

# **Greenland Camp: Mentorship as a Disciplined Practice in Preparedness**

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## **Abstract**

Sea kayaking may be best understood through the insights and knowledge of people whose ancestors kayaked for survival. Greenland Camp, held over several days in late summer, is a kayaking event that draws paddlers from around the world to reconnect with one another and learn age-old and advanced skills of the Arctic's Inuit. Greenland Camp is a gathering for paddlers that preserves and passes on to future generations the traditional paddling/rolling skills of Greenland's experienced seal catchers. Rooted in the need for responsive skill development and observant awareness as well as the indispensable skills needed to hunt and survive in Arctic waters, the Inuit point to a traditional practice that challenges the depth, scope, and limitation of experience of all kayakers. Facilitating mentorship of the disciplined practice of sea kayaking is thus explored to discern how the cultivated practice of hunter-gatherer Inuit communities may positively affect youth resilience to adversity.

KEYWORDS: water sports; paddle sports; skill development; environment; resilience

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Greenland Camp embodies a viable way of life—a kayaking community committed to thriving beyond the cultivated practice and proven seamanship of hunter-gatherer Inuit communities. Notably, the Greenlandic heritage is an experiential awareness of the kayaker's relationship with the wilderness as much as an achievement of resilience within a harsh environment. By helping kayakers hone skills through disciplined practice, Greenland Camp brings attention to a form of bushcraft (Steinbright, 2002). Through a facilitated mentorship approach, it cultivates the need for participants to reach beyond to acquire and refine skills that mitigate the untoward effects of elemental exposure. Through demonstrations, classes, and events, within a typical day, Greenland Camp offers games from individual/relay kayak races to increasingly advanced skills such as rope gymnastics (Allunaariaqattaarneq) and harpoon throwing. For example, Allunaariaqattaarneq is an ancient skill and form of fitness training that builds strength, coordination, and flexibility. Preparedness through practical, experiential skill development and mentorship, as embodied by Greenland Camp, is a process analyzed herein to gain insight into its value in community empowerment (Steinbright, 2002; Iwasaki, Messina, & Hopper, 2018).

Ungar, Brown, Liebenberg, Cheung, and Levine (2008) suggested that empowerment due to a sense of connection and identity in Indigenous communities may enhance resilience in youth. Through access to culturally meaningful resources, Indigenous youth have experienced benefits including increased resilience and sense of identity within their communities (Iwasaki et al., 2018). While participation in leisure has been correlated with positive health outcomes, heightened awareness, and/or commitment to common community interests, as forms of recreation Greenland Camp and sea kayaking at large may provide direction to the student mentee via self-discovery. Environments that foster purposeful relationships between youth and adult mentors, therefore, prove to be valuable, especially among marginalized individuals with access to fewer resources (Ungar, 2013). This paper therefore explores the nature, process, and effect of facilitated mentorship—an immersive experience that gives direction and focus to the mentee as a form of community responsibility.

Moreover, Indigenous worldviews extend beyond limited notions of resilience. Iwasaki, Coyle, and Shank (2010) presented a broad heuristic leisure framework considerate of the value of a facilitated mentorship within a strengths-based approach. Consequently, resilience may be viewed as an artifact of the capacity of a person to navigate to health resources and the community capacity to provide access to resources from culturally meaningful perspectives (Ungar et al., 2008). As such, a comparison may be made between the facilitation of the cultural bushcraft of kayaking as a form of leisure exercise and the facilitation of that of sea kayaking as an activity that involves mentorship as a way of life. The value of facilitating programs such as Greenland Camp may thus be considered in part an inclusive community process that cultivates a disciplined practice in preparedness.

## Confronting Vulnerability

Research has suggested unequivocally that leisure participation promotes a greater awareness of community, health status, and a commitment to shared interests (Lavalée & Poole, 2009). An Indigenous self-reflective practice in cultivating peace and compassion may be considered from a critical-democratic perspective (Barrett, Solomon, Singer, Portelli, & Mujuwamariya, 2009; Kincheloe, 2008). The Inuit assurance that a warrior is not about perfecting the Greenland roll or achieving victory during a hunt but rather about embracing absolute vulnerability leads to the question of how a strengths-based approach to mentorship would support the resilience of youth who have experienced adversity. In any event, a facilitated mentorship toward regaining a lost connection with self, others, and/or the environment would tend to unveil authentically the full spectrum and progressive state of associated feelings of an individual's well-being.

According to Brown (2012), wholly accepting personal vulnerability reflects the confrontation of fears to the point of coming alive in ways that may allow the mentee to dare greatly. As

courage may be considered an accurate measure of vulnerability, a factor that may keep youth out of connection is the fear of feeling not worthy of that connection (Brown, 2012; Jelicic, Bobek, Phelps, Lerner, & Lerner, 2007). Hence, Greenland Camp may be a natural learning environment that invigorates the mentee to become aware of the here and now, which may come hand in hand with an enhanced feeling of competence associated with the increased courage to live and engage in a challenging environment.

## **Greenland Camp Preparedness Experience**

The Inuit, a Greenlandic northern nomadic tribe of Indigenous people, lived interdependently with the land, sea, and animals (Heath & Arima, 2004). A successful hunt afforded the ability to stay warm without the use of fires, which was vitally important for a sustainable lifestyle in the harsh Arctic environment (Golden, 2006). James Roberts, Ontario Director at Paddle Canada, stated, "All kayaking . . . is descended from the Inuit hunters of the Arctic. It was their means of survival that became our recreation" (Marshall, 2015, "What Are Traditional," para. 1).

Greenland Camp offers paddlers an opportunity to experience a culturally meaningful connection with others. The context of facilitation provides paddlers with a significant commitment to be open to learn and relearn that which may have been previously affirmed. It is necessary for paddlers to be able to acknowledge their strengths and especially their limitations of their kayaking skills in open water. In doing so, they can then develop and master effective paddling technique through repetitive, disciplined practice. Further, Roberts (2015) asserted, "There is no finer tool with which to learn the cold water survival skill of [righting] yourself in a kayak" (para. 11). Complex skills associated with the Greenland roll and its variations require conditioning as well as the instruction of a mentor. While a camp participant may have one or more mentors for different skills, the capacity to be able and alert in calm or turbulent water is important.

Formulating a plan and knowing what to do when incidents arise is vital to safety. Veteran kayakers continue to succumb annually to objective hazards associated with the ravages of cold water immersion, and even the most detailed plans may be compromised by errors in judgment (Cunningham, 2004). Thus, the ability of kayakers to assess and modify decisions in situ allows for appropriate timely action. While respect for the natural environment and a clear understanding of the effect of weather on bodies of water are essential, kayakers may take turns making decisions based upon weather and sea state. Camp participants may identify solutions to simulated distress scenarios created by mentors in dynamic conditions. Taking on leadership roles that necessitate navigating real-life conditions benefits participants through informed practice. The possibility, for example, of the sudden rise of southwesterly winds that stir the surface of the water indicates the need for kayakers to pilot naturally with the current and lay of the land. Furthermore, unanticipated adverse environmental conditions may signal the need for kayakers to regroup and/or come ashore.

## **Greenlandic Perspective of Community**

Whether kayaking recreationally or taking part in an expedition, paddlers can learn important lessons from Greenland kayaking. Notably, how has it been possible for the Inuit to sustain life in a way that overcomes the overtly harsh East Arctic? Being challenged potentially beyond the capacity to survive reflects a community-oriented goal to thrive. The qajaq hunter's craft represents an enduring Inuit culture that draws a unified spirit supportive of the safety of each and every hunter-kayaker. Living for centuries at the edge of human settlement in an egalitarian hunter-gatherer society, the Inuit passed their teachings from generations before with cunning ingenuity (Steinbright, 2002).

During a seal or walrus hunt, the race against time after sudden immersion in extreme cold water and subsequent cold shock or hypothermia ultimately meant facing death. When capsized

with an entangled harpoon line, the kayaker-hunter needed proficiency to recover in a calm state of mind while being dragged upside down by the prey (Heath & Arima, 2004). Traditionally, Inuit youth were encouraged to immerse in preparatory Allunaariaqattaarnek conditioning that built on core strength and flexibility as an essential part of the bushcraft relevant to sea kayaking. Inuit hunter-gatherers, from an early age, represent a northern Indigenous culture that embraces the aptitude required for the movements of subtle variations in sculling, bracing, and rolling (Golden, 2006).

Kelly McDowell (personal communication, 2015) noted that the ability of kayakers to respond appropriately under distress reflects a conditioning that is much more about the intimate, observant, and practical knowledge of the environment than it is explicitly about the athleticism required in advanced levels of kayaking. Developing, for example, the skills that allow a kayaker to conform to an environment (e.g., noticing how wind may whip up at the base of cliffs with local turbulence) direct the kayaker for safe passage. Skill development in variations of sculling and rolling and in designing and building the qajaq and paddle to fit the hunter became well embedded within the Inuit heritage. The evolving art of skin-on-frame qajaq building matched the strength and performance needs of each kayaker (Heath & Arima, 2004). The structural design of the qajaq was designed to cause it to weathercock, or turn its bow into the wind, to assist in hunting seal prey.

### **Mitigating Risk Through Navigational Awareness**

Navigational awareness requires kayakers to maintain a high level of environmental awareness. Before kayakers set out on an open-water journey, deciding whether it is safe to go out is the last decision in a long chain that begins with proper preparatory and precautionary planning. Checking updates in marine broadcast weather conditions and topological forecasts, whether at home or while tripping, is a necessary routine. Using tide tables and being generally familiar with the recurring tides, winds, and currents allow for a more accurate assessment of the kayaking journey and thus whether individuals or groups have the experience to handle such conditions (Parry, Marleau, Woodford, & Harris, 2010). Looking, listening, and observing while also logging forecasts builds on weather awareness well in advance. The potential for a prevailing southwesterly wind, for example, that can rise and stir the surface of the water indicates the need for kayakers to understand the hazards posed by currents and the possible effects of landforms on conditions relative to the direction of an offshore breeze. Understanding the geological and natural story of coastal waters thus affords a navigational framework from which kayakers can become keenly aware.

As aligned with the traditional knowledge of Inuit elders, piloting with subtle cues in the position and movement of the prevailing winds and currents provides clues of changing conditions, according to Roberts (Marshall, 2015). A first response requires assessing conditions thoroughly in a way that predictably accounts for changing conditions and the skills of paddlers. Without a priori awareness, however, kayakers may face the challenge of being without a network of assistance in conditions beyond personal limitations. Being stranded and unable to come to shore certainly raises the question of how such a situation could have been prevented. Comfortably navigating in fog, wind, and waves is an essential skill. Wearing protective clothing and/or a dry suit with sufficient layering insulation beneath and having the confidence of a reliable roll in cold water provides a degree of protection from the elements. The most significant safety consideration, however, begins prior to leaving shore. Arguably, the greatest risk in kayaking is not being aware of the risks confronted in the first place.

## A Greenlandic Perspective on Preparedness

The traditional Inuit have retained a sustainable heritage that embraces the virtues of respect, humility, diversification, and protection, and Greenland Camp represents a juncture of a viable mentorship reflective of a bushcraft that preserves, perpetuates, and promotes the Inuit culture (Golden, 2006). The practice of preparedness essentially is not so much about executing the best roll to survive as it is, principally, about cultivating an adaptive mind-set.

Greenland rolling represents a rigorous discipline rooted deeply in the Inuit cultural paradigm. Whether the mentee is developing the proprioceptive sensitivity to scull for support or learning a variation of a roll, working with mentors personifies the harmony between the individual, environment, and community. Kayaking within arm's length to one another provided the reciprocal advantage of positioning hunter-kayakers to help right a paddler who capsized and failed to roll. Utilizing a bow or hand of God rescue or rafting up in turbulent conditions provided an interdependence that leveraged the strength of team members.

Granted the need for reliable capsized recovery, rolling in contrast to a wet exit and self or assisted rescue in severe current and/or frigidly cold water temperatures represents arguably the only line of defense (Giesbrecht & Hayward, 2006). The core strength and coordination resulting from disciplined practice of the athletic qualities associated with Greenland kayaking provide a venue for analysis. Kayakers who plan to undertake open-water crossings, confront storms, and navigate rock gardens may, however, face the frailties of unacknowledged underpreparedness. Greenland kayaking, as an art passed down, mentored and learned in sustainable service to an inclusive community, conveys the need for kayakers to work together. In paddling groups with diverse abilities, for example, a designated guide or sweep boat may be brought up from the rear. As well, dividing into teams or a buddy system provides an opportunity for kayakers to engage in simulated distress situations that focus on skills beyond a well-grounded roll.

## Conclusion

Greenland Camp helps kayakers to explore their adaptive capacity while developing skills relevant to the disciplined practice of preparedness. Inuit ingenuity, through a long heritage that has allowed not only the survival but also the flourishing of the Inuit communities in bleak conditions, is commensurate with the interdependent community resilience discovered in Greenland Camp. The accumulative wisdom of the Inuit further teaches best practices in the prevention of the objective hazard of cold water immersion. Meeting like-minded paddlers while passionately exploring and learning from various components of the Greenlandic games brings paddlers together in a way beyond paddling. Ungar et al. (2008) indicated that developing a sense of empowerment in connection to community may discernibly enhance youth resilience. As resilience is facilitated when contextual differences are culturally embedded into the program, promoting meaningful expressions of identity, power, and control through intentional self-reflective practices allows mentors to work cohesively to fulfill program goals. Greenland Camp, therefore, facilitates youth empowerment as an experiential mentorship of the Inuit community's adaptive mind-set (Ungar, 2013; Ungar et al., 2008). Greenland Camp thus provides a focused perspective to an investigation—an observant awareness of the land, sea, and natural environment that upholds, resourcefully, the ways of the Inuit.

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