

CENTOL TFE TENEW (TOGETHER WITH THE LAND): PART 1: INDIGENOUS LAND- AND WATER-BASED PEDAGOGIES

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Abstract: This article presents reflections from an Indigenous land- and water-based institute held from 2019 to 2020 for Indigenous graduate students. The institute was coordinated by faculty in the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria and facilitated by knowledge keepers in local WSÁNEĆ and T'Sou-ke nation territories. The year-long institute provided land-based learning, sharing circles, online communication, and editorial mentoring in response to a lack of Indigenous pedagogies and the underrepresentation of Indigenous graduate students in frontline postsecondary programs. While Indigenous faculty and students continue to face significant, institutionally entrenched barriers to postsecondary education, we also face growing demands for Indigenous-focused learning, research, and practice. In this article, Part 1 of a two-paper series on Indigenous land- and water-based learning and practice, we draw on a storytelling approach to share our individual and collective reflections on the benefits and limitations of Indigenous land- and water-based pedagogies. Our stories and analysis amplify our integration of Indigenous ways of being and learning, with a focus on local knowledges and more ethical land and community engagements as integral to Indigenous postsecondary education.

Keywords: Indigenous pedagogies, decolonization, land-based education, Indigenous students, colonialism, postsecondary, child and youth care, youth work

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ÍY, SÇÁCEL SIÁM

'Uy' skweyul

tawâw, tânisi — tatawâw, tân'si

Luu amhl good'y win gya'an

šaḥ yuut q^waa

The greetings that begin this paper are for our ancestors, relatives, and readers. Starting with our languages is our way of honouring the sacredness of the first stories, which come from our homelands and connect us to all our relations. We extend our deepest gratitude to the Songhees, Esquimalt, W̱SÁNEĆ, and T'Sou-ke nations on whose homelands we live and work. In making this acknowledgement, we commit to moving beyond gratitude to enact everyday actions and solidarities that uphold their resurgence and sovereignty.

Together with the land, waters, and all our relations is how this story begins, with greetings in our own languages. We write together as graduate students and faculty from the University of Victoria who are privileged and honoured to live and learn on the homelands of the Lekwungen and W̱SÁNEĆ nations. We belong to the nations of the W̱SÁNEĆ, Snuneymuxw, Stz'uminus, Cowichan, Ahousaht, Gitksan, Sauteaux-Cree Métis, nehiyaw (Cree), Ojibwa, Anishinaabe, Kahnawake, Wolastoqiyik, and Maya (Guatemala). In between May 2019 and May 2020, we participated in an Indigenous land- and water-based learning institute hosted by W̱SÁNEĆ Old One JESINTEN, T'Sou-ke knowledge keepers Jeff Welch and Thor Gauti, and Nuu-chah-nulth artist Denise Williams from House of Winchee. The institute was facilitated by faculty mentors Sarah Wright Cardinal, Nick XEMFOLTW Claxton, and Sandrina de Finney from the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria.

Collective Storytelling of an Indigenous Land- and Water-Based Institute

During the institute, we gathered, walked, harvested, feasted, learned, and shared together in special and sacred places: the shores, meadow, trails, and forest at SNIDÇEEL [Tod Inlet] in W̱SÁNEĆ territory, and between coastlines, sheltered inlets, and old growth on T'Sou-ke territory. These have been, and continue to be, significant gathering places for W̱SÁNEĆ and T'Sou-ke nations; their histories were restoried for us by JESINTEN and knowledge keepers Jeff and Thor, who generously hosted our group. When we came together for a closing and blanketing ceremony, we were honoured by and grateful to Old One May Sam and knowledge keeper JB Williams for sharing protocols and land-based teachings with us on W̱SÁNEĆ territory. Each teaching we received has been practised on these territories since time immemorial, rooted in the resilience of the knowledge keepers who steward these lands, waters, and languages.

Our hosts recounted how local ecosystems and ways of life have been severely impacted by colonial practices and policies. They described how policies of genocide, reserve systems, segregation, forced land appropriation, and residential schools, and numerous child apprehension policies — among many other forms of colonial violence — were deliberately imposed on their sovereign Nations. In the process, Indigenous peoples were disconnected from their homelands, and thus from their land- and water-based ways of teaching and learning (Archibald, 2008; Simpson, 2017; Williams et al., 2018). To counter the colonial harms held in these sacred places, our institute recentred land- and water-based pedagogical practices of working in circle, harvesting, ceremony, speaking the language, and sharing oral histories. These practices are vital to our accountability to all of our relations that guide and protect us in our frontline work with diverse Indigenous communities.

To coauthor this paper, we employed a collective oral and written storytelling approach by sharing in circle, taking field notes, and exchanging stories and writing. As lead authors (Morgan, Sandrina, and Sarah), we collectively wrote the abstract, introduction, and framing pieces, and invited institute participants to share individual reflections on their experiences with land- and water-based learning, which we edited to fit into a collective story. We have organized our work into two distinct papers both featured in this special issue. This paper, entitled *Part 1: Indigenous Land- and Water-Based Pedagogies*, focuses on our experiences with restorative, de-settling, land- and water-based local Indigenous learning and pedagogies in postsecondary contexts. *Part 2: Indigenous Frontline Practice as Resurgence* (de Finney et al., 2020) applies this learning to our frontline practice frameworks with children, youth, families, and communities, and outlines our connections to broader debates about land- and water-based programs. In this paper, we augment our integration of Indigenous ways of being and learning with a focus on local knowledges and more ethical land and community engagements as integral to postsecondary pedagogy.

In terms of terminology, we use both Old One and Elder to refer to an honoured and respected teacher of Indigenous worldviews. “Old One” is a more appropriate English translation of the SENĆOTEN word used in WSÁNEĆ territories. We also use both of the terms “land-based” and “land- and water-based”, with the understanding that even though “land-based” already encompasses water and air, specifying “water” is especially important when working in coastal territories.

We raise our hands in deepest gratitude to the knowledge keepers, ancestors, relatives, waters, and lands who hosted, cared for, and fed us during this institute; to institute faculty mentors Christine Sy, Leanne Kelly, Mandeep Kaur Mucina, Nick Claxton, Sarah Wright Cardinal, and Sandrina de Finney; and to all the staff of the University of Victoria’s Indigenous Academic and Community Engagement (IACE) office, especially Indigenous initiatives coordinator Dorothea Harris, LE,NONET mentorship and bursary coordinator Jilleun Tenning; to the Centre for Indigenous Research and Community-Led Engagement (CIRCLE); to our funders, the Aboriginal

Service Plan (Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training) and The Canet Foundation¹; and to Spirit Bear Art Farm².

Figure 1. *At Spirit Bear Art Farm*



Note. Gathering on the beach to share wild rose and fir tip tea in T'Sou-ke territories.

Land and Water as Our First Teachers

The primary purpose of our institute was to foster a community of learning for Indigenous graduate students that values and honours their distinct and diverse histories, cultural traditions, and worldviews. Indigenous students continue to be drastically underrepresented in graduate programs in Canadian postsecondary institutions (Pidgeon et al., 2014) and face significant institutionally entrenched barriers to success that include intersecting forms of colonial violence (Gehl & Ross, 2013), systemic racial discrimination, poverty, limited accessibility, and lack of relevant curriculum and pedagogical practices (Chirgwin, 2015; Cote-Meek, 2014; Smith & Varghese, 2016). At the same time, Indigenous instructors and students are increasingly called upon to conduct Indigenous practice and learning rooted in their own worldviews (Chirgwin, 2015), highlighting the need for new pedagogies in practitioner training to support culturally

¹ www.thecanetfoundation.org

² www.spiritbearartfarm.com

grounded, community-responsive (Mashford-Pringle & Stewart, 2019) teaching, practice, and learning models.

This work is crucial to unsettling enduring colonial ideologies and practices in postsecondary education. Relationality is a way of being that is restricted by Western teaching and pedagogical models (Datta, 2018). Thus, a sense of relational, land- and water-rooted community is often missing for Indigenous graduate students who attend Western postsecondary institutions (Pidgeon et al., 2014). Dominant Western modes of education have been employed by the Canadian government to disconnect Indigenous peoples from their territories, languages, and community responsibilities (Mashford-Pringle & Stewart, 2019; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2016). While Indigenous students have been forced to adapt to the cultural norms of Western universities, universities have lagged in adapting to the cultural and educational needs of Indigenous students and communities (Battiste, 2005; Chirgwin, 2015; Cote-Meek, 2014).

Land- and water-based learning offers a vital response to this institutional lag. Indigenous pedagogies differ from other kinds of imported, Eurowestern-centric, colonial nature-based pedagogies in that they are rooted in place-based relations held by families and nations, and require participants to enter into reciprocal relationships with local ancestral knowledge systems rooted in Indigenous governance pathways. For decades, Indigenous scholars have advocated for relational, politicized pedagogies that enhance the well-being of Indigenous peoples (Archibald, 2008; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Gunn Allen, 1986; Robertson & Ljubicic, 2019; Simpson, 2014). Red Pedagogy (Grande, 2000), Radical Indigenism (Garrouette, 2005), and other Indigenous resurgence frameworks provide a vital roadmap for restoring Indigenous knowledge systems that open the way for community healing and wellness. Garrouette (2005) urged resistance to the pressure upon Indigenous scholars to participate in academic discourses that strip Indigenous intellectual traditions of their spiritual and sacred elements. Garrouette took this stand on the ground that sacred elements are absolutely central to the coherence of our knowledge systems; if we surrender them there is little left in our philosophies that makes any sense (Garrouette, 2005, p. 172). Engaging with these ancient Indigenous knowledge and linguistic systems fulfils an eternization of Indigenous worldviews that is required for vibrant Indigenous futures. The pedagogies that we centre so rigorously in these reflections both challenge and “run parallel” to mainstream discourses on Indigenous worldviews and relationships to land and water (Gaudry & Hancock, 2012). Indigenous-led pedagogies carry the potential to foster spiritual, social, emotional, and physical (Mashford-Pringle & Stewart, 2019) changes in worldviews that continue to influence students even after their studies have concluded (Corntassel & Hardbarger, 2019).

To illustrate the transformative power of these pedagogies, in the following sections graduate students who participated in the institute share individual reflections on their learning experiences there.

Figure 2. *T'Sou-ke Land- and Water-Based Learning*



Note. Students observe T'Sou-ke knowledge keeper Jeff Welch butterfly salmon with cedar stakes.

Shifting Accountabilities, by Morgan Mowatt

Stepping out of the classroom and onto the land, into the water, into fresh air immediately transports me from a colonial mindset back towards my teachings. As a Gitksan person, being with the land and water reminds me that my accountabilities lie with our relations and the future generations, not with the colonial institutions where much of our work is contained. This shift towards teachings is greatly enhanced for me when these sacred places I enter into have been sheltered or restored in some way from the grotesque impacts of colonization. This was the case where we gathered on W̱SÁNEĆ and T'Sou-ke territories, which have been nurtured, and continue to be restored and protected, by their relations. Unfortunately, finding decolonial learning spaces is a challenge in conventional graduate education. Throughout Canada's short history the Canadian education system has been one of the most utilized tools of genocide on Indigenous peoples. The disconnection from our accountabilities, a result of Indigenous students learning solely through Western academic frameworks in Canadian universities, can be traced to Canada's nation-building project. This particular disconnection plays a key role in upholding Canada's claims to legal and political authority; put succinctly, "one, if not the primary, impact on Indigenous education has been to impede the transmission of knowledge about the forms of governance, ethics and philosophies that arise from relationships on the land" (Wildcat et al., 2014, p. ii). Indigenous

students continue to be set up to fail by the intentional exclusion of Indigenous ways of knowing, relating, and governing from post-secondary institutions.

Ultimately, state-sanctioned disconnections from land, such as reserve systems, residential and Indian day schools, and unjust apprehension of our children, seek to convince us that we are *separate* from land (Goeman, 2008). Further, universities create an environment that promotes forgetting our Indigenous accountabilities. Without the land, water, air, and more-than-human beings to remind us of our responsibilities, we may struggle to honour them. As Jane Smith (2005) has shared, our people’s origin story paints us as one with the land: “The first *Gitxsan* was thrust out of the earth and became the first child of the earth. The *Gitxsan* are children of nature.” (p. 17). Consequently, Canadian universities force Indigenous students to choose between expending our energy in efforts to validate our own accountabilities within the institution or focusing on the studies in front of us.

The immense tool of oppression that is Canadian education is mitigated, at least in part, by land-based learning. Accountability structures shift the moment teaching is moved into less colonially-entrenched spaces: I can see, smell, taste, and feel our relations once again. I am reminded at SNIDÇEE and on T’Sou-ke territories of my responsibilities to the relations here. Failure to adhere to the laws and protocols of Indigenous lands, including my own, is also a failure to recognize myself as a part of the land (Goeman, 2008). Parallel to actions in my home territories, as a guest I seek to embody *Gitxsan* principles of harmony, balance, and interconnectedness, all framed within a holistic framework of respect (Smith, 2005). When JESINTEN speaks to his history, land, people, and nonhuman beings, I simultaneously hear my own ancestors’ calls for accountability. The ancestors know when they are being slighted: the trees tell them, the wind tells them, and the salmon tell them when they head back home. The connection to the land, water, and beings that is fostered through land-based learning sends messages to the ancestors and lands from which we’ve been disconnected. Honouring these accountabilities is reciprocal, of course. The earth, water, and ancestors have always offered us much more than we offer them. Land-based learning fosters the remembering required to become a good ancestor, both on our own territories and as guests on the homelands of others.

Interconnectedness, by Jilleun Tenning

JESINTEN begins the land-based workshop with stories of Land. Land is the most fundamental part of Indigenous life. Sandra Styres (2011) teaches us that Land informs pedagogy “through storied relationships that are etched into the essence of every rock, tree, seed, animal, pathway and waterway in relation to the Aboriginal people who have existed on the land since time immemorial” (p. 721). Land-based education is a vital part of resurging and sustaining Indigenous life and knowledge. This way of knowing acts in direct contestation to the colonizer’s drive to eliminate Indigenous life and Indigenous claims to land. JESINTEN’s process of storying Land is an important example of Indigenous education whereby storying connects us as Indigenous peoples to our ancestors and reinforces that we are a part of everything that has come before.

The Old Ones position language at the forefront of our land-based learning; they know that the “voice of the land is in our language” (Taylor, 2004, p. 19). Languages arise out of Land; language is our relative; it speaks to us as learners in many different verbal and nonverbal ways. This means that Indigenous languages have not developed in isolation inside our brains but in relationship to land and water (Rasmussen & Akulukjuk, 2009). Thus, Indigenous languages are necessary for story and are connected to the very concept of land.

The W̱SÁNEĆ Nation, where I was raised culturally, uses the Indigenous language SENĆOFEN. Indigenous languages are at the core of who Indigenous people are. At this workshop, as SENĆOFEN language is spoken, I become cloaked in its superpower that is impenetrable by the colonizer. When I hear SENĆOFEN and when I hear myself represented through story, I feel complete — as if the words are blanketing me through ceremony. Without a connection to the unique lands the Creator gave to each of us, I am made aware that we as Indigenous peoples would very likely be starved into colonial dependence and erased from history. To avoid this spiritual disconnection, we must remain deeply connected to the teachings embodied in the phrase “all my relations” — respect for all our relations — for which we all hold responsibility. We must push back against the violence that occurs when we are disconnected from Land and our languages.

Towering over the group of Indigenous learners in T’Sou-ke Nation are the cedar trees, which are also referred to as grandparents. Knowledge keepers Jeff and Thor share that the cedar tree is the tree of life, capable of sustaining the mind, body, and soul. Sadly, many of the grandparents have been cut down through commercial logging practices, sold as a commodity to make way for colonial development and extractive industry. These human intruders on the land have been unaware of or uncaring about the disruption this has caused to delicate ecosystems. At a deeper level, Old Ones share that Land is not a possession; rather, it is the heart of Indigenous people and her pulse beats through our bodies (Tuck et al., 2014). As learners of the land, our Old Ones share the teaching that we should “take only what we need.”

Having this opportunity to engage in land-based learning has provided our circle of Indigenous students with the chance to share knowledge, culture, and lifeways. These are infused with Land, as she is the first, foremost, and best teacher (Tuck et al., 2014). Additionally, this experience created opportunities to engage in decolonizing practices that promote reciprocal relationships and ethical practices; these position Indigenous approaches to learning at the forefront of our educational journeys, nurturing us as students who are learning how to practise through our Indigenous ways.

The Land is Our Greatest Teacher, by Gina Mowatt

I am frog clan from the house of Luutkudziiwus and Xsimwitjinn of the Gitxsan Nation. My master’s research was on Indian education as an act of genocide, and on the oral history of Gitxsan cultural strength and resurgence. During the institute, I reflected on how my experience in a previous program — a mainstream learning environment — shaped my thinking, my reactions,

and the questions I felt I needed to ask and answer in my work. Colonial and Eurocentric buildings, where Western knowledge and colonial mentalities are considered to be neutral and universal baseline markers of “scholarship”, are unsafe learning spaces for Indigenous learners. Some Indigenous learners will never be able to be themselves, will always be on guard, will always feel uncomfortable and will always be on the defence (Cote-Meek, 2014, p. 34) in colonial spaces. Many of us navigate postsecondary institutions in survival mode. Survival mode is a traumatizing place in which to be and learn; it disrupts our cognitive functioning as students and changes our relationship with ourselves and our kin.

Land-based learning with and by First Peoples can help us transcend this harmful experience. The space was provided in the land-based institute to feel vulnerable. I shared my academic experience and connected with other similar stories. In this sacred space, my mind, body, and spirit were able to open, to let go of and transcend the harm that had been inflicted on me in my former program. Outside of Western thought, pursuits, and knowledge — and beyond fighting racist students within the walls of a trespassing state’s institution — Indigenous students begin to thrive. Different places, smells, and experiences activate our “ancestral memory” (Basso, 1996, p. 17). Land-based learning elevates the mind and spirit to reach a higher consciousness in our thinking and our work. Hearing birds singing reminds me of stories about birds from my territory, which underlines my responsibility to those relations. I remember the teachings passed on to me: to fight to keep the vision of our ancestors alive and pass it on to the next generation.

The land is our greatest teacher. The rocks are calm and quiet and also strong and fierce. The water has depths that hides mysteries and worlds. Viewing the water from one way, we see one teaching, and from another perspective we see something else. Further, the ocean is a collective, but it has innumerable particles. We are that way too. We are like the diversity of trees: one tree offers something the other does not, but they are both necessary for a healthy ecosystem (Grant, 2018). Listening to brothers and sisters, aunties and uncles, grandfathers and grandmothers sharing stories, talking in circle, and hearing and feeling the worldviews of W̱SÁNEĆ, Cree, Punjabi, and other ancestors in how they speak and relate reminds me of what we hope to reclaim and what feeds our spirit. I am reminded of the love, kindness, gentleness, and calm that lives in the blood of our circle as we share together.

Indigenous students need to learn in spaces where our knowledge, our teachings, our food, our bodies, our accents, and our voices are the baseline. We are not the visiting scholar; we are not the blurb at the end of the page in the textbook. We are the pedagogy and approach to the course. When a student can present their body on the land that their ancestors have fed with good medicine, good lessons, and good energy, our spirit awakens. That memory is sparked when we are on our territories and start our day with a prayer in our language, when we come together and invoke our laws and protocols and our ways of respecting each other on our journeys, side by side.

Reclaiming my Indigeneity, by Ana MacLeod

Indigenous people have always healed through stories, song, dance, and connection to land and water. Leanne Simpson (2014) explained that we are not only “learning from the land” but we are learning “with the land” (p. 7). During my time participating in the land-based research institute, I learned how sacred land and water are to my healing and reclaiming of my identity. Hansen (2018) stressed that land-based education “is a fundamental part of decolonization because it promotes an Indigenous model of education in a culturally appropriate way” (p. 78). Further education such as the land-based research institute is needed to inform Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers and practitioners about the importance of connecting to land and water as a way of healing. Connecting to land helps me to ask myself how I can continue to be an advocate for the Indigenous families and communities alongside whom I will work. How can I learn from and with Indigenous families and communities in a way that shows my deep compassion, respect, and empathy for their stories, traditions, ethics, and protocols?

During one of the land-based days when we spent the afternoon at Spirit Bear Art Farm on the lands of the T’Souke people, I started to consider what it means to be Indigenous. Over the past six months I have been deeply connecting to my Indigenous roots. I am Mayan but not exactly sure which Indigenous Maya Guatemalan community I am from. I also identify as Latina as I have some mixed Spanish roots from El Salvador. Land keeps me connected to my ancestors who are thousands of miles away. I also now think of myself as living in two worlds, both Western and Indigenous. My birth family are Indigenous and my adoptive family are Western. Being physically in the ocean I am reminded that I am always going to be living in both worlds. Connecting to land grounds me, as “land teaches and can be considered as first teacher” (Tuck et al., 2014, p. 10). For me, land is indeed first teacher. I need to feel comfortable with the land and water before I can do good, grounded work with Indigenous families and communities — work that is relational, honest, and compassionate.

I also think about the different worlds I am in as an academic, community member, daughter, and professional. Education and learning can come from any human and nonhuman relation. Before I weave my academic, personal, and professional lives into the counselling work I will be doing with Indigenous youth, communities, and their loved ones, I need to find out how I am reclaiming my Indigeneity. As someone who is not from this territory, I have been very privileged and honoured to learn from teachings, land, and ceremonies of local communities. Connecting to land reminds me that the colonial institution called “academia” or “university” is just a small part of my journey toward becoming a strong Indigenous young woman. I raise my hands to the knowledge keepers, mentors, Old Ones, and nonhuman relations (rocks, land, and water) who have taught me that my body is to be respected, not abused. My spirit is to be protected, not bruised. The *land* is to be honoured, not misused.

The Potlatch Way, by Pawa Haiyupis

Colonization dehumanizes people (Fanon, 1963). For example, in Canada, the Indian Act is a colonial tool that has devastated Indigenous people (Allan & Smylie, 2015). The Gradual Civilization Act and the Gradual Enfranchisement Act of 1855 were consolidated in 1876 as the Indian Act (Henderson, 2006). Frances Abele (2007) compared people living under the Indian Act with people in prison because they both “live so thoroughly under the supervision and control of the executive branch of the federal government” (p. 30). Due to its ongoing and traumatic interference, the Indian Act represents all the things taken away from Indigenous people, such as connection to territory, language, ceremony, culture, and children (Satsan, 2019).

I come from a strong bloodline: my kin have been leaders, weavers, healers, artists, whalers, and warriors. We are descendants of Potlatch people. In the Pacific Northwest, where my family is from, the potlatch is a governance feast system that is centred around gift giving and wealth sharing to foster economic redistribution and to show appreciation and respect (M. Sutherland, personal communication, October 5, 2019). For us, potlatch is a way that centres deeply situated Indigenous identity, values, and ethics. Wealth sharing through the potlatch system helps decrease inequality within communities (Kte’pi, 2013), since “a chief earned respect by giving away all that he had at the appropriate times” (Atleo, 2010, p. 43). Our potlatch system is a cultural expression of familial and tribal economy, laws, institutions, and spirituality.

Two pieces of Indian Act legislation, the potlatch ban and the pass system, which were enforced from 1855 to 1951, significantly disrupted the intergenerational relationship between Indigenous people and our ancestral territories (Allan & Smylie, 2015). Under the reserve system, officials called “Indian agents” were armed with the power to govern the movement of Indigenous people on and off reserve through a pass system (Allan & Smylie, 2015; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Making the potlatch, a source of land-based teachings, illegal at the same time as imprisoning Indigenous people on reserves limited our access to the natural world. As Fanon (1963) so rightly stated, “For a colonized people, the most essential value, because it is the most meaningful, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and, above all, dignity” (p. 9). Before contact, the natural world sustained potlatch people economically and spiritually, whereas life under the Indian Act created poverty and disconnection (Satsan, 2019). The Indian Act made it illegal for us to live freely, and our sacred Big Houses were replaced by churches that are now abandoned on reserves across the country, a symbol of the spiritual wasteland (Satsan, 2019).

In my work with various Indigenous young people and communities across Canada, I have observed that creating more opportunities for land-based well-being offers a pathway to heal from the damages of colonization. The oral process and cultural protocol within the potlatch provide a specific kind of land-based pedagogy. Potlatch provides instructions for activities such as origin stories, songs, dances, art, language, and Big House etiquette, as well as harvesting sustenance from the territory. In my teachings, this framework encourages respect for humanity’s

relationships with all life; it serves as our resistance to, and confers resilience against, settler colonialism (Simpson, 2014, pp. 19–20). A relationship is a commitment over time. Indigenous people who continuously reside in their homelands have a bond to the land that endures across lifetimes.

Translating knowledge into action to impress on us who we are as learners is an ancient way of coexisting with the natural world and a significant driver of land-based research, pedagogy, and practice. Potlatch cultures use protocol, song, dance, prayer, and oral history as means of governance. At all times, our land-based practices comply with the local Indigenous protocols of the gathering. Speaking Indigenous languages to introduce oneself to the people, territory, and ancestors is encouraged. In the same way as the ancestors resisted by practising potlatch underground during the potlatch ban, we now bear a responsibility to the future to keep Indigenous potlatch people thriving.

Today, potlatch teachings provide me with the ethical framework that guides my work with youth and communities. My family goes to the mountains, the ocean, and the forest to heal our trauma. Along with reciprocity, a strengths-based, inclusive, Indigenous-led, and community-engaged approach benefits our communities. This is a movement of change that inspires people to do more on the land and water, as our great-grandmothers and great-grandfathers did. A powerful connection to our ancestral roots is generated when we live according to precontact social norms and laws. The potlatch way is in the DNA of our people.

Witnessing Kinship, by Erynne Gilpin

I sit here now on W̱SÁNEĆ shorelines watching an eagle fly above me, and salt water meets fresh water along the body of the lands. My eyes are puffy from quiet tears and I feel like falling asleep among those gathered in this learning circle. Maybe because, for the first time in a while, I feel safe. I feel like I can drop the stones I have been carrying in my fists. I feel like I can rest. I feel; I am allowed to feel. I truly feel love move through us, as the warm wind. I can hear the trees and they are happy because Nick XEMFOLTW̱ Claxton and Tracy Underwood are sharing knowledge, systems of science, technology, healing, governance, and kinship through introducing us to the land. Introducing us to the territories and the relatives, and inviting us to introduce ourselves to them. Sharing with us the kin names of the lands, waters, and plants, which in this moment house our circle, and hold our bodies. Then I cry some more, when I look at how much Cedar loves their people. And I cry again, quietly, for the people in my life who have taken time over these past five years to teach me about the beauty, complexity, vitality, sorrow, and mystery of their homelands. Today our learning is on the land, and this is how I feel.

I feel like I am a visitor in the house of a dear friend's grandmother. It is warm, familiar, safe, and welcoming, yet still not my own place of belonging. I am here from another territory, kinship, and community. The love and respect contained in their kinship and belonging radiates outward, and I can feel its strength. Through learning and witnessing their kinship, I am accountable to them. Today, we have been invited to be witnesses. What does it mean for me to witness as

someone who is a visitor in the kinlands and waters of W̱SÁNEĆ peoples? Just as I witness and revere kinship that flows between grandmother and grandchild, I am here today, witnessing and feeling sacred kinship and belonging that flows through SENĆOTEN speakers and W̱SÁNEĆ lands and waters, informing my own sense of accountability.

Don't I wish for visitors on my own homelands to treat my kinship in the same regard — with honour, love, and respect? To honour the love I share with my grandmother? The love that flows between my own nehiyawewin-Michif language and nehiyaw lands is sacred. My body is here, my mind is here, my heart and spirit are here. The trees are happy that we recognize this, and the wind pushes a little louder through their leaves. Rattles. As a birth-doula/helper, I understand my responsibilities, roles, and accountabilities within a framework of loving support, unconditional care, and quiet helping. Sometimes I think of the nehiyawewin word *natamakewin*, which tells me about how to be a helper and offer support and involves responsibility to make space for others rather than take space. The roles and responsibilities of *natamakewin* in my birth practice also inform my everyday ethic as a witness and visitor to these lands and waters. I realize that witnessing kinship informs an everyday commitment to support, assist, and make space for W̱SÁNEĆ and T'Sou-ke community members in relationship to their lands and waters. When we remember we belong to the land, we remember that we belong to one another, yet I am a visitor here. I am accountable. When I enact *natamakewin* in the birth room, I am not a member of the family but rather a witness, a witness to expanding kinship networks extending from ancestral belonging and into futurity. To enact the everyday relational practice and governance of *natamakewin* is to ensure that our communities can live out safe, loving, and focused kinship with their lands and waters. As I sit here on W̱SÁNEĆ shorelines, learning from the land and waters, witnessing kinship, and informing my accountabilities ... this is what I feel.

Decolonizing Ourselves in a Spiritual Vacuum, by Dorothea Harris

As we stood in Circle and each of us introduced ourselves traditionally, grounded in teachings that were shared by the Old Ones, I could sense my spirit come back to me. The academy — the place where I work and learn — had been draining the life out of me.

The place where we held our work was sacred; I could feel it. I sat with my feet in the ocean, watching the birds flit over its surface and remembering times that I have felt that carefree and peaceful. Decolonization and Indigenization are overarching theories that describe the work that many of us in the academy are trying to do. What often gets missed is that we need to decolonize ourselves. There is nothing healthy, or Indigenous, about sitting at a computer all day writing reports and sending emails. The very things that we are trying to do — Indigenize curriculum, support land-based learning, prioritize Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and listen to the Old Ones — are lost in the sheer business of the academy. We become a cog in the wheel of Indigenization.

In contrast, what I experienced during our institute was that the land is nourishing, and being in community with Old Ones and knowledge keepers is life-giving. The Old Ones often talk about

knowing who you are and where you come from. How do we do that when we are so busy reading and writing that we aren't listening to the land, to the sounds of the waves crashing on the rocks, the birds chirping, the wind rustling through the trees, people laughing? How do we feed our souls? We talk about developing cultural acumen among our teachers, colleagues, and students; we even have Indigenous cultural acumen training. But how can we teach people to be still and listen, to be present and learn from Creation ... in a classroom? How can we teach these spiritual values that are so important to Indigenous ways of knowing and being when we are in a spiritual vacuum? These are the questions that I asked myself after spending time being reacquainted with my spirit at Spirit Bear Art Farm.

Qwul'sih'yah'maht (2018) reminded us that:

even when our academic work takes us away from our communities, we must always be mindful of our ways of knowing ... our relationships with all living things are what keeps us rooted in our traditional ways of knowing and being.
(pp. 48–49)

These relationships with one another, with our communities, and with the land are imperative, but they take time. Time is often not afforded to academics and students, as I am quickly discovering.

It seems that a “good” academic practice can involve spinning wheels in the hope of making change: finishing a degree (or several), being published, and presenting at conferences. This is in sharp contrast to my experiences of working in community, where “relationships do not merely shape reality, but they are reality” (Wilson, 2008, p. 74). In First Nations communities, good practice is spending time — time with community members, Old Ones, Elders, and children, and on the land. While this represents an Indigenous epistemology, actually supporting land-based learning for students, supporting staff and faculty to have healthy relationships with one another and to get out on the land, is a challenge. We need to engender a culture that respects the work that is done outside the walls of the academy, that encourages students, staff, and faculty to spend time with one another and the land, and that rewards us for more than mere academic production. It is too easy to get lost in this space and forget the values that we are fighting for. Songhees Elder Skip Dick, talking about the effects of assimilation that happen within educational institutions, summed it up this way: “Once you become institutionalized you give up your family way” (S. Dick, personal communication, April 1, 2019). This is what Indigenous academics must be wary of — losing our teachings, our family way. This institute was an opportunity for healing, and it reminded me of what is important, and of Skip Dick's words to us: “We are not a program, we are human beings” (S. Dick, personal communication, April 1, 2019), human beings who need a connection to the land.

Conclusion

Indigenous education is not Indigenous or education from within our intellectual practices unless it comes through the land, unless it occurs in an Indigenous context using Indigenous processes.

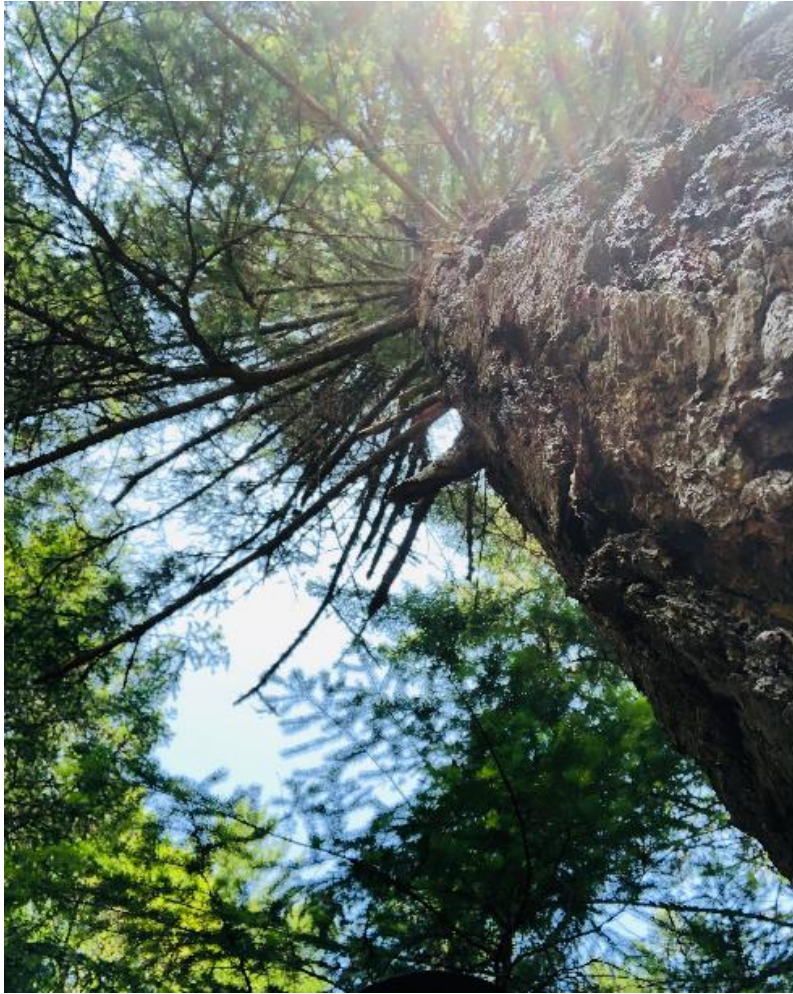
Leanne Simpson, 2017, p. 154

To conclude, we return to Leanne Simpson's profound teachings about the vitality of our original, sacred learning processes and governance that are integral to the well-being of our children, youth, families, and communities. Recognizing that Indigenous nations have distinct, sovereign ways of knowing and doing provides an opening to foster more complex dialogues regarding whose knowledges are being reproduced and valued in post-secondary education. Indigenous scholars have long warned us against the danger of romanticizing and essentializing Indigeneity, and we see these challenges in postsecondary classrooms when Indigenous ontologies are presented in appropriative, diluted, or tokenistic ways (Borrows, 2017; Deloria, 1969; Grande, 1999; Robertson & Ljubicic 2019). These are significant questions for students who face the paradoxical pressures of enacting holistic praxis informed by Indigenous worldviews, while at the same time learning in educational environments that are removed from the very places and relations that inform those worldviews (Borrows, 2017; Munroe et al., 2013). As we share our diverse experiences and histories, we are reminded that there is no singular, prescriptive, linear approach to land- and water-based relational praxis. These practices are learned over time, with hard work, in relationship, and through complex ethical frameworks that hold us accountable to place and kin. There are no shortcuts. Simpson (2017) stressed that land-based pedagogies require a permanent shift in learners' worldviews:

Like governance and leadership and every other aspect of reciprocated life, education comes from the roots up. It comes from being enveloped by land. An individual's intimate relationship with the spiritual and physical elements of creation is at the center of a learning journey that is lifelong. (p. 154)

The institute encouraged us to sharpen our land- and water-based literacies and ethics while centring local knowledges. We are grateful for the lived connections that perpetuate relational praxis, extend our kinship to one another, and inform our accountability to children, youth, families, and communities. This prepares us for the difficult work of extending our learning into our frontline practice, which we discuss in Part 2 of this two-paper series.

Figure 3. *At SNIDŪEE*



Note. Learning under our tree and sky relatives. Photo credit: Danielle Alphonse.

Land–Water Kinship, poem by Erynne Gilpin (institute participant)

On the land
On the water
Held in SENĆOFEN kinship
Today is the future
It belongs to the next generations
of learners — dreamers — healers
Maybe one day we will move beyond territorial acknowledgement
and gather here in a good way
so that the land and their kin
can introduce themselves.

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Dr. Sarah Wright Cardinal is a faculty member in the School of Child and Youth Care, University of Victoria. Her work centres the importance of healing from colonial disruptions to Indigenous identities and addressing these fractures with land-, water-, and spirit-based teachings and practices that contribute to child, youth, and community wellness.

Jilleun Tenning is Coast Salish from Stz’uminus. Jilleun holds a Master of Arts degree in Child and Youth Care from the University of Victoria.

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Pawa (pawatsq^wačiiil) Hayupis is a graduate student in Indigenous Nationhood at the University of Victoria. She has 20 years of experience facilitating transformational gatherings in First Nations communities by encouraging connections to traditional waterways, lands, languages, songs, and ceremonies. Pawa hosts “safe enough spaces” to explore difficult governance questions and her approach is rooted in the belief that nation-rebuilding is healing.

Erynne Gilpin is Saulteaux-Cree Métis (The Pas, Manitoba). Erynne is a community wellness researcher and practicing Birth Doula, and is completing a PhD in Indigenous Governance with a focus on Indigenous Women’s embodied experiences with well-being, leadership, and kinship to Land and Waters.

Dorothea Harris is the Indigenous Initiatives Coordinator at the University of Victoria and is completing a Master of Education degree in Leadership Studies at the University of Victoria. Dorothea is Snuneymuxw (from Nanaimo), German and Irish.

Ana Celeste MacLeod is Maya and Salvadoran. Ana is a second-year graduate student in the Master of Arts program in Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria. Her research focuses on how she is reclaiming her Indigeneity.

Dr. Nick XEMFOLTW Claxton’s teaching and research are centred on the revitalization and resurgence of Indigenous knowledges and languages through community-based and land-based research and education. Nick’s work involves reconnecting elders, youth, and community members and supports a longer-term journey of resurgence and intergenerational resilience.