



Wapna'kikewi'skwaq

Women of First Light Feminine Leadership Retreat 2020

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

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Photos



Natalie Gloade leading a discussion on Indigenous Death Doula Services



Chenise Hache mapping the discussion on Growing Leaders an Reclaiming, Restoring, Revitalizing, and Being



Ishbel Munro documenting the discussion on Mi'kmaw Worldview and Language

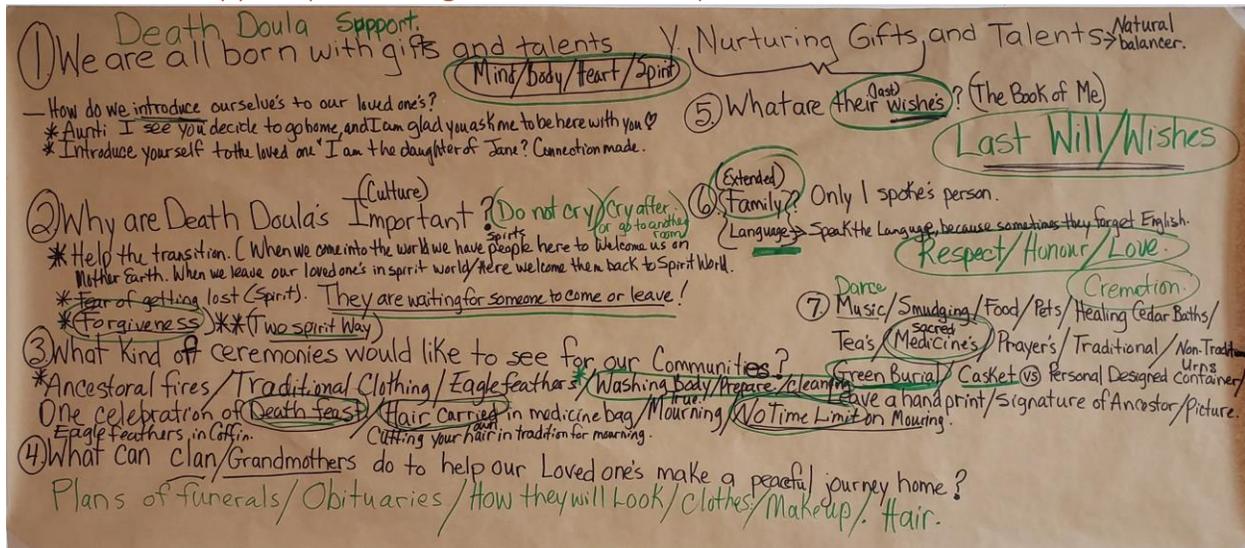
Notes from Workshops

Guiding Questions for the Workshops/Weekend:

Essential Guiding Questions:

- What leaders do you see in your community?
 - What qualities do you see in that person?
- How do we nurture traditional leadership?
 - In our families?
 - In our communities?
 - In our confederacy?
 - In ourselves and personal lives?

Death Doula Support (Discussing Gifts and Talents)



Focus on Holistic Model of Health – Mind/Body/Heart/Spirit, natural balance

1. How do we introduce ourselves to our loved ones?
 - "Auntie, I see you decided to go home, and I am glad you asked me to be here with you"
 - Introduce yourself to the loved one, "I am the daughter of Jane". Connection Made

When speaking to the one passing, we can orient ourselves by explaining our family connection and validating them, this is especially helpful when the loved one has cognitive impairments or drug or disease related delirium.

2. Why are Death Doulas important?

→ Help the transition (when we came into the World. We had people there to welcome us to Mother Earth/when we leave our loved ones in the Spirit World/there to welcome them back)

→ Fear of getting lost

→ Forgiveness → Goes both ways, forgiving the dying person/being forgiven by them

→ They could be waiting for the right person to come or go/planned who they want with them when they pass over.

We are a community-based people, having support of our loved ones during life transitions is crucial. Some people have a hard time letting go/dying because of fear or unresolved issues on Earth. We can assist with organizing family/last wishes and needs of dying person and their loved ones.

3. What kind of ceremonies would we like to see for our communities?

→ Ancestral fires (fires during death, the wake/burial, and in the mourning ceremonies)

→ Wearing traditional clothing in death

→ Eagle feathers (doctoring during death, buried/cremated with them)

→ Washing of the body/preparing/cleaning done by gender-congruent family members

→ A single celebration/Death Feast 1-2 years after death

→ Hair cutting – carrying the hair of the loved one in medicine bags/prayer ties or cutting your own hair to be buried/cremated with them

→ True mourning, allowing time (at least 1 year) to grieve properly – but remember there is NO time limit on mourning

→ Teachings on tears/crying – many people have taken the older teachings and have understood them to mean they must be stoic to be strong.

There is a great need for clarification on what mourning means to us, the protocol for death feasts, and the culturally specific supports available in our communities in regard to ceremony for death and dying. Teachings about the healing power of tears/clarifying that we try not to cry in front of the dying person but crying outside of their presence and after their death is encouraged – crying in front of them while they are dying can take the focus from them and can tether their spirit/they will hold on longer than they should to try and take care of you.

4. What can Clan Mothers/Grandmothers do to help our loved ones make a peaceful journey?

→ Planning their death, funeral, what ceremonies they may want for their family members

→ Assisting in writing obituaries

→ Planning how they will look during burial/cremation – clothing, make up, hair, sacred items they want with them

As with many other aspects of life, Clan and Grandmothers can be crucial supports in assisting with planning and organizing the family/wishes of the dying person and provide guidance.

5. What are their last wishes?

→ The Book of Me (a fill-in journal to document their life for the family to keep/remember them). A personal history.

→ Last will/wishes

→ Focus on Respect, Honour, and Love

As Death Doulas, we can be an advocate for the dying person and make sure their last wishes are honoured and their death/funeral/celebrations are in line with what they wanted. We can also support and help guide families through these processes/decisions.

6. Language and Communication

→ Family includes extended family – whoever the dying person considered their family

→ One person should be designated as the spokesperson

→ Speaking our languages to the dying can be beneficial especially for those in mental decline – they may forget English/connect to our Indigenous languages on a deeper level

Indigenous languages provide more than verbal communication – connects to spiritual and emotional aspects of the person. People who speak more than one language can make neural connections faster/rewire their brains quicker than monolingual people. The parts of the brain that stores more abstract thoughts – songs, prayers, etc – also often stores Indigenous languages because they contain more abstract concepts than English alone. Can be a much more effective mode of communication as well as comfort.

7. What can last wishes/rites/care look like?

→ Arts – Dance, music

→ Comfort measures – pets, foods

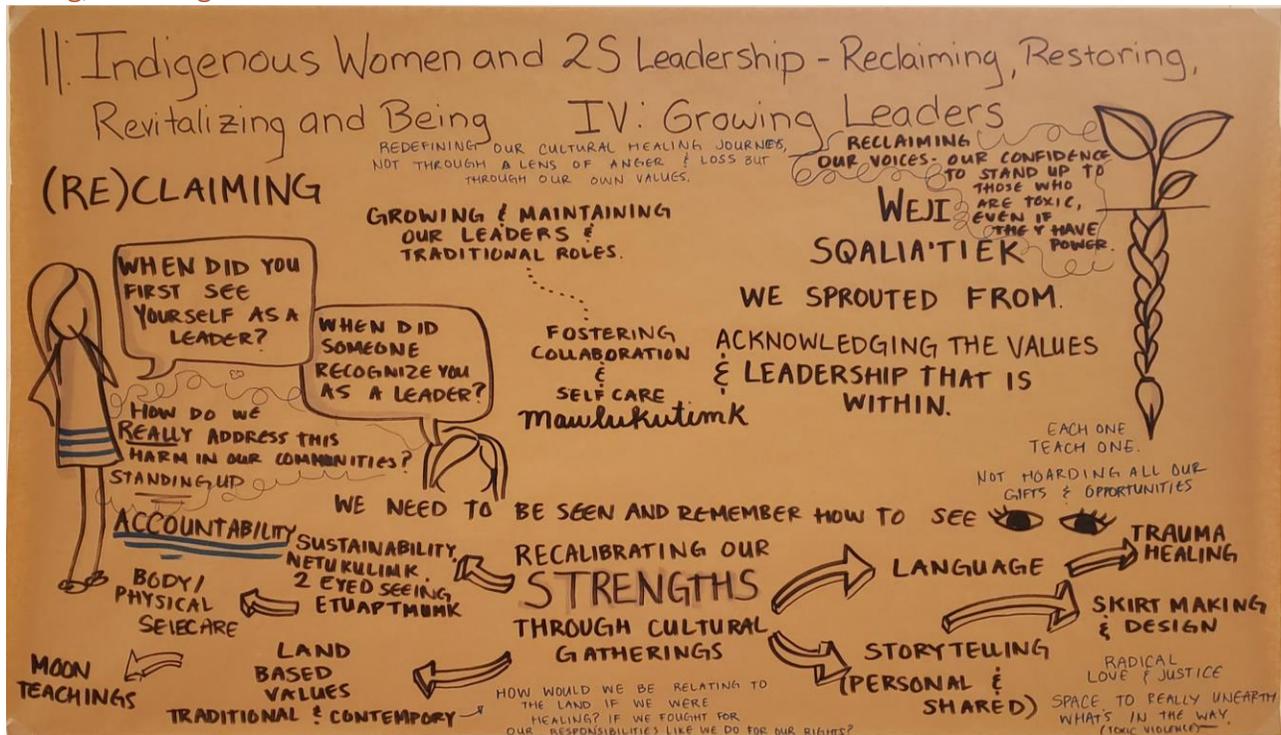
→ Ceremony – smudging, healing baths (cedar), sacred medicines, prayers

→ Death planning – traditional/non-traditional, green burials, casket vs urns, cremation

→ Mementos – leaving handprint/signature and photos

What is important for each person will vary but respecting and honouring preferences/wishes is important for everyone, and loving care will be a consistent need. Many of these comforts trigger deeper memory and meaning.

Indigenous Women and 2S Leadership – Reclaiming, Restoring, Revitalizing, and Being/Growing Leaders



Chenise did such a beautiful map, it's hard to transcribe as I believe it speaks volumes on it's own, but I will type out the text so it's easier to read:

(RE) Claiming

Redefining our cultural healing journeys, not through a lens of anger and loss, but through our own values.

Reclaiming our voices – our confidence to stand up to those who are toxic, even if they have power

When did you first see yourself as a leader?

When did someone recognize you as a leader?

Growing and maintaining our leaders and traditional roles

Fostering collaboration and self-care

mawlukutimk

Weji Squalia'tiek
We sprouted from acknowledging the values and leadership that is within

How do we REALLY address this harm in our communities?
STANDING UP

We need to be seen and remember how to see

Each one Teach one
Not hoarding all our gifts and opportunities

ACCOUNTABILITY

Sustainability Netukulimk
2 Eyed Seeing Etuamptmumk

Body/Physical Self-Care

Moon Teachings

Land Based Values
Traditional and Contemporary

Recalibrating our **STRENGTHS** through cultural gatherings

How would we be relating to the land if we were healing? If we fought for our responsibilities like we do for our rights?

Language

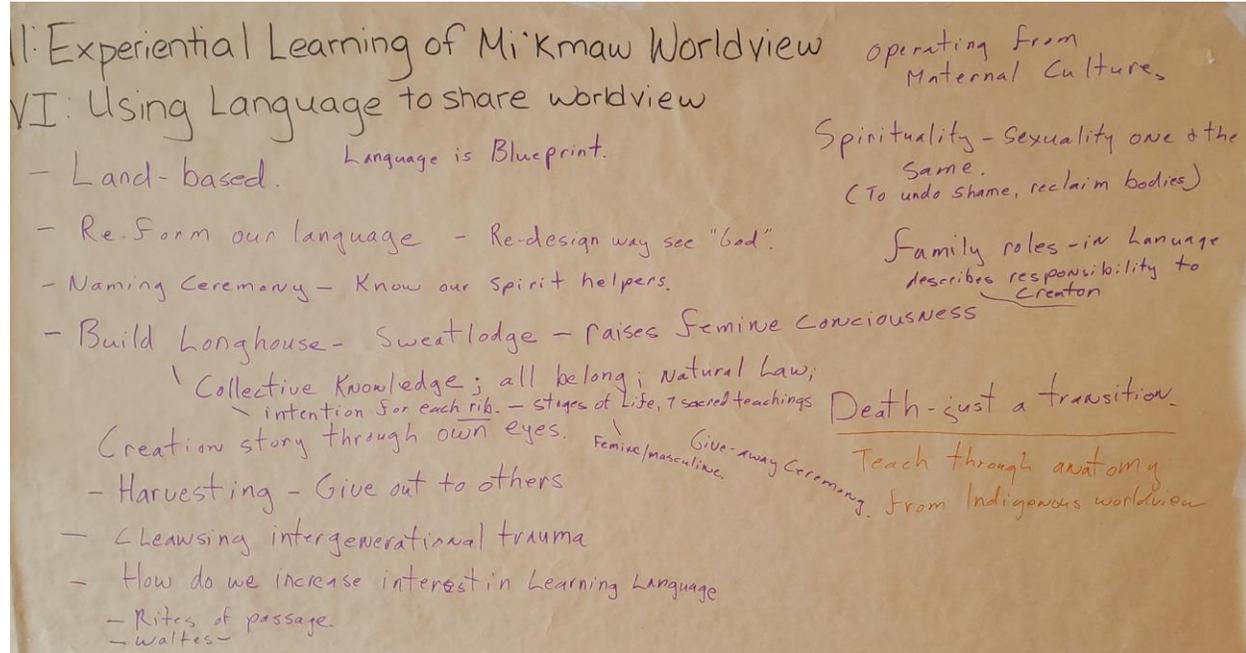
Trauma Healing

Skirt Making and Design

Storytelling (Personal and Shared)

*Radical Love and Justice
Space to really unearth what's in the way
(Toxic Violence)*

Experiential Learning of Mi'kmaw Worldview/Using Language to Share Worldview



Points of interest – things we can do/knowledge we must be sharing with our future generations: goals, roles, and foundations:

- Language is a Blueprint
- Land-based
- Reform our language
- Re-design the way we see "God"
- Naming ceremony – know our spirit helpers
- Build longhouses → sweatlodge → *Raises feminine consciousness*
 - Collective knowledge; all belong; natural law
 - Intention for each rib → stages of life → 7 sacred teachings
 - Feminine/masculine
- Give away ceremony
- Creation story through our own eyes
- Harvesting – give out to others
- Cleansing intergenerational trauma
- How do we increase interest in Learning Language?
- Rites of Passage
- Waltes
- Operating from a Maternal Culture
- Spirituality → Sexuality – one and the same
(to undo shame, reclaim our bodies)
- Family roles – in language they describe responsibility to creation
- Death is a transition
- **Teach through autonomy from an Indigenous Worldview**

Evaluations

Nov 13th to 15th Leadership Retreat: Evaluation forms

Here is a summary of the evaluation forms that were returned:

Goals of program:

- To build relationships and grow leaders,
- Connect upcoming Clan Mothers;
- Healing and leadership
- Further develop what leadership program will look like by brainstorming and sharing teachings

1. What extent was the goals achieved? (Between not at all to completely)

- 8 x Completely,
- 1 x 6.5 with comment: "achieved high goal of excellence"

Why?

- Indigenous women-led – ceremonial – It was women centred – honouring life – acknowledging all voices in the circle
- This program achieved a very high goal of excellence in achieving the outcomes for this gathering
- Actually, it was so much better than I expected

2. What did you like best?

- The flexibility of program for our needs
- Circle process, organic, time is now, Honouring cooks, food, gifts from sources of life.
- Being in Sacred circle with my sisters
- The Ceremonial aspect
- All of it
- Ceremony enabling the ancestors to set the agenda
- Women in it, Ceremony
- Love my beautiful sisters, aunties, grandmothers and getting to unwind, disconnect and reconnect in a beautiful spiritual place. Great welcome packages and facilitation. Much needed weekend. Well done Paulina. Uesalul aq welalin

3. What would you change?

- Maybe longer
- I would not change anything. I just would add more days to make a healing quilt and gift it away for strength and healing
- 2 x More days to spend together
- 4 x Nothing
- More time to share songs

4. Additional comments:

- I left feeling renewed

- Circles are very important. Break our groups are very important for us to learn from each other
- So much healing for the spirit
- Wela'lin. So needed!
- Add some land based stuff or sweats so we could be outside a bit as well

5. *Comments to leadership of program:*

- I can't thank you enough for creating a safe healing space for us to be ourselves as whole;
- Welalin. Thank you to the facilitators and Coordinator
- You are all strong smart beautiful women. Thank-you for sharing yourselves
- Enjoyed it immensely
- Well done
- The best!
- Great work. I am so proud of you and inspired by you as always sister. And of course to all the women on the planning team – wela'liog

6. *Follow up program you would like?*

- Grandmother – spiritual retreat. Another Feminine Leadership Retreat II and III
- Healing Blankets making and give away of love
- Continue this series of workshop
- Same type of program
- Please have another program very soon as we are all needing strength and guidance.

Summary

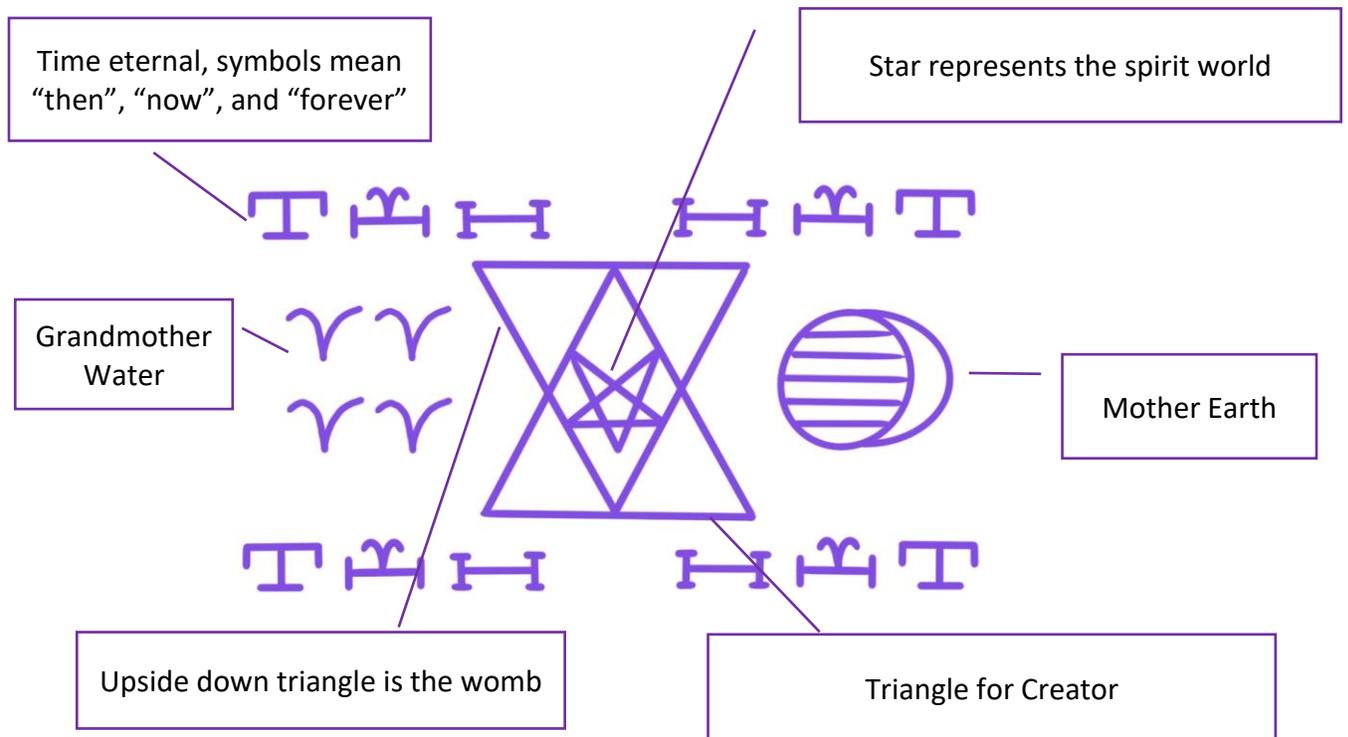
- There is a great need for these kinds of feminine-centered ceremonial gatherings
- A full 4 or 7 day ceremony if time allows
- More land-based work/lodge building/skill teachings
- More time for craft and creative sharing spaces – blanket/skirt making, singing, and bonding-time

Women of First Light Wapankai Wampum Belt Design

Many people contributed ideas and thoughts about what our wampum should look like, here is a rough draft.

The guiding phrases and notes included:

- Water
- Women
- Feminine
- Dance/creation of child
- Language
- Protective layer → Male
- Heart → Female
- Pericardium (Sac) → Male
- All organs are structured like this
- So is the earth – o-zone to Mother Earth



I did my best to include all the concepts, with water/spirit/earth being in the center

The feminine is represented with the womb

The masculine is represented by the protection around the spirit created by the womb and creator (the sac/protector of the heart)

Spirit is in the symbol of Creator and the spirit world symbol

Note

Please note that this is a living document and any/all contributions, edits, and feedback is greatly appreciated, please send notes to paulinameader@gmail.com.

If you would like to join the e-mail list for Women of First Light or Apaji-wla'Matulinej or our Facebook group, please email Ishbel at iseabail_86@live.ca We don't email often but do send our emails on upcoming events.