creates a type of ahkamimoh or resilience that is based more on the community than the individual.

Anderson explains that Indigenous resilience has a “collective aspect, combining spirituality, family strength, Elders, ceremonial rituals, oral traditions, identity, and support networks” (2008a, p. 4). Anderson also explains that there is no unified Indigenous view of resilience, but that many of these views are based on Indigenous relationships to the land (Anderson, 2008b). Furthermore, Du Hamel (2003) states that Indigenous people were very connected to the land and resilient:

“Our people were engineers, governors, doctors, healers, lawmakers, scientists, architects; we had to be everything to survive on the land . . . What’s happened today to Native Youth is that this connection has been shattered between their cultural self, spiritual self, and the land” (Du Hamel, 2003, p. 214).

This is where the whole concept of family and community, which is better known as *wahkootowin*, or “kinship,” for Indigenous Peoples, is addressed (or *wāhkōhtowin*). The concept of *wahkootowin* validates that land and family relationships are essential to the development of resiliency. Our community hopes that a revitalized connection to the traditional way of life, through the support of Elders and their knowledge, and to the land, will build resiliency in our youth.

Family, Self, and Community

One concept that promotes resiliency in Indigenous communities is self-identity, which is knowing who you are and where you come from. Self-identity is the foundation of Indigenous ways of learning and knowing. According to the Métis Holistic Lifelong Learning Model (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007, p. 23), identity is the first basic factor in knowing who you are, followed by spiritual, mental, physical, and emotional factors. These factors extend to learning from family, community, and social relations.

My grandparents were ranchers, fishermen, and farmers. My great-grandfather, Joseph Burnouf, came from France as an Oblate missionary for the Catholic Church. He travelled to Northern Saskatchewan to serve in the Catholic faith. He was a talented builder who must have been summoned to build a school in the Northwest. It was here that he met and married my great-grandmother, Hermaline Daigneault, who was a Métis woman from Île-à-la-Crosse. Joseph left the Oblate brothers but the events surrounding this are not known. The Catholic Church gave him land six miles south of Beauval and he cleared a spot overlooking the Beaver River where he and Hermaline built a homestead in what is now known as Riverside Ranch. This homestead was self-sustaining and was in a strategic location since it was the resting place for people heading to Île-à-la-Crosse. Joseph established a small store for people to buy basic necessities as they travelled along the river system from one community to another. It is likely they also supplied fresh meat and fuel for those travelling by snow buggies or heavy-duty trucks. Apart from his involvement in the building and construction of the school, Brother Joseph travelled to Prince Albert and Saskatoon and was contracted to build churches in these areas. His name became well known and requests from engineers took him away from the Beauval area at times.

Joseph and Hermaline had six children and one of their sons was my grandfather, Alex Burnouf, who raised his family on the ranch where they tended cows and had a very large garden. Alex was also a commercial fisherman and

left for months at a time to fish all over Northern Saskatchewan. In addition, he worked at the residential school as a maintenance man and developed trades skills in woodworking and plumbing; he also took engineering training, predominantly with the boiler system. My grandmother, Germaine, cared for the home and family which included nine children. Together, Alex and Germaine persevered and made it possible to raise their children and pass on the legacy of traditional values and lifestyle through the generations. Today, the heritage of resiliency, traditional beliefs and knowledge, and hard work has resulted in the Burnoufs being very successful in many ways (Burnouf, 2019).

Métis identity is based on family and community. Macdougall utilizes genealogical research to describe how the Métis based their world view on family (Macdougall, 2010). She uses the Cree word *wahkootowin* to describe how familial relationships form Métis identity. Specifically, Macdougall states that, “in the context of *wahkootowin*, individuals were taught that who they were could only be understood in relation to others in their family and community, as well as in relation to the environment, the sacred world, and outsiders” (Macdougall, 2010, p. 56). Essentially, Macdougall’s work uses genealogy and the concept of *wahkootowin* to explain Métis ways of knowing in northwestern Saskatchewan. In turn, identity must be taught through example, such as during celebrations and cultural experiences, in order for youth to gain an appreciation of our familial roots and homeland.

The life of Louis Riel models this. Goulet takes us through the trial of Louis Riel and the many injustices inflicted on the Métis people (Goulet, 1999). His book provides a detailed account of the resiliency displayed by Louis Riel and the courageous stand he took that led to the recognition of the Métis people and the birth of the Métis Nation. Louis Riel displayed pride and belief in his nationality. As individuals, community members, educators, and Elders, we need to continue modelling the tenacity that our forefathers and foremothers had, to continue to strive for “making a good living,” and to be bold enough to be proud of our Indigenous roots.

My family is one of many in a resilient and proud Indigenous Nation that overcame the government’s destructive tactic of creating residential schools where the attempt was to kill our seed. The systemic oppression and colonial violence also resulted in lateral violence among our own people. However, we have overcome many obstacles and we will continue to stand up and have faith and hope so that our children, our youth, will rise up and believe that they are good enough and will not compete or tear down their brothers and sisters, but will live the good life called *miyo-pimatisiwin*. The importance of community cannot be ignored. A community shapes an individual’s identity, social network, friends, clubs, and organizations, where people come together with common interests. Furthermore,

the North itself is a community where there is a connection between the people and the land (Beatty, 2012). The term community can be thought of as common and unity (Bopp & Bopp, 2006, p. 12). In the North, we are unified; we share because we need each other to survive. Northerners historically had to do this for survival. For example, long ago, if one person killed a moose, they fed the whole community. There was no such thing as packaging it all up and putting it into a deep freezer. Today, we do not practice this as much as we once did. The loss of this type of communal sharing has led to the deterioration of miyo-matsihitowin (having a good life); however, this type of sharing must be revitalized to encourage resiliency among the youth.

Spirituality and Resilience

Spirituality encompasses more than just the spiritual beliefs of recognized religions. Spirituality is interlocked with culture and “the intrinsic human capacity for self-transcendence, in which the individual is embedded in something greater than the self, including the sacred,” and which motivates “the search for connectedness, meaning, purpose, and contribution” (Benson et al., 2003, quoted in Wong et al., 2006, quoted in Fleming & Ledogar, 2008b, p. 49). Spirituality helps build resiliency. Health care professionals use spirituality to address and prevent alcohol abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, abandonment, and suicide, which have been the experiences of many Indigenous people. Youth who have high self-esteem and strong cultural identity experience less alcohol and substance abuse in comparison to those who do not (Fleming & Ledogar, 2008b). For Fleming and Ledogar (2008b), “Aboriginal spirituality should not be treated merely as an antidote to pathologies like substance abuse and suicide. It is a resource for ‘navigating life’ and for transcendence” (p. 62). Hanohano (1999) contends that spirituality is often mistaken and confused as “religion”; however, it is much more than religion.

For further validation of this, Beauval Elder Abraham Gardiner explained to me that spirituality was in everything that our people did and was an ongoing relationship with the Creator (Gardiner, 2019). The everyday tasks in life were carried out in accordance with spirituality. They consulted and waited, and only if they were sure they heard from the Creator, would they then proceed to act. Moshum (Grandfather) Abraham continued to share that Aboriginal people, the term he prefers to use, have a natural connection to the Creator because spirituality was embedded in the Aboriginal ways of learning and knowing. It was not a foreign concept to them which allowed it to be easily understood. That is why, today, practising spirituality comes to Indigenous Peoples very easily (Gardiner, 2019).

Elders always had a connection to the Creator. In fact, their connection was so strong that they could predict what was going to take place in the future. For

instance, in the school where I work, Elder Abraham, our school spiritual teacher, once told me to practice patience and be ready to have a soft and pliable heart, which he explained was *opsisowin* in Cree (Gardiner, 2019). Later, it was close to the end of the day when an angry parent came in to see me concerning her child. I instantly remembered what Elder Abraham told me that morning and I applied patience, compassion, and wisdom to create a suitable solution for her child. If we train ourselves to be in tune with our Creator, we will hear the teachings and instructions resulting in miyo-pimatisiwin.

Knowledge

Cree knowledge and ways of knowing are essential to building resilience in our youth: “Our Cree ways of knowing are based on collective memory and long-term relationship with the land” (Mitchell, 2013, p. 13). The skills, experience, and insights of our people are key elements for achieving self-determination, especially as it relates to experiential knowledge about the land, the natural environment, and livelihood (Beatty, 2012). Battiste supports this:

The recognition and intellectual activation of Indigenous knowledge today is an act of remediation, recognition of rights of Indigenous peoples, and a renaissance among Indigenous scholars, social activists, and allies. Their struggles represent a regeneration of the dignity and cultural integrity of Indigenous peoples, where success has been found in affirming and activating the holistic systems of Indigenous knowledge, engaging Elders, communities, and committed individuals. (Battiste, 2013, p. 94)

Knowledge for Cree people includes common sense, being mindful, and considering others and one’s surroundings. One example is the traditional natural medicines that are harvested locally in our community. My uncle and aunt are medicine people. They attained this knowledge from the Elders, and from their grandparents, who attained it from their grandparents, so it was passed down through the generations. Today, my aunt and uncle prepare all types of medicines for every ailment. This is why Elders are key people who keep the stories and Traditional Knowledge alive so that we may all experience miyo-matsihitowin.

Elders also play a very important role in making sure that the knowledge and teachings are passed on to the next generations; thus, *ahkamimohwin* is practised. Elders are often known because of their wisdom and ability to teach others. As Hanohano writes, “Elders bear an important responsibility for the tribal community by functioning as a parent, teacher, community leader, and spiritual guide” (1999, p. 206).

In my conversations with Elder Abraham, he stated that wisdom in Cree is referred to as *ainesowin*. He explained that this knowledge is a gift from the Creator that gives people insight into gaining wisdom and knowledge for problem solving and decision making. In addition, Elder Abraham shared that *ainesowin* is about tapping into the spiritual realm. Therefore, the wisdom and knowledge that is attained cannot be known only through the act of researching (Gardiner, 2019). Today, it is crucial that we continue to go to the Elders and seek their knowledge as though we are seeking treasure. Their knowledge and understanding is a valuable resource that we must not ignore.

For example, Elders can be utilized in schools to help bridge the Indigenous ways of learning and knowing and merge this into today's ways of life. Elders can help our youth and teachers to make sense of things such as damaged emotions, and can help with positive decision making. Elders in the schools also help foster a caring environment that can promote restorative justice instead of punitive discipline strategies that actually cause more harm than good. This way of influencing youth gives skills and a voice to the students and teachers so they can openly share their thoughts and come to an agreement to repair or replace the troublesome behaviour with positive behaviour. Elders model a sense of spirituality by praying openly with the students and teachers. In our school we identify and engage Elders who live and model *miyo-pimatisiwin* (living a good life). Their strong sense of spirituality enables them to guide our youth.

Many Elders are gifted as storytellers, which is a very important part of retaining or rebuilding resiliency among our people. Bizhiw (1999) explains that the importance of storytelling has two aspects. A cultural story is told by human beings, and there is a non-human person that can be interpreted as the "spirit of the story." Bizhiw further explains that the Anishinaabe have a name for this, *aadizookaan*, which "speaks to the listener through a voice of the human cultural storyteller" (1999, p. 79). In summary, Bizhiw emphasizes that the main objective of the human and spirit storytelling is to bring *mino-bimaadiziwin*, "a good life" (Bizhiw, 1999). Storytelling is both a cultural and a spiritual tool. It creates a safe and caring environment of trust, kindness, and empathy (Battiste, 2013, p. 184), and enables a greater interconnectedness that is fundamental for community belonging.

Education

How is *ahkamimoh* related to education? In this section I discuss what has happened to Indigenous People in regards to education and, as a result, how this history continues to impact us today. Indigenous People had a very sophisticated way of governing themselves; there was a political governance system within the community. This knowledge was not recorded or written down but was embedded in the people through storytelling and experience.

Indigenous knowledge systems do not encompass a singular body of knowledge but reflect many layers of being, knowing, and methods of expression. Indigenous knowledge systems include knowledge about economics, politics, music, leadership, transportation, building, autonomy, women's unique contributions, art, literature/stories, humour, and community values (Settee, 2007, p. 15).

The most devastating and oppressive acts that impacted Indigenous ways of knowing and the governance of Indigenous communities were colonization and then forcing Indigenous children to attend residential schools. Settee states that "historical events such as colonization imposed dominant systems of governance, economics, and schooling that have created near genocidal conditions" (2007, p. 16). Early contact with Europeans created a relationship of mutual trade where explorers and traders relied on the knowledge and skills of Indigenous Peoples. This changed when settlers arrived and sought land. The colonial British and then Canadian governments looked for a way to assimilate the Indigenous population, and they created the residential school system:

The arrival of an age of peace, immigration, and agriculture in British North America meant a dramatically different relationship between Natives and newcomers, a shift in relations that explains the effort of state and church to assimilate Aboriginal communities through residential schools. (Miller, 2012, p. 62)

Boarding schools run by the churches were viewed as an efficient way to re-educate Indigenous children, and Indigenous Peoples' relationships to traditional education were severed.

Residential schools had a destructive ripple effect on Indigenous communities. Widespread apathy amongst youth can be directly linked to the impact of the residential school system, which has hurt many Indigenous families and communities across multiple generations. In our community, the impact of the Beauval Indian Residential School is evident in the widespread lack of self-esteem. We are so afraid to be successful and when we do achieve and are recognized for it, some of our own people abuse us through lateral violence. Tousignant and Sioui propose that "the challenge for Aboriginal communities is to overcome the

historical burden of colonization, to repair their social fabric, and to assert pride in their culture” (2009, p. 43). This is where the holistic idea is brought forth to not only repair or reinstate the Indigenous ways of knowing and learning but to enhance them. This is achieved through community-based education, Elder involvement, language revival, and bringing traditional ways of knowing back into the schools. As community educators, there is a need to commit to the healing of community members (Tousignant & Sioui, 2009).

The community’s goal in Beauval is to develop community-based education by forming partnerships with the parents and the community. To develop a true sense of unity between the community members, community resources, and the school, we, as local educators, must strive to have a balance between the incorporation of the community into the school and engaging the school within the community. Our school mandate must be to create an environment that respects the natural ways of learning through modelling. This is why it is so important to bring in Elders and community role models to encourage and support the students. There needs to be a transformation in the relationship between the school and the community. It is not just a focus on the academic way of learning, but also the blending of community-based lifelong learning. For the Métis from Beauval, this is a natural way of learning and it is now being recognized as a valuable approach. This approach impacts all four areas of the Métis development: self, family, land, and languages and traditions (see Métis Holistic Lifelong Learning Model in Canadian Council on Learning, 2007, p. 23).

In spite of the devastating acts of dishonouring the Indigenous Peoples and the genocide that almost occurred, Indigenous People remain resilient and are now in the process of restoration and healing, along with the revitalization of our stories, culture, dignity, and self-identity. In spite of all the trauma that Indigenous People have endured, we must continue to strive for self-determination and persevere to remain resilient. We must practise *ahkamimoh* by continuing Elder engagement and support—both in the school and the community—promoting the Michif language and incorporating traditional ways of learning in Valley View School, Beauval, Saskatchewan. Elders model resiliency by being “the change they want to see.” They govern their life around the teachings that they live by. In addition, Elders must see themselves as a “mouse” to be humbled and, like a mouse, observe and listen. This is viewed by the whole community as a model to help others who struggle and who can take a strengths-based (positive) approach to life instead of a deficit-based (negative) one.

There must to be a greater emphasis in policy and procedures for school administrators so that they are supported as they become aware and value Elder involvement, encourage the revitalization of Indigenous languages, and use community involvement to link or merge cultural practices with the school

curriculum. By rewriting, and then implementing, more culturally inclusive policy and procedures, school administrators will have guidelines for how to bring Elders into the school and for the various ways in which Elders can contribute (i.e., storytelling, praying, meeting with and greeting staff and students, role modelling behaviour, and meeting social-emotional needs).

Our community has stories that are filled with immeasurable knowledge and wisdom, which will continue to impact the next generations. The knowledge that our people attained through the many generations cannot be lost. Who will take this forth? It is the self-determined, the resilient, the risk takers who are not afraid to tell their stories and share them so that today we can be inspired to go forth in spite of all the oppression. McCallum states that “the struggles we face today are the experiences and building of new strengths for tomorrow” (2012, p. 13). He further shares that “growing up as a child I remember some difficult situations in my life of being the black sheep of the family where sometimes you just don’t know where or who to turn to” (p. 45). Today, Leonard McCallum, who is from Pinehouse, Saskatchewan, says, while telling his story, that no matter what struggles you face there is always hope. There are so many success stories and testimonies from northerners that, in spite of the tragedies they have encountered, illustrate resilience and *ahkamimohwin*. We need to go to the people and hear their stories, and give them an opportunity to be heard and to share these stories with the youth.

Child and Community

Brendtro et al. (1990) claim that in order for a child to prosper the following four elements in the “Circle of Courage” must be present: mastery, belonging, generosity, and independence. These elements are essential for youth to develop self-identity and self-determination, and to acquire resiliency.

Fostering self-esteem is the primary goal and encompasses four components, which are significance, competence, power, and virtue (Coopersmith, 1967 quoted in Brendtro et al.). To have significance means to possess “acceptance, attention, and affection to others” (Brendtro et al., 1990, p. 44). Competencies are acquired once a child masters the environment. Power is the ability to have self-control and virtue is to possess values of one’s culture.

The spirit of belonging is to “be related, somehow, to every one you know” (Deloria cited in Brendtro et al., 1990, p. 46). Child rearing was traditionally done by the whole community and “the ultimate test of kinship was behavior, not blood: you belonged if you acted like you belonged” (Brendtro et al., 1990, p. 46): “Treating others as related was a powerful social value that transformed human relationships” (p. 47). The spirit of mastery can be celebrated by practising what you are good at and developing it to a level of competence. Playing games and

using creative play to simulate adult responsibility leads to mastery. The spirit of independence teaches children responsibility and ways they can empower themselves. Indigenous Peoples followed the teachings of respecting their children, and children were shown consideration by all the people in their lives who helped in their upbringing. Children were disciplined with gentleness and were expected to have responsibilities. Talking to children was the most effective way to model independence. The spirit of generosity is to be generous and to practice giving: “Children were instructed to always share generously without holding back” (Brendtro et al., 1990, p. 57). The mastery, independence, belonging, and generosity that Indigenous Peoples practised were the true elements of resilience. These must be brought back and retaught in the home, community, and school.

Indigenous Peoples, referred to as “native” peoples by Brendtro et al., had the most sophisticated approach to child rearing (Brendtro et al., 1990). This was not recognized by the colonizers and was, therefore, disregarded in favour of the “European approach,” which was forced on Indigenous Peoples. According to Brendtro et al., “Native peoples possessed profound child psychology wisdom that might well have been adopted by the immigrants to North America” (1990, p. 44). Instead, the children were subjected to a way of discipline that was foreign to them. Indigenous children were traditionally governed by positive discipline that was likely the most effective way. Today, this notion of positive discipline has elements of what some call “restorative justice.” Brendtro et al. state that “These approaches emerged from cultures where the central purpose of life was the education and the empowerment of children” (1990, p. 44).

At Valley View School, where I am currently the principal, we strive to model the above practices that were used by our ancestors. We have introduced a model called “Restorative Practices,” which enables us to bring back similar past teachings. In spite of all the hardships that have been imposed on the people of Beauval, we continue to push forward by implementing restorative circles as our ancestors did prior to colonization. We were aware that colonization brings many forms of dysfunction to any organization if not dealt with or corrected. We recognized that our people were disengaged and appeared to have lost their voice. We knew we were not a safe school with the amount of violence, both visible and discreet, being directed at individuals, students, and adults. We wanted to be proactive instead of being reactive, so we had to create a space for our people to feel safe, justified, and empowered. The whole purpose for restorative justice was to encourage our people to vocalize their trauma and pain. If there has been an injustice made towards anyone who is involved in the school, there is the option of having a restorative circle to address the situation. We have two spiritual Elders who are present in the circle, along with administration, to help guide the procedure. The people who have been hurt will state their case and we try to resolve the issue by having the

student(s) vocalize the trauma they experienced. Everyone has an opportunity to tell their story. We use guiding questions to help them express their feelings. A solution is developed by providing ways to correct the undesired action and we close the circle with a prayer and by offering a chance to forgive each other. We restore the individual by using compliments and solutions rather than by being judgmental and punitive. The application of restitution to one person at a time will result in the whole village practicing ahkamimohwin.

Conclusion

The goal of this article was to describe the elements of ahkamimohwin and their importance for building self-identity and community resilience. The article advocates for community-based education that integrates Elders’ teachings and traditional ways of knowing and being in order to enhance resilience amongst youth and help the community heal from the devastating impacts of colonization and residential schools. This article further provides an aerial view of the incredible knowledge and wisdom that our ancestors had by practising ahkamimoh, and how they governed themselves in the most sophisticated ways.

I thank God for the resiliency that was gifted to our people. It is a gift from the Creator and a blessing to bless others as we inspire and help others towards ahkamimohwin. We are to inspire the youth so they can become leaders in carrying on ahkamimohwin. I am in awe and have acquired a greater respect and appreciation for my Métis heritage. The gift of humour that is needed when speaking to Elders enables us to never forget the past.

Resilience is a concept that has to be taught, modelled, and celebrated with individuals, homes, schools, communities, and nations. Let us make it a point to never be afraid to teach and model the most amazing gifts that our relatives and Elders left us. I am so thankful today for all of my *wahkominuk* who continue to practice ahkamimohwin. As I continue my journey, I will tell the stories and ensure the knowledge is passed on to the next generations. I will practise what I preach, to honour ahkamimoh.

Notes

1. Ahkamimohwin in Northern Cree is an adjective referring to being resilient. The term “ahkamimoh” is a singular imperative word telling or encouraging someone to be resilient (in the context of “have faith/do not give up”). The word Ahkameyimok—in the y dialect, Plains Cree—is more like an imperative encouragement to a group.

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