**Transcript of Thrivival: The Fire Within  
6. Research Done in a Good Way  
Project Lead and Speaker: Heather Simpson**

HEATHER SIMPSON:

Research done in a good way.

As Elder Phillip expressed, this research centers Indigenous Autistic learners and supports them to create self-determined actions towards transforming their educational experience. This is not pan-research, and we acknowledge that the participants do not represent the whole of Indigenous Autistic experiences. That said, the storied experiences shared are crucial to filling in a gap in much needed information to improve educational experiences and outcomes for a student body that is often relegated to the margins in post-secondary and society in general.

Before we finalize the scope and focus of this project our research team followed protocol and extended an invitation to the First Nations of whose land partnering post-secondary institutes are located. This includes Squamish, Musqueam, Qayqayt, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. We invited Nations to be involved and compensated in the research project from its inception so that the direction and outputs can directly benefit and fit within the needs and interests of the respective Nations. Before sharing my words today, these respective Nations received our research findings and this presentation to ensure mutuality in the sharing of reported information.

This research was guided by an ethical framework, transparently shared with all of the esteemed partners. It is situated in a knowing that the Canadian public post-secondary system was created and is maintained as living manifestation of the colonial project. That is a country that has been built and evolves on the disadvantage, spiritually, socially, politically, economically, and environmentally, of its First Peoples. To Indigenize and decolonize Westernized educational institutions, we must acknowledge that the public post-secondary institutions, and by extension, the system it operates within, fundamental purpose is to uphold various colonial ideals and processes based on discriminatory, capitalistic, and imperialistic motives. It is with this understanding, we could shed further light on the dominating ecosystem existing at institutional and individual levels that operate to make invisible or erase intellectual traditions, discourses and practices different from the foremost Euro-Western ways in education.

The denial of multiple worldviews, ethics and values and education prevent any real progress to achieving greater equity, diversity and inclusion in BC postsecondary in general and in a teaching and learning context. It also prevents institutions, in this case, public postsecondary from meeting its responsibility to build a school ecosystem not on a singular truth, but multiple truths so that all students, staff, and faculty are respectfully served. To assert the necessity and value of Indigenous-Autistic perspectives in the development and transformation of education and educational practices, we used a participatory action research design. Also called PAR.

We addressed the issues of exclusion and systemic oppression by supporting the leadership and collaboration of Indigenous Autistic students to identify gaps and inform educators and administration who make policy decisions as to what is needed in post-secondary teaching and learning and in policy to better support the identity and further to the success of Indigenous Autistic students. As a PAR project, deliverables were determined by Indigenous Autistic students and addressed the gap of self-determined, culturally relevant knowledge in teaching and learning literature with the aim to lessen the ongoing oppression harmful to self-identity and individual and public health of Indigenous Peoples and Autistic Peoples.

We chose a PAR model to conceptualize, design test, and evaluate a culturally responsive education and arts intervention for teaching and learning purposes. The model honours Indigenous knowledges and affords collaboration with Indigenous Autistic Peoples, with Elders and with advocates. PAR aligns with Teachings I have received from my Elders related to community-building, social justice, equity, and Indigenous ways of living. That is also a model that aligns with values and perspectives exemplified in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and the province of British Columbia's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, and its design features are endorsed by the evidence-base of my previous literature review. For example, healthy cultural identity formation embodies the idea that each member is an important part of the larger whole. And their presence, perspective and lived experience is as valid and meaningful as it is necessary, in shaping both individual and collective cultural identity. Moreover, it is critical to the integrity and authenticity of this research that Indigenous Autistic voices and citizenship be present, represented and fully articulated, and power and control and ownership of research and the research process shared. The PAR research model upholds integral principles and concepts as central to ethics, efficacy, and appropriateness required in this area of research, such as the protection of human rights, dignity, self-determination and sovereignty, and concepts of shared power, accessibility and holism.

The research problem described originally was limited by my perspective and my scholarship. By design, PAR involves Participants in the research process from conceptualization, so that there is a comprehensive understanding of localized social problems that inspire self-directed actions for change. Our research problem was built upon by research participants and research questions developed reflected a shared vision of the refined research problem.