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NOTES FROM THE FIELD

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Re-stitching and strengthening community: Three global examples of how doll-making translates into well-being in Indigenous cultures

ABSTRACT

Traditional doll-making has important meanings that translate into personal and communal identity. As one of the earliest discovered play artefacts, dolls are deeply intertwined with symbolic meanings around spirituality, rituals, familial histories

KEYWORDS

Indigenous health
Artshealth
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and communal traditions. These values are especially important in Indigenous groups where health and well-being pivots on the preservation of cultural heritage. This article develops the theory on the well-being functions of doll-making through the exploration of three different practices in Indigenous cultures across the globe. We explore the Gomeroi Yarning dolls (Australia), Six Nations Cornhusk dolls (Canada) and Siyazama Zulu dolls (South Africa) to show that, through building the expression of local community-level identity, these dolls support Indigenous world-views around well-being. Specifically, the Gomeroi Yarning dolls encourage the sharing of oral personal narratives, the Six Nations Cornhusk dolls promote the transmission of cultural teachings, and the Siyazama Zulu dolls create community support networks through locally relevant HIV/AIDS awareness. As a result, local Indigenous communities are strengthened through the space that is created for a healing process, capacity building for problem-solving, and the reclaiming of Indigenous identity. All of these factors are important steps for moving forward from the silence, dealing with trauma and difficult situations, and thus transforming pain and grief through cross-cultural communication.

Across the globe, the arts have provided a creative pathway to breaking silences, transforming conflicts, and mending the damaged relationships of violence, oppression, and exclusion. From war-ravaged countries to local communities struggling with everyday violence, poverty, and racism, the arts are widely used by educators, practitioners, and community leaders to deal with trauma and difficult emotions, and communicate across cultural divides.

(Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015)

INTRODUCTION

Artefacts provide a graphic historical collection of the shared beliefs of a society. Dolls, one of the earliest play artefacts, are models of human beings that are often representative of a local and/or global community's identity. In a contemporary context, dolls are typically associated with children, toys and play. However, they have also been used by adults as talismans to support various social, psychological and cultural functions such as spiritual ceremonies, rituals associated with birth, death and marriage, and symbols to be worshipped, sung to, sacrificed and nurtured (Fox and Landshoff 1972; Young 1992). In fact, dolls have been used to help people move to the spiritual world, assist in rites-of-passage ceremonies (Young 1992), and encourage reproduction, reduce infertility, produce good mothers and create beautiful daughters (Markel 2000). As a result, dolls are symbols of identity and fantasy, often leading to the creation of self-attitudes, rules for behaviour, shared perceptions, and mental images of what is expected. Dolls can act as vehicles for the translation of cultural heritage because the stories behind them help to deliver group and individual histories. They are used to teach, entertain or support personal healing, processes that maintain particular importance in many contemporary Indigenous cultures. For example, Haagen (1994: 1) observes that Australian Indigenous people have created a history of sustaining 'a strong collective sense of attachment to the artefacts of play'.

In the past, the oral translation of Indigenous world-views and the expression of cultural identities through artistic means were largely undisrupted.

However, since colonization, Indigenous peoples across the world have suffered multiple massacres, been forced out of their traditional lands, and faced the involuntary removal of their children and social injustices enabled by colonial racism. All of these actions have negatively impacted the transmission of Indigenous knowledge between generations and have led to much grief and trauma (Atkinson 2002).

One of the most effective ways to move forward from this degree of pain and build a healthier future for subsequent generations is by supporting the revitalization of culturally generated actions and behaviours (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015). Communal crafting has traditionally been a medium that allowed for the opportunity to express cultural identities. In the pre-colonial past, plant materials, bush products and animal/human hair were gathered and crafted in combination to song, dance and performance. These actions helped to maintain social relations, perpetuate ideals and guide cultural behaviours, which were beneficial to upholding communal well-being for many Indigenous groups.

The therapeutic benefits of traditional art forms are linked to improved physical and mental well-being (Barraket 2005), social cohesion, and inclusion. Furthermore, the disruption in cultural continuity and cultural connectedness faced by Indigenous communities can be ameliorated by the transmission of Indigenous culture and the maintenance of strong links to country (lands and waters) (Bromfield and Burchill 2005; Colquhoun and Dockery 2012; Lawrence 2007). In this process, such art activities are especially important and valuable. They can lead to the building of a sense of purpose, hope and belonging, especially in remote communities (Cooper et al. 2012), where limited infrastructure and services can often lead to unhealthy activities among youth and adults (Allain 2011; Cooper et al. 2012). Thus, participation in these traditional art forms is a protective factor against behaviours such as substance abuse and self-harm (Colquhoun and Dockery 2012).

Because health and well-being within an Indigenous context extends beyond the physical well-being of an individual, it is important to recognize the social, spiritual, emotional and cultural well-being of the entire community. This view represents a holistic perspective that includes the cyclical, continuous concept of life-death-life. These values can be upheld within the framework of contemporary health care models through culturally generated health initiatives and culturally respectful community partnerships.

The process of doll-making is an example of a communal visual art form that plays a role in supporting healthy Indigenous communities. The communal creation and display of handmade dolls is a culturally generated vehicle that has been used to promote health in a non-threatening way. This includes the gathering of individuals to learn new artistic skills and to revitalize the stories, memories and identities that are exemplified by the creation of their individual dolls. In addition, doll-making provides the physical space and the kinetic opportunities to weave the symbolic and literal threads of Indigenous culture together, contributing to the reclaiming of identity and the strengthening of local communities. Similarly, the gathering of people to participate in and observe the making of such an intimate art form encourages personal shared healing and allows the space to build capacity (e.g. new sewing techniques) and learn new problem-solving skills (e.g. how best to deal with familial challenges or cope with loss). Doll-making serves as a vehicle for the translation of traditional stories, songs and visual depictions of culture, allowing Indigenous peoples to formulate stronger connections between new skills

and existing knowledge constructs. These benefits contribute to the overall well-being of individuals and communities at large.

This article aims to showcase three global examples of how doll-making enhances the health and well-being of a number of Indigenous groups through the strengthening of local communities. Specifically, the Gomeroi Yarning dolls (Australia) encourage the sharing of oral personal narratives, the Six Nations Cornhusk dolls (Canada) promote the transmission of cultural teachings, and the Siyazama Zulu dolls (South Africa) create community support networks through locally relevant HIV/AIDS awareness. As a result, local communities are strengthened through the space that is created for a healing process, capacity building for problem-solving, and the reclaiming of Indigenous history and identity.

Clarissa Pinkola Estes, a Jungian analyst, describes dolls as a *vidacita*: an innate life power that is impulsive and perpetual. The doll experiences a life hidden inside ourselves – representing a symbolic homunculus (a little life), which is the symbol of what lies buried deep in all people, a small duplicate of the original self.

Dolls serve to us as talismans. Talismans are reminders of what we feel, but do not see, of something that is as it is, but we cannot see it immediately. Talismanic numen of a doll is here to remind us, to speak and to anticipate for us.

(Estes 2004: 107)

GOMEROI YARNING DOLLS (GOMEROI COUNTRY, NEW SOUTH WALES, AUSTRALIA)

Gomeroi (Goomeroi, Gomilaroi, Kamilaroi, Gamilaraay) Country extends from the Queensland–New South Wales border to Tamworth, Aberdeen/



Figure 1: Map of Australia with notation for the land that currently represents Gomeroi Country.

Muswellbrook, Connabarabran and Walgett in rural and remote eastern Australia.

The Gomeroi people, the second largest group of Indigenous people in eastern Australia, are the traditional owners of this land. As the traditional owners of Gomeroi Nation, the Gomeroi people continue to hold inherent land rights that were not traded or signed away, and have cultural identity and practices that have also been maintained. The Gomeroi language is classified in the Pama–Nyungan family of Australian languages, which is one of the most widespread groups of Indigenous languages (where there are over 300 distinct languages). The Gomeroi interpret people and country (land, water) as inseparable co-dependent entities that are linked through landscape, culture and spirituality. Health and well-being is linked to the health of the environment and the degree of self-governance over caring for and managing Gomeroi Country.

The Gomeroi Yarning dolls are handmade using a variety of available craft materials (e.g. cloth, felt, ribbon, buttons, etc.), strung together with yarn. They represent a person in the doll creator's life (literal, figurative or themselves) and thus symbolize relationships between individuals, their families, and other community members, bringing to life stories, memories, accounts from the past and inspiring new ideas and hopes for the future. The dolls also serve as a vehicle for sharing personal stories, which are known to help one reaffirm their own values, overcome adversity, help others, prioritize tasks/issues, and support a space to problem-solve (Stokes 2003).

Storytelling represents an important process of translating information in a way that is culturally meaningful and has impact on both the storyteller and the listener with both parties involved in the co-creation of knowledge. Throughout history, Indigenous peoples have held complex systems of knowledge, philosophy, government and medicine (Battiste and Henderson 2000; Gunn-Allen 1986; Smith 1999). These systems are often passed down through the practice of oral storytelling, which encases narratives that symbolize holism and cultural/political resurgence (Corntassel et al. 2009). Storytelling is also seen in dances, songs and paintings. It is displayed on message sticks, rock paintings and sand drawings. Storytelling is especially important because it is handed down to subsequent generations as a way of upholding ancient mantras and important teachings around cultural respect, responsibility and reciprocity. In fact, stories are dynamic (evolve over time) and help to guide decision-making and problem-solving (Leavitt 1995; Waldram et al. 1995). Storytelling has sustained Indigenous communities by validating the experiences of peoples in a space where knowledge is honoured, affirmed and shared (Iseke-Barnes 2010). Public storytelling is also known to be a tangible form of social action (Cruikshank 1997) with the ability to motivate and inspire people. Embedded within the concept of oral storytelling is 'yarning' – an informal conversation that Australian Indigenous people recognize as a way to provide or receive information. Yarning is a way for a group of people to share their own stories and learn from the stories of others. It plays an important role in ensuring cultural security and thus allows for deep discussions and conversations of intimate topics.

All the many different uses for the yarning process (social, therapeutic, collaborative, research) are not only conducive to Indigenous ways of doing and knowing, but they also contribute to the re-dressing of social powers by demanding an equal level of human interaction among those involved (Bessarab 2012). Social yarning is used as an informal, unstructured

way to build relationships and can include gossip, news, advice or comedy. Research yarning is also inclusive and interactive but done with the purpose of gathering information, while collaborative yarning is an active discussion involving two or more people. Therapeutic yarning involves the sharing of a traumatic or intensely emotional experience that aims to empower and support the storyteller.

Telling stories while making Gomeroi Yarning dolls utilizes all of the yarning approaches and the social skills that are important for personal and community functioning. In addition, it promotes traditional art forms that help people learn how to communicate more clearly, relate and empathize with different people, build networks (social capital), contribute ideas, and learn to apply pro-social values (Barraket 2005; Stokes 2003). The communal practice allows people with different skill levels to come together and conduct the same activity, which supports the learning process (Light 2010). Similar to other visual arts projects, the making of Gomeroi Yarning dolls provides an opportunity for senior community members to practise their traditional arts and pass along that knowledge to the younger generation. This translation builds cohesion and cultural solidarity, and increases a sense of shared heritage (Cooper et al. 2012; Palmer 2010). The facilitation of intergenerational learning, sharing stories, and building communication skills aids in the active transmission of cultural knowledge, builds capacity, and reclaims Indigenous space and identity. Through the development of these specific threads within the fabric of Indigenous peoples' view of well-being, local communities are strengthened and supported in a sustainable, cost-effective way. A sample of a Gomeroi Yarning doll created by an Elder woman during a doll-making workshop at the Gomeroi gaaynggal Center (Tamworth, NSW, Australia) and the personal narrative that is represented by the doll can be seen in Figure 2.



Figure 2: Doll of Mum by Aunty Pearl Slater from Walhollow/Caroona, NSW, Australia.

This doll is my mum, Aunty Eileen Slater. She lived until the ripe old age of 85. In 1992 when Queen Elizabeth II came to Australia, mum was invited to have lunch with her. Unfortunately no one in the family can recall why she was invited to the luncheon with the queen.

On the day of the luncheon mum wore a pale blue suit, it was one of her most prized outfits. When she passed away we buried her in her pale blue suit. This is the outfit I have dressed my doll in. The doll reminds me of my mum and I miss her (2014).

To provide more detail, we also offer a brief cameo (including samples) of the Gomeroi yarning doll programme that we built into the Gomeroi gaaynggal programme:

The Gomeroi gaaynggal programme

The Gomeroi gaaynggal programme is an Arts Health programme based in Tamworth, NSW, Australia, that was established in 2009. This programme seeks to develop a culturally safe method of providing additional support to Aboriginal mothers during the prenatal and early postnatal period. The Arts Health programme offers an informal forum to facilitate health-related discussions and interchange cultural knowledge. The programme offers many different artistic mediums: belly-casting, casting of children's hands or feet, painting, weaving, and doll-making. Doll-making enables yarning to occur naturally and in a non-threatening manner. The Gomeroi doll-making sessions aim to increase the Elders' history, knowledge and experience by engaging Elders with the younger generations in a relaxed and safe environment. Attendees become joined in the mutually positive activity of creating dolls and recording their conversations on digital media so that the passing of oral history from generation to generation can be captured. The Elders will frequently discuss the meaning behind their dolls, sharing personal narratives of their life experiences with the others. The conversations that can be heard are often dotted with laughter, displaying the unique therapeutic impacts of gathering together to engage in traditional art forms and promote individual and collective Indigenous identity.

We come to understand sorrow or love or joy or indecision in particularly rich ways [...] This richness and nuance cannot be expressed in definitions, statements of fact, or abstract propositions. It can only be evoked through story.

(Carter 1993: 6)

The process

The workshop planning period lasted twelve months (November 2012–November 2013). During this time, all Elders groups in Tamworth and Walgett were consulted with respect to the value and feasibility of doll-making workshops. All were in agreement with the positive impact that doll-making could have within the community, as an effective way for community members to resolve some of the pain and grief experienced in their personal and community history. The Gomeroi gaaynggal team held informal meetings with four Elders groups and spoke with the mothers who attended the Gomeroi gaaynggal programmes within the Tamworth and Walgett areas. The meetings with the Elders were very constructive as the Elders felt the traditional art form of doll-making was in line with promoting Indigenous traditions and was a

beneficial way to engage young people, especially pregnant women and those with young children.

The team worked with a group of Elders to plan the finer details around the logistics that would need to be in place for the doll-making sessions to be a success. The group discussed what craft materials were needed, issues around booking reliable transportation for the attendees, arrangement of catering for morning tea/lunch, and the organization of cameras and video-recording equipment. The doll-making sessions were planned weekly at the Gomeroi gaaynggal Centre. This venue was selected because it is a culturally safe environment where Elders and mothers could feel comfortable and relaxed. Additionally, the group wanted to ensure that everyone could create a doll and that it would not be so challenging that a beginner would lose interest in the creative process. The team and Elders wanted to ensure the engagement of individuals with varying creative skills sets. One of the team members (a non-sewer) created a doll independently to determine how long it would take a beginner. Although dependent on the individual, it can take up to 6–8 hours to make a complete doll; therefore, full-day sessions were planned. This alleviated any time restrictions that would potentially influence the quality of yarning, sharing personal narratives, discussing different issues, and learning from each other. Each workshop attendee was required to provide written informed consent for participation in the session and use of their personal photos and videography for publications and doll exhibitions. The group decided that they wanted all dolls to be completely hand stitched so that a beginner could be involved and costs could be minimized. Most importantly the hand stitching meant that yarning conversation would not be limited by the noise of a machine.

Gomeroi Yarning dolls are made to represent a particular person in the participant's life (figurative or literal). Thus, it is often decided ahead of time who the doll will symbolize. This helped direct decisions around selecting materials for the actual construction of the doll. Participants were told this in advance so they had time to consider fabrics and obtain special fabrics if needed. This included fabric from a child's dress, a mother's scarf, or a favourite colour. Choosing these fabrics could often take longer than other aspects of the doll-making.

During the sessions, each participant was interviewed with open-ended questions relating to her dolls and her experiences with motherhood and raising children. Also, it was agreed between the Arts Health staff and the Elders that photos and video recordings would be captured of the attendees constructing their dolls and sitting in a circle yarning with one another.

The findings

The Gomeroi gaaynggal programme has held a total of seven doll-making workshops between November 2013 and December 2015, with each workshop serving ten to twenty attendees in both Tamworth and Walgett. The first workshop was held on 6 November 2013. The preparation for each workshop was small, needing only to ensure transport for participants, food for lunch, and ample supplies of needles, scissors and fabrics. Fabrics came predominantly from donations and old clothing or linen. Embellishments including ribbons and old buttons were also collected. The team found that many participants arrived on the day with a bundle of bits and pieces and had a clear idea of who their doll would represent.

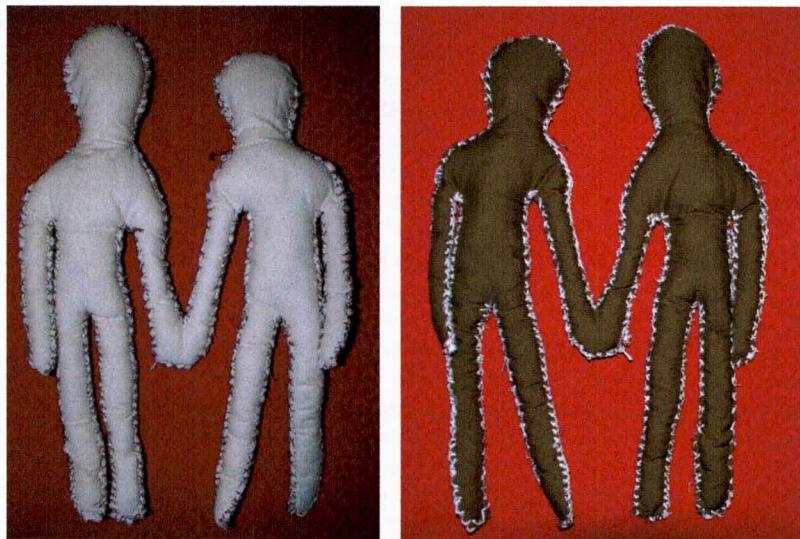
Observing the yarning over the workshops to date has been such a pleasure that it is sometimes challenging to be in the office working on other activities when the Elders are at the studio. The art studio is full of hilarity, gossip and amazing personal stories of resilience. The Elders and mothers reported that making the dolls was of great enjoyment to them and many have continued making dolls outside the sessions offered at the Gomeroi gaayngaal Center. One such participant has recently made her eleventh doll and says she has 'become addicted as I never had my own doll, now I can't get enough'. Every doll has a unique beauty and showcases meaningful people and events. Many stories were shared within the yarning circle, opening up much discussion around the participants' upbringing, motherhood, what bush medicine and food was once eaten, and current life realities. A film that captures all of the discussions was made and will be used as a future cultural learning tool for all of the Gomeroi gaayngaal mothers, the schoolchildren who visit the centre to learn more about Indigenous culture, and health students who will care for future Indigenous people. To date, this project is ongoing because many of the previous workshop attendees have claimed that they have 'more dolls' to share. Figures 3–5 display a selection of three dolls made between 2013 and 2015.

This doll is my Nan. I have made her as an angel because she was an angel to me when she was alive and I am sure she is an angel now in heaven.

Nan was a part of the Stolen Generation and she really didn't talk about her life as a child or early years because of this. I learnt about her life through other people telling me. She was the inspiration for me to start this yarning doll project to give a platform for Elders, grandmothers, aunts and others to pass on their life stories and knowledge to the younger generation so we can keep our stories, culture and heritage alive.



Figure 3: My Nan by Loretta Weatherall from Walgett, NSW, Australia.



Figures 4 and 5: Will and Tom by Lyniece Keogh from Tamworth, NSW, Australia.

These dolls are a reflection of my sons Will and Tom. Their hands are joined together because they are twins. This style also reminds me of my own childhood when we made cut-outs at school like this. I have made them with both brown- and cream-coloured materials to reflect their dual identity as strong young Aboriginal men, and also their European heritage. The stitching that holds these dolls together is both coarse (to reflect their rough and tumble attitude to life, love of the outdoors, the bush and nature) and strong (to symbolize my connection to them and to each other, a bond that is unbreakable).

Overall, the Gomeroi gaayngaal doll-making workshops support the space for communities to engage in Indigenous cultural activities. Through building and sustaining new and old relationships with oneself and with each other, these sessions have important social impacts that improve physical, mental, spiritual and emotional health. Having Indigenous and non-Indigenous people come together to collaboratively reconfigure, heal and co-create new goals for a community is a difficult task to achieve. However, doll-making workshops encourage these challenging discussions in a safe environment. The shared yarning process experienced by the doll-makers encourage a shared journey of healing that may assist many of the Elders and their families in recovering from past traumatic histories and unresolved truths. Elders and youth have continued to gather to form and re-form cultural identity and learn through the sharing of stories, knowledge and life experiences. Making dolls promotes the practice of oral storytelling and yarning in a comfortable non-threatening way – in a way, through the deep connections that are formed between people, that is conducive to healing. The space that is created by yarning circles is culturally safe for Elders and young people to come together to re-stitch old identities and meanings and perhaps even create new identities, finding new ways to bind oneself together. In fact, all of the sessions have led to such fruitful conversations, stories and doll creations that participants have repeatedly requested the continuation of these gatherings. In addition, the digital media presentations of the personal narratives that accompany this workshop series will become powerful local histories that will resonate with

local community members and allow non-Indigenous people to learn more about the unique realities faced by Indigenous peoples. With the rich meanings that thread through each and every doll, there is no doubt that these creations are destined to be cherished throughout Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian communities. To share these experiences with those who were unable to attend the sessions, a selection of dolls made during the Gomeroi gaayngaal workshops will be featured in art exhibitions accepted for 2017.

To strengthen our work with the Gomeroi Yarning workshops, we sought out other community-based projects to explore whether doll-making practices were being used to support healing within other Indigenous communities. We report on two other doll-making projects with the Six Nations of the Grand River (Canada) and the Indigenous women of KwaZulu Natal (South Africa).

SIX NATIONS OF THE GRAND RIVER CORNHUSK DOLLS (CANADA)

The Six Nations of the Grand River is a reserve of the Haudenosaunee People, the largest First Nations population in Canada. According to the Six Nations Lands/Membership Department (December 2013), there are 25,660 band council members, of whom 12,271 live within the Six Nations First Nation Territory (190km² of land Southwest of Hamilton Ontario and bordered by Brantford, Norfolk County, and Haldimand County).

The Six Nations, consisting of Mohawk, Oneida, Cayuga, Seneca, Onondaga and Tuscarora peoples, were unified under the Great Tree of Peace in order to sustain peaceful decision-making. The Confederacy states that each of the Nations should come together with the primary goal of living



Figure 6: Map of Canada with notation for the land that currently represents the Six Nations of the Grand River Reservation.

together in harmony, where law, society and nature play equal and important roles. The Grand Council is given sanction to handle the matters that affect the nations within the Confederacy; however, it also allows each nation to uphold its own council and handle its own nation-specific internal affairs. Six Nations has therefore maintained very diverse cultures and includes different types of art forms, including expressive dance, sculptures, paintings and the making of corn husk dolls.

Six Nations Cornhusk dolls are made by wrapping and tying layers of dried corn cob leaves (the husk) into a human figure shape. They are additionally embellished with colourful beads, yarn, leather, feathers and/or felt pieces. Cornhusk dolls are often made to showcase cultural teachings (e.g. sacred responsibility of parenthood, the 'Peacemaker's journey' – a Haudenosaunee (First Nations group that includes the Six Nations people) cultural story that highlights important human values) and stories, and to pass on knowledge about community identity. The teaching of traditional narratives translates important communal values, supporting the promotion of cultural connectedness among community members. Cultural connectedness is a culturally specific protective factor that quantifies the extent to which an Indigenous person is integrated into his or her Indigenous culture (Snowshoe et al. 2014). The degree of cultural connectedness is correlated to positive health benefits in Indigenous peoples, particularly in regard to mental health. By supporting identity building (individual and communal) and promoting traditional views, making and displaying cornhusk dolls is a culturally generated vehicle for encouraging a connection to Indigenous principles among Six Nations youth and adults. This effort strengthens local communities through the creation of space that supports a healing process and helps to reclaim Indigenous identity and space. A sample of cornhusk dolls and the cultural narrative that accompanies them is provided.



Figure 7: Cornhusk dolls of the Three Sisters (Beans, Corn and Squash).

'Our sustenance.

We gather our minds together to send greetings and thanks to the plants that we grow and harvest, our sustenance, corn, beans, and squash. You continue your duty to sustain us. With one mind we send greetings and thanks.

Now our minds are one'.

Many Cornhusk dolls are made without faces to: exemplify the cultural belief that vanity should be avoided; and to allow people to define their own criteria for beauty (Courtesy of Elizabeth Doxtator, *Everything Cornhusk*, Oshweken, Ontario).

SIYAZAMA ZULU DOLLS (SOUTH AFRICA)

KwaZulu-Natal is the sub-tropical garden province of South Africa. Washed by the warm waters of the Indian Ocean, KwaZulu is bordered by Port Edward to the south, Swaziland and Mozambique to the north, and the mountainous range to the west.

Indigenous Zulu people ('The people of heaven') speak Zulu language, which is one of South Africa's most widely spoken languages.



Figure 8: Map of Africa with notation for the land that currently represents Kwa Zulu Natal, South Africa. Image courtesy of Big Picture Ministries, 2012.

Traditional Siyazama Zulu dolls are created by rural beadmakers in remote KwaZulu-Natal. These doll-makers first gathered for a project that would help support their personal incomes; however, the communal effort quickly evolved into a powerful synergy of sitting together and sharing information (sometimes intimate details) about HIV/AIDS and learning strategies for peer support. The Siyazama doll-making project evolved in the late 1990s when there was much fear about the consequences related to HIV/AIDS and many of the doll-makers were affected by this in some way. Most often this was as a concerned community member and woman in a society in which there was little understanding of contraception. Siyazama Zulu dolls are large beaded dolls constructed from a variety of materials that range from metal pieces to fabric, yarn and recycled trinkets. They are topped with a beaded red hat to represent a rural Zulu woman's commitment in a marriage and marked with a blue and white motif to symbolize a relationship to HIV/AIDS. The reason for using the blue and white beading is to make a statement against the stigmatized red beading that is commonly used to represent HIV/AIDS awareness.

The opportunity to hear about the physical, mental and social complexities of AIDS became a transformational process for many of the doll-makers. In fact, learning and sharing these unique stories created the mental space to be able to produce a variety of beaded masterpieces representing the struggles of women and their increasing anger against the AIDS pandemic. Over time, this led to a change in personal attitudes, and AIDS awareness began to show a presence in rural communities. The Siyazama dolls promote the role of art and design in encouraging Indigenous knowledge and skills in addition to being a vehicle that disseminates important information about HIV/AIDS in a non-threatening way among the most economically marginalized and vulnerable people in South Africa – rural women. This sharing process also leads to the enhancement of community-level support networks among those that have and/or will face the emotional, mental and physical realities of HIV/AIDS in their lifetime. The strengthening of (illness) support networks creates a communal space for an open dialogue that supports a healing process and helps build capacity for individuals to learn new problem-solving skills. The literal space where the women gather to construct dolls and share personal stories allows for the reclaiming of Indigenous identity. The concerted effect of these factors helps to improve well-being through the strengthening of local communities. A Siyazama doll with the AIDS awareness story that accompanies has been included as a sample.

During the time that Oprah Winfrey was in and out of South Africa inaugurating a new all girl school, we were also beginning a new Siyazama doll workshop series that involved everyday First Aid for rural caregivers (e.g. how to deal with choking, CPR, hygiene, and caring for the very ill – often for those who cared for extremely sick HIV/AIDS patients). Inspired by Oprah's organization, the Angel Network, I decided to buy cream/white fabrics, white/cream/opalescent beads. Once the women saw this they were intrigued – as normally I supply a bundle of brightly coloured beads and coloured bright fabrics – which are traditionally Zulu.

I remember thinking this was a 'Major Intervention' as I really felt I was interfering and meddling wherein as before I tried hard never to interrupt their traditional practices of doll-making. I felt I had no right. Yet it did not take long before they responded with 'we have angels in Zulu cosmology'. Our angels are called 'ingolosi' and they 'bring messages from God about how to care for others'.



Figure 9: Siyazama Angel Doll.

These white dolls not only assisted in exchanging knowledge about how to support extremely ill patients, they also highlight the dynamic state of Indigenous culture – something that is a collaborative, amalgamated symbol of the interactions that traditional doll-makers have with non-Indigenous people. These white dolls represent a parallel point between many different cultures that is preliminary for addressing issues around individual and communal identity (Story Courtesy of Kate Wells, the Director of the Siyazama Project, South Africa).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The unique designs of the Gomeroi Yarning dolls (promoting personal narratives), Six Nations Cornhusk dolls (promoting cultural teachings and cultural connectedness) and Siyazama Zulu dolls (promoting HIV/AIDS awareness and enhancing support networks) allow for the expression of local Indigenous community identity - which is essential for ensuring a holistic approach to well-being. This celebration of unique communal identity is deeply embedded in the Indigenous world-view of health. The impact is achieved by the individual contributions of these cultural art forms to become a notable art form for strengthening local communities. By creating an open dialogue that supports a healing process, bringing people together to help support the learning of new problem-solving skills, and reclaiming Indigenous space and identity, doll-making is a culturally generated vehicle for the long-term positive impact on Indigenous peoples' health.

Two stipulations regarding the benefits of this type of visual art form must be addressed: (1) those who are not interested or skilled within the specific techniques may be excluded, further increasing social marginalization for

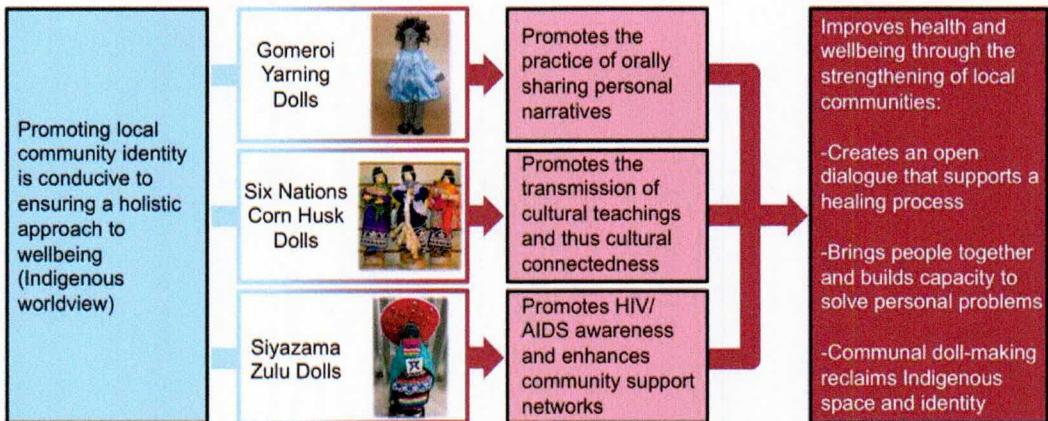


Figure 10: Framework illustrating the relationship between three Indigenous doll-making styles and how they strengthen local communities.

some members within the community. To address this concern, communal doll-making sessions can include instructions and teachings around how to perform the craft with extra help offered to those who need it. In addition, displaying a selection of handmade dolls in art exhibitions or gatherings in a way that is inclusive and easily accessible allows everyone who attends to create a meaningful experience and benefit further. (2) The benefits gained from traditional art forms are difficult to measure because they are often diffuse and occur over long periods of time (Mulligan and Smith 2006; Stokes 2003). However, the lack of quantitative data does not equate to a lack of benefits. Instead, a long-term view of benefits must be maintained because it is not appropriate to manipulate the impact of these communal traditional activities for short-term gain (Allain 2011; Mulligan and Smith 2006).

Doll-making is an intrinsic part of many Indigenous cultures across the world, including these communities in Australia, Canada and South Africa. Doll-making in all three of these cultures represents a transfer of cultural knowledge, building of capacity, and the reclaiming of Indigenous identity, on both a local and a collective level. The benefits of these outcomes are important to supporting health and well-being in Indigenous communities. Through the revitalization of such culturally generated behaviours and activities, these three projects showcase effective ways to move forward from the pain and grief experienced by Indigenous communities and work collaboratively towards building a healthier future for subsequent generations.

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