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Title

Connecting the Experiences of First Nations and Inuit Care Providers in the Wise Choices Program Through the Group Analysis Method

Abstract

This article offers a detailed methodological examination of how the Group Analysis Method was implemented and adapted during a three-day research seminar involving First Nations and Inuit care providers engaged in the Wise Choices program, a substance use intervention program codeveloped with Indigenous partners. It also provides a critical analysis of the process and its cultural relevance in the context of Indigenous research. Building on long-standing relationships established through the program's development and evaluation, the seminar sought to create a culturally grounded space for participants to share experiential knowledge, reflect on their roles and challenges as care providers, and jointly identify strategies to support their well-being. The description of the process and adaptations implemented underscores the cultural relevance of storytelling as a means of transmitting knowledge, the usefulness of graphic facilitation for supporting collective analysis, and the importance of centring Indigenous cultural practices as sources of knowledge. Using Kovach's Indigenous conceptual framework as an analytical grid further enables an assessment of the cultural relevance of the methodological process deployed. The collective analysis led to the co-construction of a ten-component model reflecting the shared experiences of the First Nations and Inuit care providers who participated. The seminar also generated methodological insights: when used with cultural humility, grounded in relationships of trust, supported by Indigenous ways of doing things, and embedded within a long-term collaborative approach, the Group Analysis Method can be consistent with the conceptual framework described by Kovach. However, limitations – such as reliance on colonial languages and the Western origins of the method – highlight the need for continued adaptation and greater use of Indigenous languages. Overall, this study shows that decolonized and culturally congruent adaptations of the Group Analysis Method, if they are part of a relational approach and an ongoing process of critical reflection, can meaningfully support participatory research with Indigenous communities and produce community relevant knowledge.

Keywords

Indigenous Peoples; First nations; Inuit; Community Health Workers; Qualitative Research; Community-Based Participatory Research; Storytelling; Graphic Methods

The Roots of the Study

In 2017, a research seminar bringing together addiction intervention stakeholders from First Nations and Inuit communities was held in Wendake, Quebec (Canada). Using the Group Analysis Method, whose foundations are storytelling and co-constructed analysis (van Campenhoudt et al., 2005), participants discussed issues related to addiction intervention practices in their communities and highlighted the need

to develop new approaches that are culturally appropriate and consistent with a harm reduction philosophy (Plourde et al., 2024). Harm reduction is recognized as a promising approach for reducing the health inequities faced by Indigenous peoples; however, it raises challenges in terms of social acceptability and cultural appropriateness, underscoring the importance of working in co-construction with communities when implementing interventions grounded in this approach (Cole et al., 2023; Haddad et al., 2025; Zolopa et al, 2025). The research seminar laid the foundation for the Sage Usage/Wise Choices/ My Choices Nunavik – Nallikaaqtaka – ᓇᓪᓕᑲᖅᑕᒃ program (Wise Choices), developed for and with First Nations and Inuit peoples, which aims to support them in their choices regarding substance use and to develop strategies for achieving and maintaining their goals (Plourde et al., 2023). This program can be offered in various formats, including as part of an on-the-land stay that incorporates traditional activities specific to the Nation on whose territory it is being held.

The Group Analysis Method, which is based on sharing stories and co-construction (van Campenhoudt et al., 2005), proved to be relevant for addressing the sensitive issue of substance use in an Indigenous[1] context, but researchers found that it also had some limitations and made recommendations regarding its use with First Peoples (Plourde et al., 2024). To avoid perpetuating epistemic inequalities experienced by Indigenous peoples in research (Smith, 2021), they suggested, among other things, developing strategies to include participants more actively in the analysis and construction of hypotheses, as well as creating more space for Indigenous knowledge (Plourde et al., 2024). Thus, the research team believes that by applying these recommendations, the Group Analysis Method can be a tool for working congruently with an Indigenous epistemological perspective, and that it is therefore relevant to disseminate it while taking a critical stance.

Since 2017, the Wise Choices program has been developed collaboratively with an advisory committee[2] of First Nations and Inuit addiction care providers[3] (Plourde et al., 2023). A qualitative implementation evaluation has been completed (Alarie-Vézina et al., 2024), and a study on its outcomes and sustainability is ongoing. These activities enabled sustained collaboration with care providers across training, land-based implementation, and workshops, fostering enduring trust among the research team, advisory members, and trained care providers. One of the main implementation challenges identified both in formal evaluation activities and in informal consultations with program stakeholders concerns the complex reality of the role of care providers. Indigenous workers supporting community members who are experiencing difficulties related to substance use or other psychosocial issues face multiple pressures, including relational proximity and perceived social expectations (Fitzpatrick et al., 2024; Roche et al., 2013b). They often face high expectations, including constant availability, and complex situations involving dual relationships within their communities (Fitzpatrick et al., 2024; Roche et al., 2013a). Despite this, they are best positioned to deliver culturally safe care attuned to community realities

[1] We recognize that the word “Indigenous” is limited since it implies a uniformity among distinct peoples who have diverse traditions and histories of colonization. In this article, we will therefore refer specifically to the First Nations and Inuit who are participating in the project and use the word “Indigenous” inclusively to refer to a network of people who share experiences of colonization of their territories and cultures (Smith, 2021).

[2] As the Wise Choices project is collaborative in nature, its development and evaluation are guided by an advisory committee composed mainly of Indigenous people, but also including non-Indigenous people involved in addiction intervention in the First Nations and Inuit communities participating in the project.

[3] In this article, we will use the term “care provider” to refer to all individuals who work in psychosocial support roles in indigenous communities.

(Fitzpatrick et al., 2024; Quelch et al., 2025). However, their well-being and context-specific needs – especially in addiction care – remain underexplored (Roche et al., 2013b). These findings and observations prompted the research team to become concerned with the well-being of care providers, who expressed the need to have an open dialogue about their experiences and to acquire practical tools to help them navigate the challenges they face. Building on the results from 2017 research seminar using the Group Analysis Method, the research team felt that using this method again, while incorporating the recommendations issued, was the natural choice for addressing this need expressed by the care providers partnering on the project.

Research conducted in Indigenous contexts remains shaped by a legacy of inappropriate practices and by enduring structures of colonialism and imperialism (Khan et al., 2024), which persist notably through the marginalization of Indigenous knowledge within academic institutions (Anderson et al., 2025; Smith, 2021). On the path to decolonization and indigenization of research practices, participatory and community-based approaches, as well as the use of culturally appropriate methods consistent with Indigenous epistemologies, are recognized as the best ways to produce knowledge that is relevant and useful to communities (Lenette, 2022; Simonds & Christopher, 2013). A commonly proposed way to address these tensions is Etuaptmumk (Two-Eyed Seeing), developed by Mi'gmaq Elders Murdena and Albert Marshall, which promotes the respectful and equitable integration of Indigenous and Western knowledge systems (Bartlett et al., 2012; Forbes et al., 2020). However, its use requires critical reflexivity, as oversimplification may reproduce colonial power dynamics and obscure fundamental epistemological tensions (Broadhead & Howard, 2021). Consistent with this critical understanding of Two-Eyed Seeing, this inquiry, focused on the experience of care providers, seeks to be grounded in an Indigenous conceptual framework, namely the model described by Kovach, 2021.

In this spirit, the purpose of this article is to provide a detailed account of the process implemented within the framework of the Group Analysis Method and to critically examine whether, and to what extent, this methodological approach aligns with the four foundations of an Indigenous conceptual framework as articulated by Kovach (2021).

The Group Analysis Method

The Group Analysis Method is a structured participatory research method based on sharing stories (van Campenhoudt et al., 2005). Developed in Belgium in the 1980s, it brings together 10-12 stakeholders directly concerned with and issue to co-construct interpretations and practical responses. Participants, considered experts, share stories of lived experiences with a few selected for in-depth collective analysis. Conducted over 2-3 days, the Group Analysis Method follows a flexible yet structured process across four phases: narration, interpretation, analysis, and practical perspectives (Van Campenhoudt, 2017; van Campenhoudt et al., 2005; Van Campenhoudt et al., 2009). Consistent with the limitations identified in the literature, namely that the method does not necessarily eliminate power dynamics, particularly due to the predominant role of researchers (D'Arripe et al., 2022), some modifications to the stages of the method were proposed following its experimentation to address addiction intervention among First Nations and Inuit peoples (Plourde et al., 2024). The stages of the method are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1

Steps of the Group Analysis Method and Adaptations

Van Campenhoudt *et al*., 2005				Adaptations by Plourde *et al*., 2024			
PHASE 1 Narration	PHASE 2 Interpretation	PHASE 3 Analysis	PHASE 4 Practical Perspectives & Evaluation	PHASE 1 **Stories**	PHASE 2 Interpretation	PHASE 3 **Collective** Analysis	PHASE 4 Practical Perspectives & Evaluation
Step 1 Narrative Proposals	**Step 6* First Round Table	*Step 11* Convergences and Divergences	*Step 14* Practical Perspectives	*Step 1* **Story** Proposals	*Step 6* First **Circle**	*Step 11* Convergences and Divergences	*Step 14* Practical Perspectives
Step 2 Narrative Selection	**Step 7* Narrator's Reactions	*Step 12* Theoretical Contributions	*Step 15* Evaluation	*Step 2* Selection of **Stories**	*Step 7* **Storyteller's** Reactions	*Step 12* **Sharing Visions and Contributions**	*Step 15* Evaluation
**Step 3* Narration	**Step 8* Replaying the Story (if necessary)	*Step 13* Researcher's Hypotheses		*Step 3* **Storytellin**g	*Step 8* Replaying the **Story** (if necessary)	*Step 13* **Co-constructing Hypotheses**	
**Step 4* Stakes From the Narrator's Point of View	**Step 9* Second Round Table			*Step 4* Stakes From the **Storyteller's** Point of View	*Step 9* Second **Circle**		
**Step 5* Information Questions	**Step 10* Narrator's Reaction			*Step 5* Information Questions	*Step 10* Storyteller's Reaction		

**Steps 4 to 10 must be repeated for each story analyzed.*

Four Core Foundations of an Indigenous Conceptual Framework (Kovach, 2021)

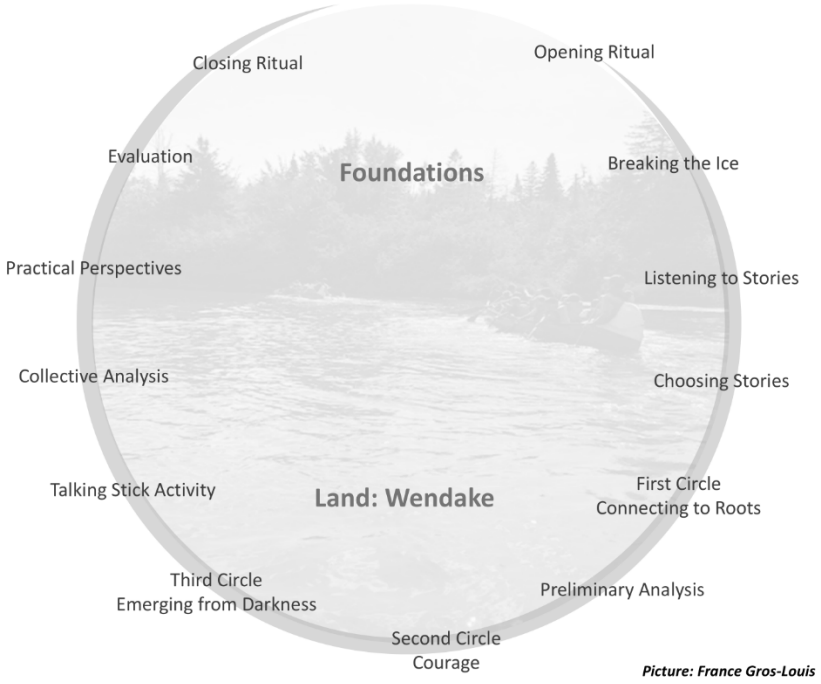
Kovach (2021), an Indigenous researcher (Nêhiyaw and Saulteaux), describes four interdependent foundations for an Indigenous conceptual framework: Indigenous epistemology, Indigenous ethics, Indigenous communities (including places and territory), and the experience of self in relationship. While not claiming that there is a universal way of conducting research among Indigenous peoples, she does identify broad principles that are relatively stable across Indigenous cultures, but that are actualized in very different ways depending on specific cultures (Kovach, 2021). **Indigenous Epistemology** refers to beliefs regarding the creation of knowledge, emphasizing a holistic conception in which sources of knowledge are multiple – beyond human-centric perspectives – both tangible and intangible (such as dreams, ceremonies, and events), strongly contextualized, and rooted in relationships with community and territory (Kovach, 2021). **Indigenous Ethics** correspond to the axiological premise that guides research. Even though Indigenous-led research is gaining increasing prominence within the academic world, it is important to consider that research in Indigenous contexts is marked by a history of unethical and extractivist practices, which has understandably given rise to mistrust. Indigenous research ethics go beyond compliance with institutional codes of ethics; rather, they are about fostering good relationships based on trust and reciprocity. They also involve questioning the real relevance of research by assessing its potential benefits for communities as well as the negative consequences of misinterpretation or misuse of the knowledge disseminated (Kovach, 2021). **Indigenous Communities** in research include places and ancestral territory, the latter being closely connected to identity. Community involvement in a research project must be considered from a collectivist perspective, i.e., beyond individual consent (which remains important nonetheless). Community engagement involves a relationship of trust that must be nurtured through concrete actions and a concern for engagement stress, a concept that encompasses research-related fatigue as well as the need to cope with a constant increase in research demands (Brunger & Wall, 2016; Kovach, 2021). Finally, the **Experiencing Self in Relationship** refers to the purpose of research (research projects ought to be meaningful on both a personal and collective level), the preparation for research (building relationships with the community and immersing oneself in its culture in a respectful manner), as well as self-locating (both broadly and in relation to the research) (Kovach, 2021).

The Process: The Group Analysis Method Put into Practice

This section details the process deployed when implementing the Group Analysis Method, as summarized in Figure 1.

Figure 1

The Group Analysis Method Put into Practice



Foundations

The process deployed was co-constructed through relationships of trust, forged within the framework of a long-term commitment through the Wise Choices project. Preparation of this research seminar began in the fall of 2023 and drew on collaborative work between the research team and members of the Wise Choices project advisory committee, as well as recommendations arising from the experience of implementing the Group Analysis Method in 2017. These recommendations mainly consisted of giving greater prominence to Indigenous knowledge by increasing the involvement of participants in the process of analyzing the data collected through the method, since that process had been conducted predominantly by the researchers (Plourde et al., 2024). The challenge was to identify a strategy that would actively engage the group in the analysis process in a culturally appropriate and accessible manner, ensuring that participation felt meaningful and connected to their reality, despite the fact that the participants are not researchers and may have limited interest in conventional, abstract forms of analysis.

Graphic facilitation, a process whereby ideas generated by a group are visually recorded using words, images, and symbols while discussions are taking place, has been used in research with Indigenous communities and has been found to be culturally relevant (Doria et al., 2019) and conducive of equitable power distribution (Wright et al., 2023). Following these authors' recommendations, the team engaged an experienced graphic facilitator with prior work alongside First Peoples. Considering the presence of multiple languages (Indigenous and colonial) among participants, as well as varying levels of research-related knowledge, graphic facilitation helps generate materials that are understandable and meaningful for all participants (Doria et al., 2019; Wright et al., 2023). Several preparatory meetings were held to ensure alignment with the values underlying the project and a clear understanding of the project. It was agreed that all discussions occurring during the seminar would be illustrated.

Eligibility criteria required participants to be employed in a partner community[4] of the project, to have completed the Wise Choices program training and having taken part in its format during an on-the-land stay, to demonstrate an interest in the purpose of the seminar, and to be available to attend the in-person event in Wendake from June 2 to 4, 2025. In order to capture the unique perspective of Indigenous care providers, non-Indigenous care providers involved in the program could not be included. The research team then selected participants, prioritizing equitable representation of the communities involved and striving to achieve gender parity wherever possible. The group of participants consisted of twelve (12) participants, including five (5) men and seven (7) women. They came from four (4) different Nations (Inuit, Innu, Atikamekw, and Wendat) and six (6) different communities (Kuujjuaq, Pessamit, Ekuanitshit, Manawan, Opitciwan, and Wendake). Eight (8) of the twelve (12) participants in the research seminar were also members of the Wise Choices project advisory committee. The graphic facilitator (non-Indigenous) and four (4) members of the research team (non-Indigenous) were also present during the three-day seminar. The research team includes two researchers who have been conducting research with First Nations and Inuit communities for over fifteen years (CP, JT), a research professional who has been involved in the Wise Choices project since 2019 and maintains close ties with the project's partner communities (JB), as well as a doctoral student who has been involved in the project since 2019 after living and working in Inuit territory from 2008 to 2017 (PAV).

To give further prominence to Indigenous knowledge, it was agreed that each day would begin with a prayer, ritual, or opening remarks led by a participant from a different Nation, and that participants would engage in a cultural activity led by a member of the host Nation. These practices, recognized as legitimate sources of knowledge within Indigenous methodologies (Kovach, 2021; Lavallée, 2009), were intended to create an atmosphere conducive to inter-Nation dialogue, with Indigenous knowledge systems at the forefront.

Prior to the seminar, the research team and advisory committee engaged in formal and informal meetings to prepare for the event. This dynamic and evolving process continued until the day before the seminar, as details and objectives were progressively refined. A few weeks beforehand, online meetings were held with participants to explain the structure of the event and gather their feedback. Participants also received a preparatory document outlining key information and inviting them to prepare a story following these

[4] Participants include addiction workers, cultural workers, and wellness workers. All provide a form of support to people in their communities who are experiencing difficulties, including difficulties related to substance use.

instructions: “Tell us about a situation you have experienced as a My Choices care provider with people in your community. (If you have not used the My Choices program, or have used it very little, you can base your story on a situation you have experienced in your role as a care provider for people with addiction)”.

Logistics

The *Hotel-Musée Premières Nations* (First Nations Hotel-Museum) was the natural choice to host the seminar, as it offered all the necessary facilities and was easily accessible for all participants. Furthermore, as it was the venue of the first seminar in 2017 that gave rise to the program and led to the current project, the site also carried significant symbolic value. Participants arrived the day before the seminar to ensure that everyone could rest (most participants had travelled a long way) and be comfortably settled and ready to begin work on the first day of the seminar.

Several Indigenous and colonial languages were represented among the participants. Although it would have been ideal, it was not realistic to have simultaneous translation of all languages, but English-French translation allowed for common understanding. Two interpreters and a technician were present throughout the seminar to translate participants' comments from French to English and vice versa. Each participant had a microphone in front of them and had to turn it on when they wanted to speak, which slightly altered the pace at the beginning but became quite fluid after the first morning. That said, at various points in the process, participants spoke in the language of their Nation and were able to explain certain words and expressions to others.

DAY 1

Welcoming and Opening

The research team welcomed the participants with a brief introduction, expressing their emotions at returning to the same venue where a similar seminar had taken place in 2017, which sparked the development of the Wise Choices program. They also emphasized that the three-day seminar would offer an opportunity for care providers to focus on themselves: their experiences and experiential knowledge. They stated their intention to create a pleasant and thoughtful atmosphere, in a spirit of co-construction aimed at identifying ways to better support them in their role.

An opening ceremony, led by a Wendat artist and woman of the longhouse, marked the beginning of the seminar. With great humility, she reflected on her journey and the wisdom that had been passed on to her, moments before performing the Ancestor’s Song. She offered a powerful message of gratitude and unity, underscoring the sacred ties that connect us all to Mother-Earth and affirming the essential role of care providers within their communities. The group listened with deep attention and emotion, as her words offered a source of profound inspiration.

Breaking the Ice

During the preparatory meetings for the event, participants had been asked to bring an object or image representing them as care providers. Taking turns, participants introduced themselves and, referring to the symbol they had chosen, shared aspects of their values and personalities. A variety of objects and symbols were presented (canoe, medicine wheel, animals, etc.) evoking themes such as childhood, ancestors, connection to the land, personal healing journey, and spirituality. Participants' interest in each other was palpable through their verbal reactions and through the direct interactions that took place spontaneously. These first exchanges were marked by great depth and sincerity and laid the foundations for a climate of trust and reciprocity.

Listening to Stories

The first phase of the group analysis method aims to generate the basic material that will be used for interpretation and analysis in the subsequent phases (Plourde et al., 2024; van Campenhoudt et al., 2005; Van Campenhoudt et al., 2009). At this stage, participants are already in a spirit of collaboration, which allows for the establishment of connections and will be key to the co-construction work that will take place later on.

Participants are invited to share the story they have prepared in approximately five minutes. The story must be one that resonates with them and is related to their work within the Wise Choices program or, more generally, to their experience working with people affected by addiction. They are reminded that a few of these stories will be selected by the group for further analysis. As each person tells their story, the facilitator illustrates it on a large sheet of paper taped to the wall (see image 1).

Image 1

The Stories



It is a powerful moment of sharing, marked by attentive listening from all participants. Multiple dimensions linked to the experiences of care providers are brought to light, many of which recur across several stories. They mention challenges (intervening with someone in their family, having to deal with perceptions of their work by members of the community), strengths (patience, non-judgment, courage), contexts (land-based intervention, crisis situations), and practices (use of spirituality, use of symbols). Participants gave titles to their stories: Old Times, Kindness, Emerging from Darkness, Courage, Connecting to Roots, Choice, A Scene, Hope, Working Together, Recognizing Each Other, Walking Together, and Accomplishment.

Choosing Stories

When everyone returns from lunch, the graphic facilitator briefly summarizes each story, partly so that participants can keep them in mind during the voting process, and partly so that each person can request corrections to the drawing representing their story if it is not entirely accurate. None of the participants asked for their story to be corrected, but some members of the research team felt that minor details were inaccurate and hypothesized that the participants were uncomfortable pointing out the graphic facilitator's mistakes in front of the group.

Participants are invited to engage in a process to select the stories that will be explored in greater depth over the coming days. They are reminded that all stories are valuable and knowledge bearing, and that even those stories that are not selected have a role to play in our journey. The graphic facilitator uses the metaphor of a river to illustrate the selection process. He explains that, during the lunch break, he went to the river and asked it to give the group the strength to hold on to certain stories and let go of others, like elements that cling to the shore and others that drift away with the current. He poured water into twelve containers, representing the twelve stories. He gave each participant five stones, which they could use freely to vote for the stories. A person could choose to put all five stones on the same story or divide them

among different stories. Participants therefore proceeded in an atmosphere of reflection and deep respect for the stories. The selected stories were “Connecting to Roots”, “Courage”, and “Emerging from Darkness”.

Telling the First Story: *Connecting to Roots*

The participant took time to elaborate on the story, providing additional details and emphasizing the emotions experienced as well as the contextual elements. In this account, this individual served as a care provider during an on-the-land stay as part of the Wise Choices program[5]. Having grown up with some of the clients, the care provider felt a degree of discomfort and uncertainty. Nevertheless, a profound connection to the land and the drum enabled the participant to live a positive and transformative experience, which unexpectedly led to quitting smoking.

Stakes from the Storyteller’s Point of View. For the participant, taking part in an on-the-land stay was a deeply meaningful experience that fostered learning, even while serving as a care provider. This experience is encapsulated in the following words: “we’re all students in the eyes of God”.

Information Questions. The story resonated strongly within the group, prompting participants to ask questions to gain a clearer understanding of the experience recounted. These questions focused on the emotions felt, the relationships with clients, the connection to the land, and the distinctive characteristics of the narrator's community.

First Circle. Participants are invited to take turns identifying how the story resonates with them, what they find interesting or important, and their initial interpretations. The sound of the drum clearly stands out as a powerful, unifying symbol associated with healing. Land-based intervention is described as an opportunity to forge authentic bonds and grow as a practitioner. Several participants also talk about working with people from their own community, which they describe as uncomfortable on some levels, but facilitating the creation of bonds once this discomfort is overcome. Participants expressed that they were moved and motivated by his testimony.

Storyteller’s Reactions. For the storyteller, being in traditional territory to support individuals with substance use issues is an experience that benefits both the care provider and the client. Simply being on the territory appears as a key ingredient in the therapeutic process. In response to another participant, who expressed deep gratitude for the testimony and sharing that it had nurtured the desire and confidence to quit smoking, the storyteller suggested beating the drum to affirm this intention. This created a powerful moment as the narrator approached the participant and offered guidance on how to use the drum to assert the intention.

The group and the research team observed saturation in the exchanges and did not consider it relevant to proceed with the stages of listening to the story again and doing a second circle. Before ending the day,

[5] The Wise Choices program can be offered in an intensive format over the course of a stay of several days on Indigenous Territory.

the researchers gauged the mood of the group, which seemed generally satisfied with the day. They also asked if everyone was comfortable with them doing some initial work to identify the convergences and divergences in the ideas discussed during the day, to provide a starting point for the analysis. The group agreed, and one participant even expressed surprise that the question had been asked, as she felt it was a given that researchers were part of the process and that their perceptions should be included.

DAY 2

Before the beginning of the activities, participants received a printed version of the drawing representing their story and were asked to write down any elements they would like to see changed. Most of them made notes on their drawings and were able to talk to the graphic facilitator individually about the adjustments, confirming the research team's hypothesis that the way the question had initially been asked had not made them feel comfortable enough to give their comments. Although the corrections required were minor, the participants put their hearts into the task and demonstrated great rigour and precision in the process.

Following this, an Innu participant offered an opening remark. First in the Innu language and then in French, the participant asked the Creator to provide the group with the tools to harmonize our ideas and wished everyone a good day. The principal investigator then expressed gratitude to the group for their energy and willingness to communicate with one another despite language challenges.

Preliminary Analysis

At the end of the first day, the research team and the graphic facilitator got together to attempt to identify areas of convergence and divergence in the participants' discourse. They identified six convergent themes (connection, willingness to help, self-care, connection to culture, patience, personal and community stories/traumas) and two divergent themes (training background, history of substance use). The next morning, a sheet with boxes for each of the themes identified by the researchers was given to the participants. As the team presented the different themes, participants were asked to write down words or images that came to their minds in relation to each theme. It was explained to them that the objective was to ensure that the elements identified were consistent with those shared the previous day and that they could, therefore, feel completely comfortable raising points of disagreement or nuances.

Participants actively and eagerly engaged in this collective analysis. They generally agreed with the converging themes presented (connection, willingness to help, self-care, connection to culture, patience, personal and community stories/traumas) and provided various examples and other words to clarify them. For example, the theme of “willingness to help” was clarified to become “bravery” and “personal and community stories/traumas” has been labelled as “trauma imprint”. Regarding the divergent themes (training background, history of substance use), participants did not agree that these were elements of

divergence and instead proposed a new convergent theme that included both elements: “Uniqueness and complementarity.”

Telling the Second Story: *Courage*

The participant shared a story about preparing to leave for a Wise Choices on-the-land stay. Acting as a care provider brought feelings of being an impostor, having to support people older in age. The story describes how a strong bond developed with a client who was initially distrustful. It turned out the client had known the participant as a child, and together they engaged in several traditional activities, which helped the client open up. After the retreat, the client began making positive changes and is now doing better.

Stakes from the Storyteller. The participant eloquently captures the essential idea of the story in this sentence: “Every person knows something you don't know.”

First Circle. When participants were invited to ask information questions, they spontaneously shared reactions and interpretations. Given the relevance of the discussions and the commitment to being attentive to the group, steps 5 (Information Questions) and 6 (First Circle) of the Group Analysis Method were carried out concurrently. The discussions focused mainly on different ways of connecting with clients. Sharing authentic experiences, particularly through cultural or traditional activities, emerged as a key element. The notion of reciprocity in helping relationships was also highlighted, with a shared understanding emerging within the group that supporting clients is a process through which we ourselves learn and grow.

Storyteller’s Reactions. The storyteller highlighted the importance of reciprocity in the intervention and expressed being touched, realizing how much participants had in common: “Even if we come from other Nations, we are very similar [...] in a different land or different Nation, but same feelings, same thoughts.” Participants then recalled moments of fun and laughter shared with clients, which inspired the idea of inviting them to share humorous anecdotes from their work. The morning concluded on a joyful note, with participants laughing together.

Telling the Third Story: *Emerging from Darkness*

In this emotionally charged story, the participant recounts how a close one received help through a Wise Choices retreat. This person had previously had a negative experience when seeking support from services but was accepted into the program without judgment. Furthermore, the person arrived at the retreat site under the influence of alcohol. But rather than being sent home, the person was accepted, had their withdrawal symptoms monitored, and was encouraged to participate in cultural activities. The storyteller expressed how profoundly touching it was to see this beloved person welcomed unconditionally and cared for by the team present.

Stakes from the Storyteller. The participant described the conflicting emotions inherent in the dual role of family member and care provider, where the person concerned holds great personal significance and the desire for the best possible outcome is shaped by this close relationship.

Information Questions. Participants asked questions to learn more about the storyteller's reactions and the way the situation was managed professionally and personally.

First Circle. Several emphasized the importance of believing in life and trusting in the Creator. Participants highlighted in various ways the importance of welcoming people unconditionally, accepting them where they are at and adjusting to their pace. They were touched by the story that was shared and emphasized the importance, as a care provider, of being able to express emotions, for instance, during debriefings with their work team. The intimate nature of the story seemed to evoke experiences shared by participants who shared personal stories related to their family relationships.

Storyteller's Reactions. Touched by the stories shared by other participants, the storyteller emphasized the value of always seeing the human being beyond behaviour – a principle passed down by a grandfather. "Always reach out" is a piece of wisdom that should guide intervention with people who are suffering.

Talking Stick Activity

To conclude this second day, participants were invited to take part in an activity to create a talking stick. A woman from the community delivered an insightful message about social inequalities and the important role of care providers. She spoke about her difficult journey and how connecting with her culture has been a source of healing, how she uses art to engage socially and pass on her Wendat heritage. She took the time to present the materials that come from Mother Earth: branches, leather, feathers, fur. She then guided the participants in creating their talking sticks and explained their meaning and how they are used. She explained that when she holds a talking circle, she always leaves an empty chair for those who cannot be there, those who have gone before and those who will come after. The afternoon ends in an atmosphere of conviviality and creativity, with most of the participants and research team members busy making their talking sticks.

DAY 3

The opening ritual on Day 3 was led by an Inuit participant, who delivered a presentation on the drum, an essential tool in Inuit culture. Traditionally used alongside songs and dances, the drum serves as a medium for dialogue with the spiritual world, aiming, among other purposes, to foster social harmony. The participant explained that this practice had nearly disappeared in Nunavik, as missionaries deemed drumming anti-religious and employed various strategies to prohibit and discourage it. Today, however, the tradition is reviving, thanks to knowledge holders, particularly in Nunavut, who have safeguarded this precious heritage. The presentation concluded with a drum performance and a dance featuring movements inspired by northern animals such as the bear and the raven. Participants observed the dance with emotion and expressed great interest and gratitude, both through their nonverbal reactions and in the discussions that followed.

Collective Analysis

At the end of day 2, the researchers met, joined by the graphic facilitator and one volunteer participant, to review the themes that had emerged during the day. Their discussions revealed that a new theme related to pleasure and laughter in the intervention had emerged. Inspired by the message from the facilitator of the talking stick activity, they also proposed the theme of the empty chair to illustrate a theme or dimension that might be missing. On the morning of day 3, the research team reported back to the group on the discussions held the previous day, explaining their view that two additional dimensions could be added to the seven agreed upon earlier. They proposed presenting each component and invited the group to collectively identify images to represent them, as a way to define these dimensions through concrete anchors. Participants were also encouraged to take a moment to review the drawings of the shared stories displayed on the walls and indicate whether any elements appeared missing or incomplete. They agreed that, over the coming weeks and months, the research team would carefully review the discussions from the three days of work in order to develop definitions for each of the themes in the model. This work will be presented to them for validation and will continue to evolve through co-construction, namely through the use of the Group Analysis Method as part of a new research seminar that will take place in approximately one year.

Convergences and Divergences. Taking the themes one after the other, participants actively engaged in a process of collective analysis and consensus building. This search for unifying symbols led them to discuss the particularities of their respective cultures and territories, while the graphic facilitator illustrates the consensual ideas. For some themes, the group easily reaches a consensus. For example, the combination of the drum and Mother Earth quickly emerged as unifying images to represent the theme of “Identity and Territory,” and the idea of spending time on the land quickly gained consensus as a representation of the theme of “Self-care”. For other themes, the images evoked are more varied, which makes it more complex to identify a way of illustrating the theme that is meaningful to all. For example, to illustrate patience, the symbol of the hunter was initially suggested, but given the different hunting techniques used by different Nations, it was difficult to find an image that was universally representative, and the image of the beaver was ultimately chosen. When discussing the theme of “Trauma Impacts,” several concrete images, stories, and personal experiences were mentioned, and the importance of resilience was emphasized. This led to the creation of an image depicting a scene with several elements (characters, children's slippers, weakened tree and roots). This step represented a challenging task for the graphic facilitator, who had to demonstrate active listening and ingenuity in order to synthesize several ideas into a single drawing.

Regarding the two new themes proposed, both were incorporated into the model. The theme of “pleasure and laughter” seemed to make sense to participants as presented by the research team. As for the theme of “Empty Chair,” the idea that it could represent a possible missing theme did not seem to make sense to them. However, the way it had been described the day before by the facilitator of the talking stick activity seemed more evocative. The group therefore redefined this theme as representing those who are not necessarily with us physically, but who accompany us: the spirit world, Elders, those who are absent, ancestors, etc.

During the final discussion to identify any missing elements, two main themes emerged: reconciliation and issues related to hierarchy. One participant emphasized the importance of integrating reconciliation into the model. She explained how trauma stems from colonization by non-Indigenous peoples and that healing must therefore necessarily come through reconciliation. A member of the research team shared his feelings of shame regarding the violence perpetrated by his people against First Nations and Inuit peoples. The group agreed on the need to work together, and that reconciliation must necessarily be included in the theme "Trauma Impacts."

One participant mentioned that the group did not include in the model the various issues that care providers may experience in relation to the hierarchies that exist above them. Institutions (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) often fail to provide them with the resources and conditions they need to adequately perform their work while also preserving their mental health. Various examples are mentioned, and the group concludes that what connects these examples is colonialism, which has created organizational structures that do not meet the needs of Indigenous peoples, and therefore this element is also included in the theme of "Trauma Impacts."

One participant pointed out that the group had forgotten the most important thing: including the Creator in the model. This led to a discussion about the different ways of practising spirituality among the nations represented (sweat lodges among First Nations, tattoos among the Inuit). Given the diversity of beliefs, it was difficult to find a word or symbol that would suit everyone. The group finally agreed on the word "Creator," which seems fairly inclusive, and on the symbol of the circle, which is an important symbol linked to spirituality for all the Nations attending, all in the spirit that the model will remain alive, that their reflection will mature, and that a better idea may eventually emerge. At the end of the exercise, the model – which is still evolving and will be disseminated through a collaborative process with participants – includes 10 dimensions of care providers' realities, namely: Connections, Bravery, Self-Care, Identity and Territory, Patience, Trauma Impacts, Humour and Joy, Uniqueness and Complementarity, Empty Chair and Creator.

Sharing Visions and Contributions. The research team explains that, for this step, they asked themselves what their academic knowledge could contribute to this research aimed at improving the well-being of care providers. They were struck by the compassion that was mentioned several times and in different ways, and by the fact that care providers work with people who are suffering, sometimes in difficult conditions, which can lead to compassion fatigue. They thus chose to present the work of Miller and Sprang (2017) on the elements that facilitate compassion satisfaction (Miller & Sprang, 2017), the model (Orford, 2005), the ingredients of stress, and self-compassion (Neff, 2003). These models were presented briefly, simply, and in connection with the stories and knowledge shared, in particular, by suggesting concrete strategies among those discussed during the three days.

Asked to share their vision and knowledge, participants respond by emphasizing how meaningful self-compassion is to them. One participant mentions that, although she is aware of the concept, it is easy to forget. The speakers agreed that they are very demanding of themselves and find it easier to show compassion to others than to themselves. One participant points out that he was struck by the concept of "compassion satisfaction" (Miller & Sprang, 2017)), but that caution is needed because drawing too

much nourishment from one's work as a care provider can lead to fatigue. This is especially true given that there is no clear boundary between the role of care provider and personal life. One participant expressed gratitude to the research team for this presentation, which appeared to be very useful. This was the first time in several years of practice that concrete strategies for self-care had been suggested.

Co-Constructing Hypotheses. The lead researcher explained that the purpose of this seminar was to lay the groundwork for a potential project, which could take the form of a program or something else, aimed at supporting the well-being of those working within the Wise Choices program. The model developed by the group appeared to provide a solid foundation for future work, and it was agreed to implement a new Group Analysis Method, to be carried out on the land, in order to design this project.

Practical Perspectives

This step took place on the last afternoon. It was a sunny spring day, which contributed to the pleasant atmosphere within the group. Participants were invited to take part in a practical exercise to share concrete strategies for self-care. All participants (including the graphic facilitator and research team members) had 20 minutes to walk around the site and take photos of something that healed them, made them feel good, or represented something that did them good. Upon their return, each person presented what made them feel good. Several elements related to nature were mentioned (river, sunrise, trails, loon songs), as well as physical exercise (gym, running) and escape (hitting the road, leaving the village).

Evaluation

Before closing the seminar, participants were asked how they felt about the process over the past three days. Gratitude, sharing, humility, teamwork, and humanity were some of the words used to describe the experience. Several people mentioned how much they appreciated being able to exchange stories between different nations. One participant emphasized this by saying that the word that came to mind to describe the experience was "community", a community of people who share a great sense of humour and a deep respect for culture and territory.

Closing Ritual

A participant from the host community offered closing remarks for the seminar, expressing gratitude to all participants for their humility and sharing feeling deeply touched and proud of what had been accomplished over the past few days. The participant explained that, as requested by the woman who had led the opening ceremony, the tobacco pouch was closed at the end of each day and reopened each morning. The closing words included the intention to burn the tobacco so that the projects envisioned would come to fruition.

The research team then offered a small bag of tobacco to the First Nations people and a small bag of tea to the Inuit. Participants stayed for a while to chat, joke, and exchange contact information. No one seemed to feel very hurried to leave.

Reflections on the Process Through the Lens of Kovach's (2021) Indigenous Conceptual Framework

We provided a detailed description of the process deployed through the Group Analysis Method during a three-day research seminar exploring the experiences of First Nations and Inuit care providers involved in the Wise Choices program. The following paragraphs will focus on the second objective of this article, namely, to examine the methodological processes deployed through the lens of an Indigenous conceptual framework, more specifically the four foundations described by Kovach (2021): Indigenous epistemologies, Indigenous ethics, Indigenous communities, and the experiencing self in relation. As these four foundations are interrelated, the methodological processes deployed will be discussed from the perspective of four overlapping dimensions.

Indigenous Epistemologies

The approach taken during the seminar was consistent with several elements of Indigenous epistemologies. First, spiritual and traditional knowledge were given prominence, with each day beginning with a prayer, ritual, or opening message rooted in the culture of one of the Nations attending, and time set aside for the creation of a talking stick according to Wendat culture. These moments of cultural sharing, which introduced and punctuated the seminar, helped to anchor the stories shared in the Indigenous cultures present. The icebreaker activity, in which each participant was given time to introduce themselves and situate themselves culturally, personally, and professionally, also allowed for self-locating, which further helped to anchor the stories shared in their contexts. Kovach (2021) underscores the importance of being attentive to the cultural nuances of storytelling across different Indigenous traditions. She stresses that, within oral traditions, personal narratives are inseparable from the identity and context of the storyteller. Thus, the fact that the Group Analysis Method is based on sharing stories ensured that data collection was culturally relevant, both in terms of the process and the results it produced (Iseke, 2013; Rieger et al., 2023). Indigenous methodologies are rooted in oral tradition and are process-centred, so both *hearing* and *sharing* stories are considered fundamental (Kovach, 2021), which aligns with the nature of the Group Analysis Method. Consistent with this perspective, graphic facilitation has emerged as an effective response to a significant challenge identified by Kovach (2021): ensuring that findings are relevant and accessible to communities, rather than remaining abstract and theoretical. Graphic facilitation unfolded through a dynamic co-construction process in which participants played an active role in developing the illustrations. Graphic facilitation resonates with the oral storytelling traditions through which knowledge is shared in Indigenous communities (Wright et al., 2023), thus the use of symbols and illustrations as raw material was both transformative and structuring in terms of co-constructing meanings and deepening collective analysis.

Indigenous Ethics

In line with Indigenous ethics as described by Kovach (2021), the project was developed through relationships of trust that led to discussions that identified the seminar topic as meaningful to the program stakeholders. The project arose from the desire expressed by care providers to address the issue of the complexity of their role, and they were involved in all stages of the project (Murphy et al., 2021). The project was approved by UQTR Research Ethics Committee (CERPPE-24-36-07.06) and complies with the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2) (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2022), but consideration of the ethical aspects of the project went beyond compliance with codes, in part through a continuous reflective process aimed at questioning the cultural safety of the processes put in place (Aguilar et al., 2025; Brockie et al., 2022). Throughout the three days, participants were actively involved in decision-making regarding the seminar's proceedings, their feedback on the process was solicited, and the seminar concluded with an evaluation stage inviting them to share their impressions.

The establishment of relationships of trust as well as a long-term commitment are key components of conducting research projects in accordance with Indigenous ethics (Burnette & Sanders, 2014; Kovach, 2021; MacKinnon, 2018; Murphy et al., 2021; Peake et al., 2021). This project is based on relationships of trust that have been built since 2017 and which will continue, among other things, through a new research seminar using the Group Analysis Method planned to build on the work that has been started, as well as knowledge transfer activities to present the model to communities that could benefit from it. These relationships of trust do not, in themselves, eliminate the tensions that may be inherent in a project led by non-Indigenous researchers who, despite their intention to centre Indigenous epistemologies, remain shaped by their own worldviews. However, they do make it possible to create a safe space in which these tensions can be addressed. Kovach (2021) cautions against the risk of misunderstanding or misinterpreting knowledge generated through Indigenous research. Recognizing that our model is not exempt from this concern, we will implement safeguards, ensuring that all those involved share responsibility for presenting it accurately, honouring its creators, and dedicating time to educate those to whom the knowledge will be transmitted.

Indigenous Community

The participants in this seminar can be defined as a community of interest (Canadian Institutes of Health Research et al., 2022; Kovach, 2021), meaning that they share the experience of being engaged with people facing challenges related to substance use in their communities, their involvement in the Wise Choices program, as well as their interest in this collective approach aimed at promoting their well-being (and that of the entire community of care providers). Consistent with the "process-oriented" nature of Indigenous methodologies (Kovach, 2021; Wilson, 2008), the approach deployed during the seminar facilitated rich exchanges between Wendat, Inuit, Innu, and Atikamekw participants. They shared their stories with each other, stories steeped in their cultures, their territories, and their spiritualities. Thus, as reflected in the words used by participants to describe their experience during the evaluation stage, the connections made over the course of these three days helped to create a genuine sense of community among them.

Regarding the stress associated with engaging in research (Brunger & Wall, 2016; Kovach, 2021), while we would not claim to have eliminated it completely, several measures were put in place to limit it. Careful

attention was paid to prepare participants so that they knew what to expect and could express their doubts and suggestions. The seminar took place in Wendat Territory, where we were welcomed and had the opportunity to connect with cultural representatives of this Nation. The First Nations Hotel-Museum is a peaceful and comfortable location where participants could also take time for themselves. Throughout the seminar, activities were adapted to the pace and needs of the participants, with regular assessments of their comfort level. Follow-up is also conducted with participants to keep them informed in a transparent manner about the progress of the project (Burnette & Sanders, 2014).

Experiencing the Self in Relationship

The purpose of this project is consistent with the relational dimension of self as described by Kovach (2021), as it is collectively meaningful—all those involved recognize the importance of addressing the well-being of stakeholders—while also being connected to more personal motivations for each of the individuals involved. The members of the research team each have their own journeys and relationships with First Nations and Inuit peoples, but their paths have converged in a sincere commitment toward reconciliation. A relationship of trust already existed between the research team and the participants prior to the project. Although the entire group was never gathered at the same time, participants and research team members shared diverse experiences through their involvement in the Wise Choices program. At various times, research team members visited participants' communities for program training and activities, giving them the opportunity to spend time on the land, eat traditional food, and participate in traditional activities and rituals. The seminar activities unfolded in an atmosphere of cultural humility and reciprocity. Indigenous knowledge was at the forefront, while complementary Western theories were integrated within a Two-Eyed Seeing perspective (Bartlett et al., 2012; Forbes et al., 2020). Members of the research team engaged authentically in the seminar, sharing their insights in a spirit of reciprocity (Pidgeon & Riley, 2021).

We would like to emphasize that this approach, strongly rooted in relationality, was only possible because it was grounded in relationships of trust built up over time and through shared experiences (training in communities, workshops on the land, etc.). Thus, based on our experience and in line with the foundations of Indigenous research as described by Kovach (2021), when conducting the Group Analysis Method with First Nations and Inuit peoples, all preparatory elements constitute a phase in itself (Foundations), which is perhaps the most fundamental phase and is transversal to the entire process.

Navigating the Limits of the Process

The fact that most of the discussions took place in colonial languages is undoubtedly the main limitation of the process deployed with regard to the indigenization of research practices. Indeed, Indigenous languages are very important in Indigenous epistemologies, since these languages are carriers of knowledge in themselves (Ferguson & Sidorova, 2023; Waters, 2004). Although Indigenous languages were welcomed and graphic facilitation was used to mitigate language issues, the reality is that nuances and important elements of knowledge are inevitably lost in the translation of colonial languages.

Graphic facilitation was certainly a relevant strategy for establishing dialogue and overcoming the constraints inherent in working in colonial languages. That said, the graphic facilitator tended to remain in a Western posture of neutrality and did not really self-locate or share personal purpose in this experience. This seems to have had an effect on the group and was reflected in the participants' reluctance to comment on their drawings. Eventually, the strength of the group allowed them to become more comfortable and express themselves freely during the co-construction of the model, but doing preparatory work to ensure the facilitator engaged more personally would have been important (Wright et al., 2023) or, even better, involving an Indigenous graphic facilitator.

With regards to the method itself, it is important to acknowledge that the Group Analysis Method was developed within a Western paradigm – one that values speaking out and places a high premium on debate (Simonds & Christopher, 2013). In working with First Nations and Inuit, we observed two key tendencies: participants tend to address profound topics directly, and once a point has been expressed, they generally see no need for further discussion. As a result, time allocated for discussion was sometimes excessive, making the step of replaying the story unnecessary.

It should also be noted that the methodologies and experiences described in this article are presented from the perspective of researchers who are predominantly non-Indigenous. Despite the desire to implement a culturally relevant approach and the attention paid to the well-being of participants, we must nevertheless remain culturally humble and recognize that our interpretation is still partly biased by our Western scientific perspective. Although the research team made genuine efforts to foreground Indigenous worldviews and epistemologies in this research, it remains that certain aspects of Western and Indigenous philosophies are irreconcilable. The approach presented here is therefore not exempt from these limitations.

Concluding Thoughts

In this paper, we have shown that, despite certain limitations, the Group Analysis Method can serve as a culturally relevant approach for advancing the indigenization and decolonization of research practices. That said, the method itself does not inherently possess this capacity; rather, it is the underlying values and relationships that allow it to be enacted within tis perspective. This seminar – and what it enabled – would not have been possible without the long-term relationships built through the Wise Choices program. The method presented here is not intended as a step-by-step procedure, but rather as an illustration of a singular experience rooted in a long-term project. If this article can offer insights to inform and inspire future work, it is important to keep in mind that non-Indigenous researchers who choose to engage in projects in Indigenous contexts must adopt a stance of humility within an ongoing process of critical reflection, in which tensions are acknowledged and addressed with openness.

Given that the research team is composed of non-Indigenous researchers, we recognize that we cannot claim to conduct Indigenous research. However, we can conceptualize our work in ways that respect and

integrate the epistemological standpoint of the communities with whom we collaborate (Buendia, 2003; Kovach, 2021). Even though major systemic changes are necessary for truly decolonized research, our team is motivated by the commitment to foster a more inclusive science, and we believe that this project – grounded in relationships and strong reflexivity – represents a modest but meaningful step towards decolonized research.

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