G̱ilakas'la:
To accept you for who you are in this present moment

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Counselling (MC)

City University of Canada

Vancouver, B.C., Canada site

March 2022

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Abstract

This thesis explores the world view of the Kwakwaka'wakw (kwak'wala speaking people) people to strengthen understanding of the true impact that Indian Residential Schools had on how the Kwakwaka'wakw people survived this colonial attempt at assimilation. This thesis emerged as a need for the writer to decolonize her synthesized worldviews of western academia and her Kwakwaka'wakw people. The Kwakwaka'wakw worldview can be demonstrated using words from kwak'wala language that greatly describe the relationship that the Kwakwaka'wakw have with the world. A literature review was conducted on language and cultural revitalization in order to engage in a conversation about the role that art can play in Truth and Reconciliation. Can art help bridge the gap between pre-conceived ideas of Indigenous people and how they live?

Keyword: Indigenous, Kwakwaka'wakw, world view, language revitalization, healing

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the Katzie, Kwantlen, Semiahmoo and other Coast Salish Peoples, and recognize that I have lived as an unwelcome guest on their unceded and ancestral territories for the past twenty-seven years.

G̱ilakas’la (thank you) to all the scholars who paved the way for me be able to write this document in a way that made sense to me. This includes the scholars who focused on an Indigenous research method, but also the Kwakwaka’wakw scholars who engaged in research that allowed me to conduct a literature review which included a strong Kwakwaka’wakw voice. I was able to rely on your ability to engage in conversations with our knowledge keepers.

G̱ilakas’la to my mother Putlas (Diane Nuvayouma nee Hunt), who has held my hand throughout my entire life. G̱ilakas’la to my father Sisa̱x̱olas (Johnson Bell) for encouraging me to make education a priority.

G̱ilakas’la to the Gwa’sala-Nakwaxda’xw Nation and their Education department for their financial assistance throughout my post-secondary Education. G̱ilakas’la to the Education Coordinator, Grace Smith, for working with me and providing support throughout my post-secondary education.

G̱ilakas’la to Dr. Christopher Kinman for helping me see this project through in a way that represented my people. Also, G̱ilakas’la to City University for always being so understanding and acknowledging that life happens.

G̱ilakas’la to my husband, Danny Narayan, for being my partner in everything. G̱ilakas’la to my children, Daniel and Brendan Narayan, for being all the motivation I need in this world.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to all those who came before me, those who walk with me and to all those who have and will come after me.

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Chapter One

Writing this document is not just to fulfill a requirement of my educational program. I hope that this document will stand as testimony to help uphold the truth of Indigenous people. It is for this very reason that my writing will not follow a traditional academic format. I will approach the writing as if I am in conversation with my sources. Imagine, if you will, that I am following the oral tradition of my people, the Kwakwaka'wakw.

For too long we have been asked to prove our history. Most recently, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission asked Indigenous people to recount their stories about the truths they lived because of Indian Residential School (IRS) system in Canada (Truth and Reconciliation Canada, 2015). Presumably, if the truths stood some sort of test, said Indigenous people were entitled to compensation to pain and suffering endured because of the forced assimilation practices of the Federal Government of Canada and participating churches. The legacy of the Residential School system was one of intergenerational trauma. This trauma has been insidious. This trauma has not cared who it hurt. Although a by-product of IRS, its lasting impact is one that we are still trying to undo. The hurt it has caused has been great. The hurt that it has caused has been written about many times. However, our truth still gets rejected and we are asked to "get over it". I would like to postulate that the way to "get over it" is to be heard. I hope to demonstrate that the real human damage caused by the Residential School system is not only that of the abusive trauma suffered, but it is further compounded by the loss of language and culture. If people can hear this part of the story and truth is accepted, then we can get to the work of reconciliation. I hope to demonstrate that a possible pathway to reconciliation is engaging in conversations about Indigenous worldviews. Most of the work I hope to achieve will be done by decolonizing my own thought processes.

Have you ever felt called to do something…like from deep within yourself? A topic has stuck with you as the ideas of how to execute it have changed and evolved? As students in western academia at all levels, we have been taught this idea of a thesis. A topic which we would like to discuss from a specific stand point. We outline this idea, but have to break it down to one sentence. One sentence that will tell you our intent. Then we must get to the work of proving our thesis. We must prove to you using our own words when possible, but credit others whose ideas we have borrowed to back up our premise. I have been at this work of obtaining my Masters of Counselling since fall of 2012. Throughout, we were encouraged to develop our thesis as we wrote on topics in our classroom work. Throughout, this idea of Indigenous art and its role in healing historic trauma has stuck with me. How I would execute this work has never been clear. The topic, yes, but how to demonstrate to you, the reader, its important and vital role has been murky. What has made it murky? I am being asked to leave a piece of myself behind to demonstrate to my academic institution that I have indeed mastered my topic of study. I would like to think that visual art is a universal language and if we can have conversations about Indigenous art work it can facilitate conversations about reconciliation.

The focus of the legacy of the Residential School system is often represented by statistics that talk about alcoholism/substance abuse; patterns of abuse—physical, sexual, mental; suicide rates; teen pregnancy; and broken families. The legacies that have created so much strife, we cannot keep our heads above the water, so have been unable to assert our place in this world. To heal these traumas many things are needed. The IRS system left us so broken that to speak about mental health and counselling is a very complex topic. These mental health problems cannot simply be helped by seeking out mental health counselling. That is not to say that counselling does not have its place in trying to come back from this legacy we have been left with. I hope to

establish that one of the things that needs to happen to heal these age-old wounds is the acceptance of these truths by Canadians from coast to coast to coast. Canadians need to stop hiding from this part of history and sit with the discomfort that it causes. This is not something that Indigenous people can just get over—an opinion that echoes through time. I am going to suggest that one of the ways that Indigenous people can be heard is for non-Indigenous people to really think about what it means to take away a people's language.

I will approach this project from an Indigenous research lens. For too long, research has been done on Indigenous People with no regard for how they live. Researchers enter communities with ideas of what they want to learn, but have no thought about how the research can serve the community (Smith 2012; Wilson, 2008). I would like to enter this process as a researcher for Indigenous people. Academic research can put the researcher in a place of authority, or rather, in a place of knowing. What do I mean? Although the goal is to learn something new, academic research can put the researcher in a position of an "expert". In this paper, I will demonstrate why this approach can be a negative experience for the Indigenous research subject.

Indigenous people have a long history of being regarded as savage, or less than. In this paper, I hope to demonstrate that working from a place where academia and Indigenous culture intersect (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2010; Linklater, 2014; Wilson, 2008) is not only possible, but necessary. Sometimes in academic writing, we get bogged down in practice and must make sure we approach the work from an ethical place. However, the ethics we have been trained to work by handcuff us, as they have guidelines that say how we can talk to people and who we can talk to (Wilson, 2008). This approach is to protect said subjects and to protect the data, but it can feel very mechanical. The mechanics can put the subject in a place where they are guarded,

because they do not trust the process (Smith, 2012; Wilson 2008). Too many times researchers have done research on a people and, at end of the process, the people are left with nothing (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2010; Smith, 2012). The people then have no connection to the research and can be left with doubt and mistrust, feeling that they gave parts of themselves to a process, but are not part of the outcome. How can this be changed? One of the key ways Indigenous people transmit knowledge is by story-telling. The oral traditions of Indigenous people require that knowledge keepers find opportunities to share stories in order to ensure that the next generation becomes versed enough in them that, when it comes time, they will transmit the knowledge to those that come next (Archibald, 2008). This knowledge can range from cultural practices; origin stories; or hunting, gathering, and fishing (Longmuir 2013).

Many Indigenous researchers have come before me and were faced with the same dilemma: How can we approach this, keep our good intentions and not get lost in the process? I have read many documents and they all seem to come to the same conclusion regardless of subject matter. If the research is done with the four Rs in mind: respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility (Kirkness & Barnhardt as cited by Archibald, 2008), it will hold Indigenous people in a safe space, a familiar space. What do these four Rs mean? If research can be approached with these four Rs in mind, it can be anchored in tradition. My culture transmits knowledge through oral traditions (Child, 2016; Cranmer, 2009; Dawson, 2012; Hunt 2014; Isaac, 2010). These traditions are always approached with a certain level of respect—respect for the knowledge keeper, respect for ownership, and respect for the process (Archibald, 2008). My main concern for this process was to find literature, or media, that offered the knowledge I was looking for within in my own culture, that of the Kwakwaka’wakw (Kwak’wala speaking) people. As I stated previously, many researchers have come before me and I am fortunate to find

resources that center me within my own people. Maya’xa̱la is a kwak’wala word, and has come to be known as respect (Cranmer, 2009; Child 2016; FNHA, 2021; Hunt 2014; Isaac 2010). It is not a basic idea of respect, but rather respect for all things physical and metaphysical (Isaac, 2010), or more basically, treating people and things how you want to be treated (Cranmer, 2014).

What it really comes down to is the relationship we have with the world around us, and this is a part of our lived experience as we are given lessons throughout our lifetimes (Hunt 2016; Isaac 2010; Jackson, 2012). Archibald (2008), a Sto:lo and Coast Salish scholar, eloquently tells us the importance of story work. I relate to Archibald’s work when I reflect on the use of story work in my own culture. Archibald suggests that story work cannot be separated from location, which is why I find it important to center myself within my own people. Story telling is a tool used daily amongst my people. Through story, lessons are transmitted. All these lessons come about because our elders and wise ones teach us how to live in the environment around us (Isaac 2010), and this thought is further developed by Hunt (2016) when one of the subjects of her research observes that our elders believe that each has unique gifts, roles, responsibilities and pathways. This all happens in order to create a sense of responsibility to someone or something that is bigger than us.

Relevance is the struggle that I have been facing. If I want to examine the role of discovering the true impact of Indian Residential School and how art work can play in healing, how do I do it in way that is relevant to Indigenous people and not just something I can write about to fulfill a requirement for my academic program. More importantly, how will the research serve the community—my community? I hope to magnify the voices of those who hold traditional knowledge that can help me decolonize my own thinking. I hope that reading and utilizing the work of others from within my own people can help remind me where I came from.

I will have to be mindful that I am interpreting what they have said and ask that you are as well. Story work's greatest impact is dependent on the level of engagement of the listener (Archibald, 2008). Archibald (2008) uses the word reverence; she suggests that a deep connection to an orator is necessary to reach that place of respect. I have a deep respect for the writers I have come across as I believe the work they have entered into is introducing a Kwakwaka'wakw worldview.

Being in service to Indigenous people carries a level of responsibility. Hunt (2014) articulates this quite well when she shares the word *hase'*, which she learned from her mother-in-law, a respected elder among the Kwakwaka'wakw: "We live our life by the breath of our ancestors and through the breath of our ancestors" (p. 15). Everything I am and everything that I have experienced up until this very moment in my life is because of my ancestors, and is in service of those that come next. Walkus (TedXTalk, 2015) and Hunt (2016) both share the word k̲'wa̲la'yu. Walkus demonstrates that the kwak'wala language is very descriptive. She shares that she did not come to the translation of this word easily. When she first asked her mother what k̲'wa̲la'yu means, her mother could not translate it. It was not that she did not know, but coming to a translation was not easy. She shares how she came to ask someone else at a later date and this person said "it's like dear or sweetie", but then paused and said "but wait it's more than that… it is almost like you could say 'you are the reason for every breath that I take'". When you take the idea of hase' together with the word k̲'wa̲la'yu, it really demonstrates the relational way Kwakwaka'wakw people live their lives (Hunt, 2016). We are responsible to those that come before us and to those that will come after us. Grounding my research in my people helps me feel like I am responsible to something much greater than myself.

When research is entered into from this place of feeling responsible, the work can be anchored in the community, and this anchor can tie you to the people as they are not just subjects. Examining resources that have a direct tie to my own community is what I hope helps me to keep my research relevant.

Approaching the work from an Indigenous research perspective helps demonstrate why this topic is important to me. Being Indigenous, this topic is part of my lived history. What I have watched my entire life is that we are more than just numbers and statistics. Too often, the ethics of academic research can unintentionally remove the humanity of the subjects. The idea that we need to protect subjects means we give them non identifying labels (Wilson, 2012). For Indigenous people, I posture that this can make them feel unvalued (Smith 2012). For their entire colonial existence, Indigenous people have been undervalued (Linklater, 2014; Smith, 2008). We have been made to feel like we are less than, and that others have the ability to show us how to be better (Smith, 2008; Wilson 2008). In IRS, the children were given numbers in place of their names, and more often than not, the only name they knew was in their own language (Cranmer 2017; Longmuir, 2013).

In research, we tend to represent ideas with numbers. You often read about the legacy of Indigenous trauma with numbers as they relate to unemployment; teenage pregnancy; alcohol and substance abuse; abuse—be it sexual, emotional, or physical; incarceration rates; rates of child apprehension; and low graduation rates. Indigenous people are more than these numbers we are often represented by. I think that using numbers causes more harm and does not serve to protect Indigenous people as research subjects.

These are all pitfalls I want to avoid, as I would like to demonstrate that Indigenous people are the ones who have the power to heal these historic traumas. Wilson (2008) shares the

idea that Indigenous people generally do no approach things from a deficit-based perspective. Rather, Indigenous people may identify a problem and, instead of looking at the deficit, look at what can we do to fix or rather change this for the better? I would like to demonstrate when western counselling practices have depended on where we, as Indigenous people, have invited them. This idea is one that I have struggled with how to represent. As I have invested a lot of time into being trained as a counsellor, how can I build a practice that honors these sides of myself? I am an Indigenous person who walks in many worlds. I have often felt like in impostor in all of them.

This is where the work of decolonizing myself will take place. I grew up witnessing community leadership try to effect change, but what I have come to learn is that change only happens when a person is ready for it. Indigenous people are not ready for change as we are still waiting to be understood (Cranmer, 2017, 0:26:12). This acceptance cannot be achieved in a world that still views us as a problem/obstacle to dominance. What I would like to demonstrate is that the healing that we need begins with the Truth. This all aligns with the idea of relational accountability presented by Wilson (2008). The process of writing this document has been a long process, and in discussion with my mentor, he suggested I had to arrive to a place where it was right for me.

The last piece to come into place for me was that of accountability. How could I keep myself accountable to an abstract idea? Grounding myself in my people helps me connect to all those relationships I have— a relationship to my family, my community, my language, my culture, and my territory. This final piece came together because of a couple of things that happened in my life. Archibald (2008) articulates this concept well when she talks about your level of engagement. Have you ever re-read a book? I did for this project, and something did not

make sense to me when I first read it: “ceremony is like the period at the end of a long sentence”. When I first read it, I do not think it landed…when I re-read it after engaging in some reading about my own people, it was almost like it smacked me in the face. This thesis is the end of a long process for me, and it was not constructed well enough in my mind for the statement “a good thesis is a done thesis” to be one that I could accept. Decolonizing my thinking was the last step I needed to reach, and it happened when I was watching a webinar for my work at the First Nation’s Health Authority.

Chapter Two

An Indigenous research method comes down to understanding worldview (Isaac, 2010; Nawalakw; Linklater, 2014; Wilson, 2008). The worldview of Indigenous people comes down to relationality (Wilson, 2008). More specifically, a Kwakwaka'wakw world view comes down to how we relate to, not only people, but the land and all things that live and exist on the land (Child, 2016; Hunt, 2014; Isaac, 2010; Nawalakw, 2022). Our worldviews are shaped throughout our lifetime, and are done so through the story telling of our wise ones (Archibald, 2008).

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission is so named as it was to be an opportunity for Indigenous people to share their truths of residential school experience (Truth and Reconciliation Canada, 2015). However, its flaw lies in needing to prove their truths in order to receive financial compensation for the suffering they experienced. How can such a thing have a monetary value when its human value has lasted for generations? This is when it is important to share narratives, and not just numbers, in relation to the difficulties communities continue to experience. If individual stories are shared with the intention of being heard, rather than being compensated, we are stepping into a place where healing can begin. I have purposely used the example of TRC, as the process was a long and hard one and, in the end, there is still debate over whether or not the testimonies should be kept for longer than the legal required time. Again, the argument is that the "data" is sensitive and they need to protect those whose testimonies have been given. However, it can be argued that, rather than protection for those who shared the sensitive personal data, the destruction of said data would be a whitewashing of history. It would function as an erasure of a history that non-Indigenous people want forgotten, because it is uncomfortable to sit with.

Initially I did not want to include a detailed history of the residential school trauma, as I believed it was something that we are all very aware of. But awareness is not acceptance. These are stories that will need to be shared until others have a real understanding of the legacy Indigenous people have been left with. Truths need to stand the test of time, as Indigenous people need to feel heard. I think this is key to healing. When being told to "get over it" is in the past. It has not been a short process that got us here. It is a legacy of hundreds of years, so why should we expect that the healing will be quick. But imagine if one person feels heard and validated.

Okay Let me back track a bit:

G̱ilakas̱daxw'la

Nugwa'a̱m A̱'a̱doł (Samantha Narayan nee Bell)

G̱ayutła̱n lax̱a Mamalilakulla dłu Kwagul dłu Hawaxmis

He'ma̱nox̱ a̱ba̱mpi Put'la̱s (Diane Nuvayouma nee Hunt)

He'ma̱n ump wałe' Sisa̱x̱olas (Johnson Bell)

He'ma̱n G̱a'aga̱mp wałe' Giga̱me U'dzis'talis dłu Wadzidalag̱a (Henry Bell and Eliza Bell nee Wallace).

He'ma̱n G̱a'aga̱mp wałe' X̱a'nus dłu Tla'pa (Roy Hunt and Christine Hunt nee Wilson)

He'ma̱nox̱ nula Kwa̱xwa̱log̱wa (Lucy Petersen nee Bell)

He'ma̱nox̱ t'saya (Johnson Bell, dłu Henry Bell)

He'ma̱n t'saya wałe' (Mac Bell)

He'ma̱nox̱ Gi'game U'dzis'talis (Henry Walkus)

G̱ilaka̱s'la (Walkus, D & Walkus, J., 2021)

This is an introduction of myself in kwak'wala the language of my people. One of the key components of IRS system was to kill the Indian in the child (Truth and Reconciliation Canada, 2015). I do not think people give enough consideration to what exactly was accomplished by stealing language and culture away from growing children. I hope to demonstrate what was lost by discussing the efforts undertaken to revitalize kwak'wala.

G̱ilaka̱sdax̱w'la: is a pluralized greeting. Gilkasala can be translated as to "accept you for who you are in this present moment" (TED, 2017, 0:0:43). This translation really stands out for me. Something I feel has been instilled in my training as a counsellor is to meet the client where they are. This translation of the greeting does just that. Joseph (FNHA, 2021) opens the webinar with a greeting and part of that greeting is the realization that people will be watching it after the fact, and he recognizes that when he opens the session.

Nugwa'a̱m: this is who I am

A'a̱doł: "old soul".

Kwak'wala is classified as a near extinct language. According to Willie (2021) there are probably about 2% of the Kwakwaka'wakw who are fluent speakers of the language. I would like to demonstrate to you the true impact of loss of language. This introduction took five people to arrive at the final version. I had some help from my cousin and my aunt for the whole structure. However, the part that proved the trickiest was the spelling and translation of my traditional name A̱'a̱doł. In 1987 a potlatch was held in memory of my paternal grandfather U'dzis'talis (Henry Bell). At this potlatch the name A̱'a̱doł was placed on me. The orthography used to document it was not familiar to my cousin or my aunt. My cousin suggested I check with one of my maternal relatives—the same relative my mom decided it would be best to ask when I sent her a picture of the document the name was written in. This cousin of my mother's transcribed it into the written

form I am currently using. He was unsure of the translation, so I brought the new written form back to my cousin and she showed her parents: “it’s like grandmother” no “like old grandmother”. The translation was not complete. A stumbling block often encountered when translating kwak’wala as there are not always direct translations. Knowing it was more than what we currently had, I asked my cousin if it could be like “old soul”? To which she responded yes…that seems like the best fit.

G̱ayutła̱n laxa̱: this is where I come from.

Mamalilakulla dłu Kwakiuł dłu Ha̱xwa’mis: All three are tribes of the Kwakwaka’wakw (kwak’wala speaking) people.

The Kwakwaka’wakw occupy the Northeast tip of Vancouver Island and the adjacent mainland. The Hawaxmis have amalgamated with three other tribes, who are now known as Musga’makw Dzawada̱’enux̱w. (Figure 1)

He'ma̱nox̱ a̱ba̱mpi Put'la̱s (Diane Nuvayouma nee Hunt): my mother is.

He'ma̱n ump wałe' Sisa̱x̱olas (Johnson Bell): my father was.

He'ma̱n G̱a'aga̱mp wałe' Giga̱me U'dzis'talis dłu Wadzidalag̱a (Henry Bell and Eliza Bell nee Wallace): my grandparents were.

gigame:chief

He'ma̱n G̱a'aga̱mp wałe' X̱a'nus dłu Tla'pa (Roy Hunt and Christine Hunt nee Wilson): my grandparents were.

He'ma̱nox̱ nula Kwa̱xwa̱log̱wa (Lucy Petersen nee Bell): my older same sex sibling is.

He'ma̱nox̱ t'saya (Johnson Bell, Henry Bell): My younger opposite sex siblings are.

He'ma̱n t’saya wałe' (Mac Bell): my younger opposite sex sibling was.

He'ma̱nox̱ Gi'game U'dzis'talis (Henry Walkus): my chief is.

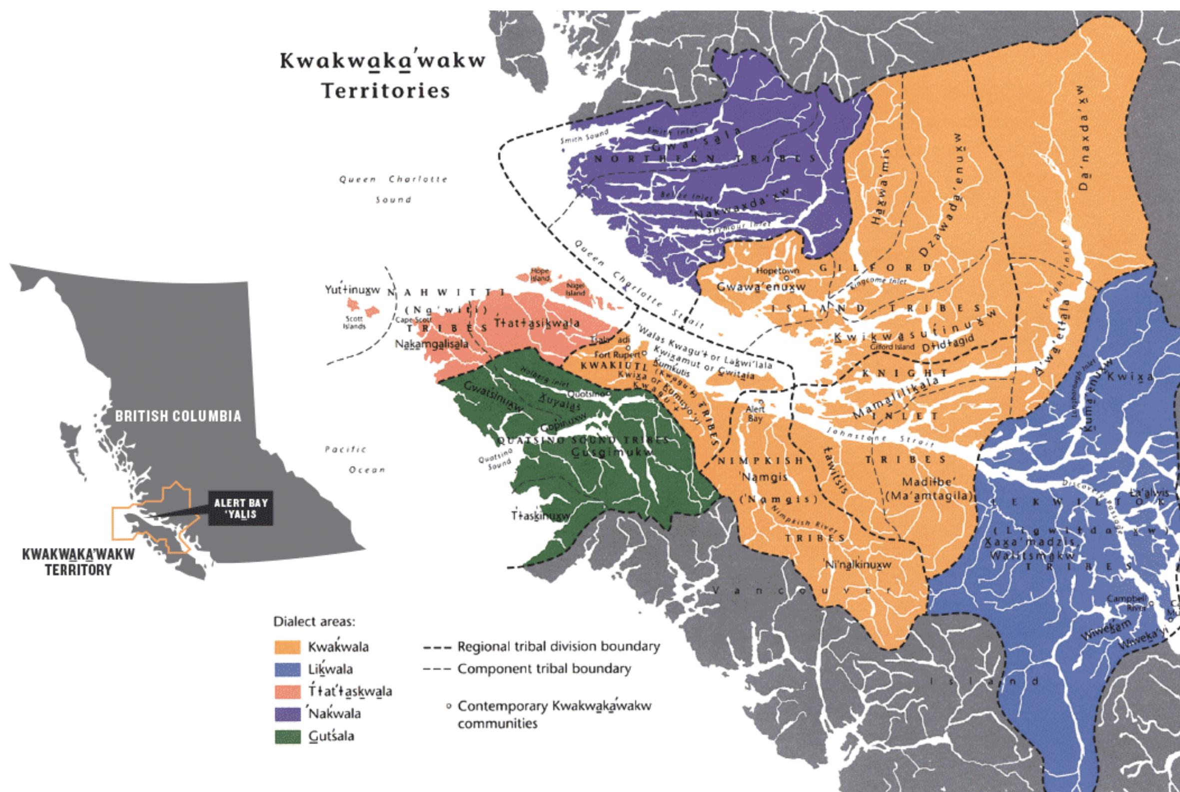

Figure 1. U'mista Cultural Society (2022)

I have spent my entire life living in relation to people around me. An important relationship that exists in my life is who my paternal grandparents were. The simplest explanation is that my father was adopted when he was a newborn. The parents who raised my father are biologically his great-grandparents. My biological paternal grandmother lost her parents at a young age, so was cared for by her grandparents. The relationality of Indigenous people becomes very apparent to me when I reflect on the decision my grandparents made to adopt and raise my father. My grandmother died prior to my birth, but I lived six years of my life knowing my grandfather. I live in awe when I reflect on the fact that my grandfather helped raise four generations of his offspring. My family has fondly shared memories of the love he had for all of us. My aunts and my older cousins constantly remind me that my grandfather would be

proud of me, and I carry that pride in my all the time. The surname I received from my grandfather is very valuable to me so when I married, I made the choice to retain my surname.

As I grew older and interacted with other people around me, I would introduce myself and, if people could not place me, they would ask me who my parents were. If they could not place me this way, they would ask me who my grandparents were. More often than not, they would figure out who I was by my grandparents. As I entered grade school and interacted with other children, they were able to place me by my siblings. I have been and will always be someone's daughter, granddaughter, or sister. Now I am also someone's wife, mother, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law, or aunt.

Where it may get confusing is the village I grew up in, and the band that I am registered with under the Indian Act, is not that which I am traditionally from. The tribes I have listed above are where my grandparents are from. My paternal grandfather was Mamalilakulla, my paternal grandmother and maternal grandfather were Kwakiuł and my maternal grandmother was born Hawaxmis. Upon marriage, my grandmothers would become part of my grandfathers' tribes. Like I stated, according to the Indian Act I am not registered to any of these bands. This is because of the choice my paternal grandfather made. He, along with my grandmother and father, relocated to a home in Port Hardy, which was on land they came to share with the Gwa'sala and 'Nakwaxda'xw. These two tribes were forcibly re-located to the reserve that is now known as Tsulquate, eventually amalgamated and are now known as the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw. My grandfather made the decision to transfer his membership. I have been told that he did so because, if he was going to live with the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw, it only made sense that he would be one. When I reflect on this, it makes sense if you live your life in relation to those around you. If he was going to make a life for his family, he would do so in relation to the people

he came to live among. The Gwa’sala-’Nakwaxda’xw are a large part of my identity as my father and his children grew up among them. They have supported me throughout my educational journey both in grade school and post-secondary. I still hear my dad’s voice telling us to be grateful and to remember this tie we have to our community.

The purpose of the IRS was to take the Indian out of the child and to assimilate them into Canadian society. The reality was much harsher.

> When the school is on the reserve the child lives with its parents, who are savages; he is surrounded by savages, and though he may learn to read and write his habits, and training and mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read and write. It has been strongly pressed on myself, as the head of the Department, that Indian children should be withdrawn as much as possible from the parental influences, and the only way to do that would be to put them in central training industrial schools where they will acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men (Sir John A. Macdonald as cited by Graham et al., 2017; Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015).

Day schooling was attempted but it was thought that removing them from their homes would better serve this goal. Returning the children to their families daily could not achieve this assimilation goal as they were still exposed to daily living of their peoples. Also living too close to their people would not be sufficient, as it would allow families to think they could visit their children. Children were removed from their communities, more often than not by force (LeBeuf, 2011). “Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question.” Duncan Campbell Scott, Deputy Minister of Indian Affairs 1920 (Truth and Reconciliation Canada, 2015; Cranmer, 2017,

0:0:22). I think these statements are very clear we were an obstacle to dominance when we just wanted to be left to practice our culture.

> Do we ask the white man do as the Indian does? No, we do not. Why then do you ask us do as the white man does? It is a strict law that bids us dance. It is a strict law that bids us to distribute our property among our friends and neighbors. It is a good law. Let the white man observe his law we shall observe ours. Now if you are come to forbid us dance leave us. If not, you will be welcome (Wheeler, 1975, 0:53:48).

The contrast of these three quotes is very telling. The government had one goal in mind…ensure the erasure of Indigenous cultures across the country. Whole laws were created to forbid the practice of cultures. A school system was created to ensure that children would cease to be Indian. The Kwakwaka'wakw wanted one thing…to be left to be who they had been for time immemorial.

Upon arrival at the IRS, children often underwent a physical cleansing as they were believed to be dirty (Cramner, 2017; Graham et al., 2018). These cleansing rituals included being bathed in kerosene, cold showers, the cutting of hair, and the removal of the clothing they arrived in. This was done because it was assumed that the children had lice, but even more cruelly, hair was cut because of beliefs that it was sacred. It was a way to remove the children from the culture. Perhaps one of the most well-known stories about the removal of clothing is that of Phyllis Webstad. Phyllis birthed a movement when she told the story of the school taking away her nice shiny orange shirt that her granny had bought her for school. Phyllis shares the feelings that this left her with: of not being valued, and how the color orange always brings her back to the day she was taken to the IRS (Orange Shirt Society, 2022).

Unspeakable things happened at the IRS. One story that is consistent across the nation is the expectation of what language the children were to speak. For most, the only language that they knew was that of their people. But upon arrival., they were expected to speak only English (Cranmer, 2017; Longmuir, 2014; Newman & Graham, 2019). They often faced punishment if they did not. This is a bit of the history that I have heard first hand. When I was in preschool, we had a language teacher, and this teacher shared with us at our young age that, although he did not know English, he was expected to speak it and when he didn't, he would be strapped. In my living memory, this is the only adult in my life who has ever shared this kind of story with me. An elder in the film "How a People Live" (Longmuir, 2013, 0:26:11) shared this same information. She spoke about the day she arrived at the school and how she didn't speak any English, so couldn't understand the staff who were giving her instructions in English. She could not understand these instructions, so asked another child in their language what was going on… she got strapped.

I have read horror stories of the abuse suffered at IRS, but the starkest example of the horror that took place is in the opening of the film "Picking up the Pieces: The Making of the Witness Blanket": "did your school have a graveyard?" These graves existed for the children who died while attending schools. Can you think of any situation in which a family would be prevented from burying their own child? Sometimes families would not be aware of the death until years later.

I have shared that I was not always in a place where I was ready to complete the task of writing this document. There were things that happened that helped me feel ready to write, and one of these occasions was when I came to learn that Gord Downie, the lead singer of the Tragically Hip, was dying of cancer. In the time that Downie had remaining, he decided that he

was going to use his platform to talk about Indigenous issues, and one of the stories he chose to magnify was that of Chanie Wenjack. A simple google search will bring you to the Downie and Wenjack fund website (Downie Wenjack, 2022). Downie found a way to help educate children about the atrocities of the IRS by writing a children's book entitled "Secret Path". Although Downie was not an Indigenous person, I was very taken by the fact that he used his dying days to bring awareness to something that he felt connected to. On a day when he realized he had the ear of over fifteen million people, he paused and asked people to "do something" about the state of Indigenous-Settler relations in Canada. Because of this moment in time, the call that I had been hearing to write about art and healing became even more solidified. If he could use his voice, it was my responsibility to use mine.

Stories like Chanie's are not uncommon. One such story is of a young man who was to leave the residential school on Kuper Island. Mysteriously the night before he was to leave, he died (Graham et al., 2018). His sister stated the school was not sympathetic, and to this day does not believe that her brother hung himself. She spoke about being on the telephone with him and him stating: when I leave here, I am going to tell everybody what happens here. Wanting to escape from the schools is a common story heard among former students. While viewing Cranmer's (2017, 0:15:11) film, a survivor of Saint Michael's Indian Residential School spoke about the night some of his friends attempted to return to their homes and how disappointed he was that they would not let him go with them. The next day the boys were not at school and days later they discovered the boys did not make it home but succumbed to the elements as they tried to escape in a skiff.

These stories are all very real things that happened while Indigenous children were forced to attend IRS. These stories are just the surface of stories that can demonstrate the trauma that

continues to exist in Indigenous communities. These stories have had multigenerational impact. However, something that we do not talk about is the lasting damage it does to a people to take away their language.

When you hear people speak about our language and try to translate it, there is often difficulty. Kwak’wala is a living language and when it is used, it is often in relation to something. I attended the funeral of my great-great-uncle in 2015, and a non-Indigenous pastor shared some of his thoughts about my uncle’s relationship with his language and his religion (Unknown, personal communication, 2015). On occasion, this pastor would ask him how to say something in kwak’wala and, as others have shared, my uncle could find a lesson anywhere. The pastor had struggled with a particular bible passage that he decided he wanted to share, and pondered the applicability to my great-great-uncles life. When he recalled the very descriptive nature in which my uncle presented lessons, he thought to himself: if I had asked how to say sunrise in kwak’wala, I would probably be met with, when asked, how there is not really a word for that…but… you could say…which might translate to how the sun comes up over those mountains (personal communication, February 1, 2015). This is a living example what Wilson (2012) describes as the relational way that the Indigenous live. Indigenous research is ceremony, because when asking questions, you may get to your answer by relating it to something else. I have spent much of my educational journey learning in this manner—relating a topic to my own lived experience. When I read Wilson (2012) it was a revelation. Something that has happened multiple times throughout my life is finding a name for something that is part of my world view.

Kwakwaka’wakw translated means kwak’wala speaking people. I have tried to ground my research in my people. I have seen or read multiple times that kwak’wala is rooted in the places we come from (Child, 2018; FNHA, 2021). Child and FNHA both address the idea that, in

order to revitalize kwak'wala, we need to be out on the land. Immersing people in the language is going to be vital. In a talk given by Khelsilem (RedxTalks, 2015) he emphasizes the importance of languages and how they live on the land. He speaks about how, when you travel and you cross a border, one of the ways this may become known to you is because you begin to hear another language. Khelisilem (RedxTalks, 2015) says, in Canada, this has great significance if you stop and think about the many nations across this land. If we had nations full of Indigenous people who spoke their language, Canadians would be confronted with the fact that this is not their home and they would not be able to ignore this. A young speaker in a FNHA (2021) webinar reflects on his language journey and how, in the past, a young person would be mentored in something, but only after the Elders, the wise ones, took the time to observe what they were good at. These ways are what ensured that different people would be experts in different things and would uphold the need for communal living. Residential schools and forced relocation of communities wanted to ensure that these ways would cease to exist. If children were removed from their communities year-round, they would not be exposed to cultural practices that shaped their world views. In Longmuir's (2013) film "How a People Live", it is mentioned that from the village of the Nakwaxda'xw, three generations of children were sent to residential school. One of the films subjects speaks about the day he was taken from his village…he was with his grandfather who had begun grooming him to be his family's gi'game (chief). His grandfather did not speak English so was unable to advocate that his grandson was too young to be taken as he was only five years old.

At five years old it was already decided that this young one would one day lead his family. It is life-long process as there are multiple things that he will have to learn. The government was very aware of the detrimental effects that removing children would have on the

cultural practices of Indigenous people. We need to remove the child to eliminate the Indian problem. My rudimentary knowledge of the Potlatch system is that a family's gi'game (chief) is the person that holds the right to Potlatch and any business that the family has is done through their gi'game. That business could be the birth of child, naming a child, coming of age, marriage, and death. The Potlatch is held so, and guests are welcomed so they can witness these events. To have witness is an important piece as Kwakwaka'wakw culture is a living system, the system is based on Oral Tradition (Child, 2016; Hunt 2014; Dawson 2019).

Khelsilem (RedxTalks, 2015) makes an excellent point about language revitalization and how we do things backwards. When a baby first learns a language, they do it as they are immersed in it. They are around adults who use their language as they go about their days. This is a sentiment that I have heard before. If the language lives on the land, should we not reclaim it by teaching them out on the land (Child, 2016; FNHA 2021)? As a child grew, it was part of daily living that they would accompany adults as they gathered the food that they needed to sustain them (Child, 2016; FNHA, 2021; Longmuir, 2013). It was in these instances that a child may learn the origins of their ancestors (Cranmer, 2009; Isaac, 2010). These origin stories are vital to cultural transmission, as they are the stories that play a vital role within the Potlatch system (Brown et al., 2021; Boll & Fazakas, 2017; Child, 2016; Dawson 2019; Isaac, 2010).

Kwakwaka'wakw culture has a nawalakw (supernatural) foundation (Dawson, 2012; Brown et al., 2021) and the Potlatch ceremony is a journey into this supernatural world. To participate relies on a knowledge of the language. To be able to perform dances you, need to know the words which dictate the motions that you make (Child, 2016; Longmuir 2013). In fact, Child's (2016) mother believes that the meaning comes from within the language, so even if we learn the basics of singing and performing to Potlatch songs, are we doing justice to these ancient

teachings? The meaning we make of something comes from the language that we do it in. Indigenous languages, like kwak’wala, really shape your world views. When you consider the existence of words such as *maya'xa̱la* that have to do with how we respect all things around us and how this is taught throughout your lifetime, it is hard not appreciate the descriptive nature of kwak’wala.

Difficulties arise when we work from an English-speaking perspective. Much work has been done to revitalize indigenous languages. But when the work is done from the perspective of linguists, too much focus is placed on rules that are employed in English. Many examples exist of people who are trying to incorporate the language into their lives. Roberts (FNHA, 2021, 0:42:58) talks about incorporating language into a yoga practice. She had asked a fluent speaker how would you say “connect to your…” and she would insert words like breath, land, body, ocean. She speaks of the powerful shift in worldview that arose out of the response she received. Instead of being connected to, she was told “be one with”. This idea of being one with something or someone really boils down to how you relate to it, rather, how you relate to everything. Relation is at the root of Wilson (2008) and Archibald’s (2012) work. Holding a topic in reverence becomes important as that will hold the accountable to something that is greater than yourself. The research is not just something that you are doing to fulfill a requirement. This is a sentiment that is echoed in the work of other Kwakwaka’wakw scholars that I have encountered (Child, 2016; Dawson, 2019; Hunt 2014; Rosborough & Rorick 2017). Indigenous research is story work, and you are looking to someone who holds knowledge that is valuable to the ideas that you are demonstrating. I feel very empowered to be able to include many Kwakwaka’wakw voices in my writing. I feel even more empowered that others have found a way to use these

voices in an academic venue. I am grateful that others have documented some of the things that I would like to share.

The difficult task that I have found myself in is separating my topics into pieces that fit within a research framework. I began writing this document wanting to speak about the effects that language loss had on Indigenous populations. For purposes of incorporating my own world view I have narrowed this discussion down to one language, that of the Kwakwaka’wakw, the kwak’wala speaking people. Interestingly, to talk about the devastation of language loss, I have engaged in a conversation about language revitalization. This effort has been something I have encountered throughout my lifetime. As I have previously mentioned, as I child we had a community Elder begin teaching us some language in pre-school. When I attended elementary school, we had a culture/language teacher that we would have class with once a week. As my younger brothers went through grade school, aspects of culture were added i.e., singing and dancing. As expressed by Walkus (TED, 2015), it is difficult to learn a language one word at a time. Walkus (TED, 2015) spoke about learning the words for her fingers, body parts, counting, the alphabet and other such lessons as a child and how her desire to learn her language decreased significantly at the loss of her maternal grandfather. Essentially, this is what I encountered as a child as well. We did not learn conversational language, we learned rudimentary things like I have mentioned. This goes along with what I have stated previously in that we go about revitalization backwards (RedXTalks, 2015). Walkus participated in MAP (master apprentice program) (Child, 2016; FNHA 2021; Rosborough & Rorick 2012), a language program where a novice learner is paired with a fluent speaker and immerses themselves in the language for a certain number of hours in order to complete the program. The idea being that once people have completed this program, they can be in a position to teach the language. Nawalakw, the program

that is the topic of discussion in FNHA (2021) webinar, wants to empower the people who participate in this program and wants to employ them so they can teach the language out on the land. This sentiment is echoed by Child (2016). Being on the land helps establish and maintain that life-long relationship that our people had with it.

Young ones may be more receptive to language acquisition if learning it in the lands of our ancestors. As discussed in a promotional video on the Nawalakw website, “our people have a deep connection to the lands”. Something in the video that really resonated with me is when it was mentioned that a wise elder once said “it̓sa'mida higa'mida wa” (Nawalakw, 2021, 00:03:49). His translation: “our rivers were never meant to be alone”. This all plays into the concept of being one with everything and everyone. I have heard on many occasions that our language is very descriptive and words are not used just for the sake of something (Child, 2016; TED, 2016). Earlier I mentioned attending my great-great-uncle’s funeral. My aunt and uncle (two of my mother’s first cousins from her paternal family) gave the eulogy, and both were students of my uncle in their language learning journeys (Rosborough & Jacobson, personal communication, 2015). As mentioned previously, this uncle found a lesson in any questions you may ask him. My aunt spoke about a culture camp that she was running for children from her village and how our uncle was one of the Elders in attendance. While on the beach there was a fire and she asked him “Uncle Pete…how do you say fire?” he responded “lag̱wis” but sat there, and she could tell he was in thought, but you could also say “lag̱was” or “lagwił”. When translated, they all mean fire on the beach; fire on the land; fire in the house (Rosborough, personal communication, 2015). Positioning the fire like this can be indicative of what it is being used for and could change the structure of your entire sentence. For me, this demonstrates the need to immerse yourself in the language in order to begin to learn nuances like this. Nawalakw

(2022) talks about how being on the land creates our presence and how that presence can help us care for the “awi’nakola”, the land, air, and sea. This is an example of creating and maintaining that relationship—an idea that is echoed by Child (2016).

In a previous portion of this paper, I spoke about the lack of some words in the kwak’wala language and that some of the concepts we have adopted from the English language may not have direct translations. In cases like this, language learners and their masters can find ways to say what they are trying to say. This becomes apparent when you consider the days of the month social media project Willie (2021) mentions in her writing. There are no words for the days of the week but you could say things like “day one; day two” and so on to indicate that it is the first day of the week. Willie (2021) indicates that there are no names for the months of the year, but our people lived their lives by what was happening outside or what they are harvesting, and this is how you identify what time of year it is. Concepts like this are indicative of living with the land, or being one with the land.

In discussions of healing, I think a holistic perspective is important (Nawalakw, 2022). This is how the discussion of language loss and revitalization has come to play a key role in my discussion. There are four parts of ourselves that we need to keep in mind according to Nawalakw (2022) and Linklater (2014). They are: mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual. I need to decolonize my thinking and switch to my Kwakwaka’wakw worldview in order to see the path to healing. Being caught between worlds is how I have lived my life. I would argue that my Kwakwaka’wakw worldview is not fully developed and that I can rely on more knowledgeable people than myself to fill in some of the blank spaces.

In fact, origin stories of our ancestors play a vital role in the transmission of our histories. Storying plays an enormous role in the transmission of our culture (Brown et al., 2021; Cranmer,

2009; Isaac, 2010) as our people did not have a written word until it came to trying to revitalize the language. Our culture has a very holistic point of view when it comes to wellness (Nawalakw, 2022). Trying to separate bits of how we live is a disservice to our culture. Isaac (2010) demonstrates this very well as her research revolved around developing an Indigenous curriculum for grade school science courses. She demonstrates that incorporating cultural teachings into science can help place children within their own worldviews, which can then help them be more invested in the work. Art became part of the conversation as harvesting parts of the cedar tree, and making bentwood boxes involved knowing about the relationship that we have with the cedar trees. Cultural aspects become important when you think of maya'xa̱la having that respect for everything. Isaac (2010) talks about the thanks that must be given before you harvest, and that you should only take what you need, no more no less, as that would be disrespectful. One of the units that Isaac developed for her study was creating a bentwood box, which required the kids to learn about what you decorate your box with. This echoed the sentiments of the blanket making research conducted by Brown et al. (2021). Each group engaged in conversations about family crests. Your family crest is something that you can learn about from knowledge keepers in your family. These knowledge keepers hold the knowledge because someone shared it with them. Each tribe would have its own creation stories.

The story could be about the first person of a tribe. In the case of the Ma'amtagila, my aunt shared a story of how her great-uncle my great-great-uncle shared a lesson with her (Rosborough, personal communication, February 1, 2015). She asked him one day how you say seagull in kwak'wala. He told her, but then began to tell her the story of the first Ma'amtagila man. This man was a seagull who had the capability of transforming between seagull and man.

One day he decided that he would remain in his human form and he became the first Ma’amtagila man.

A similar story is shared in Brown et al. (2021) when a woman is making a ceremonial button blanket and is tasked with figuring out what to put on it. She calls her grandfather who tells her what the crest is and invites her over to obtain a plaque that had the crest on it. She brought the plaque to the group, and an artist, who was part of the research group, drew her design that would be placed on the blanket. As she continued to make her blanket, the group shared the history of the crest, and they openly talked about how three generations of her family will be connected as she was making the blanket for her children. She would not have been able to find out her crest had she not called her grandfather.

What others may view as art is actually a form of cultural transmission for the Kwakwaka’wakw people. But I would like to suggest that this is the very thing that can bridge the gap and help non-Indigenous people understand the real human loss of culture as a result of the Indian residential school system. Renowned artist Beau Dick postulates “it’s up to artists to pick up the pieces and try put them together and put them back where they belong” (Boll & Fazakas, 2017, 0:30:22). A traditionally trained artist will have been trained by a master as discussed in the film of the life of artist Beau Dick. The artists that I know of in my own generation have been trained by incredible knowledge keepers. Something very interesting was brought up in the Boll and Fazakas (2017, 0:23:43) film on Beau Dick’s life: That to be an artist today is not the same as it was in the past. In the past artists would be taken care of by the community so that they could make their art. Today in the economic driven western world, artists are unable to make art solely for the traditional reasons as they must be able to support themselves. That is why there is a marketplace for Pacific Northwest Art. In order to be able to

live and thrive off their artwork, artists sell their work to the general public. This is the reality that they live in, and unfortunately, they may receive judgment.

However, this is what allows them to make art for other more important reasons. It is a way to bring awareness to important issues such as social justice, geo-politics, and environmental issues, to name a few. If they can make money off their art, they can then be offered the space they need to make art for their people, too.

One such artist comes to mind. Andy Everson is a Kwakwaka'wakw artist whose work I admire. One of the pieces he has created that stood out for me is a piece he has titled "Nimpkish Sunset" (Figure 2). It is a very beautiful piece. One of the things Everson does is create a story or description of his work. This particular art piece was inspired by the origin Story of the Gwa'ni (Nimpkish) river. I do not think I could do this story justice, but I also want to acknowledge that legends/stories are meant to be shared in real time in the oral traditions of the Kwakwaka'wakw people, so writing them down can make it seem like the story exists only in the one version (Chalmer et al., 2021).

> In ancient times, many of our first ancestors appeared, not as humans, but as animals, birds and creatures from the sea. In the early myth time, they could remove their animal skins and walk as people upon the land. One such ancestor from the 'Na̱mgi̱s (Nimpkish) was named 'Na̱mukustolis who first arrived as a great blue heron and soon transformed himself into a human.
>
> He was warned that there was going to be a great flood that would cover the earth and that he should wait for an enormous sea monster named 'Na̱mx̱iyalegiyu to rise from the depths. The sea monster took 'Na̱mukustolis under the water in order to protect him from the floods. When the waters had receded, Na̱mx̱iyalegiyu put 'Na̱mukustolis onto the

shore where he started the first Nimpkish village called X̱wa̱lkw and became the first ancestor of the ‘Na̱mg̱is people.

Later ‘Na̱mukustolis met K̓ani̱kilakw, the Transformer. In a great battle of transformation, the two pitted their skills upon one another, transforming each other into ducks, mountains and kingfishers. Resigned to this stalemate, K̓ani̱kilakw travelled on. Cognizant that K̓ani̱kilakw might return, however, ‘Na̱mukustolis wondered what he should transform himself into for protection. At first, he thought he should become a stone, but he quickly realized that stones will eventually crack. The he thought he should change into a big tree, but it occurred to him that trees will gradually fall and rot away. Eventually, he decided that he would become a great river and flow until the end of days. ‘Na̱mukustolis then took on the name Gwanalalis to reflect on this desire. K̓ani̱kilakw could hear his thoughts so he returned and pushed on the forehead of Gwanalalis. He fell to the ground and became the great Nimpkish River, Gwa’ni, and was filled with fish so as to provide for his people.

Nimpkish Sunset serves as a reminder for Everson of where his ancestors come from and helped him document something that occurred in his own life. When I think of this piece of art work and the legend or creation story that goes along with it, I cannot help but feel it connects to what Nelson (2021) says in the promotional video on Nawalakw website. This is why rivers were never meant to be alone. This makes me think of Awi’nakola that Nelson (Nawalakw, 2021) and Child (2016) talk about. We are responsible to the land, air and sea because we come from them, they provide for us, so we must take care of them. This art work is a moment in time for Everson, but it can mean so much more for someone if their worldview is the same as his.

Cranmer (2014), Isaac (2010) and Namgis (1983) share the same story, but the version they share has subtle differences with the overall information being similar.

> When the Transformer Kaniki'lakw, traveled around the world, he eventually returned to the place where Gwa'nalalis lived. In an earlier encounter, the Transformer had been beaten by Gwa'nalalis, who was ready for his return. Kaniki'lakw asked, "Would you like to become a cedar tree?" Gwa'nalalis replied, "No, cedar trees, when struck by lightning, split and fall. Then they rot away for as long as the days dawn in the world." Kaniki'lakw asked again "Would you like to become a mountain?" "No". Gwa'nalallis answered, "For mountains have slides and crumble away for as long as the days dawn in the world." The Transformer asked a third question. "Would you like to become a large boulder?" Again, Gwa'nalalis answered, "No, do not let me become a boulder, for I may crack in half and crumble away for as long as the days dawn in the world."
>
> Finally, Kaniki'lakw asked, "Would you like to become a river?" "Yes, let me become a river that I may flow for as long as the days shall dawn in the world." Gwa'nalalis replied. Putting his hand on Gwa'nalalis' forehead and pushing him down prone, Kaniki'lakw said, "There, friend, you will be a river and many kinds of salmon will come to you to provide food for your descendants for as long as the days shall dawn in the world. And so, the man Gwa'nalalis became the river, Gwa'ni.
>
> Pal'nakwala Wa'kas (Dan Cranmer) 1930 (Cranmer, 1930)

The two stories share the same outcome, the creation of the river Gwa'ni. The differences may never be known had they not been written down. Baker suggests we need to keep the words that are useful (as cited in Archibald, 2008). Oral histories are living stories, and the listener will

develop its meaning. The context in which they are told may matter, as well. Note that Everson starts his story with the Great Blue Heron and how that heron is the first ancestor of the Namgis people. This part of the story becomes important when viewing Everson's art piece. Not only is he depicting nature as it might appear at Gwa'ni, but he includes the blue heron flying in the beautifully colored sunset sky. I cannot presume to know what this story means to Everson, but I appreciate that he is adding meaning to a picture based on information he knows about his ancestors. Archibald (2008) says that story work gives you space to think and feel and what is art if not a story?

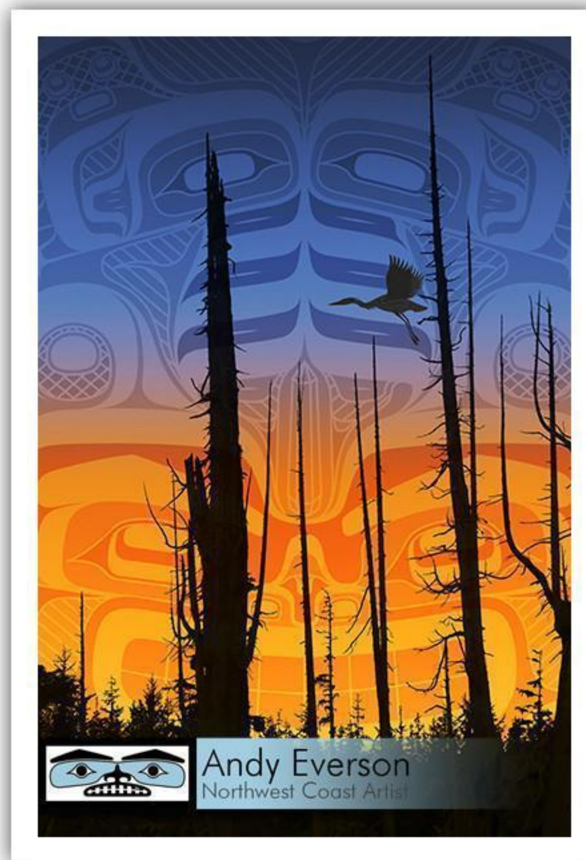

Figure 2. Totem Design House (2021)

Hunt (2014) suggests "developing relationships with landscapes contributes to cultural identity (p. iii)." Imagine, if you will, you are being told this story of Gwa'nalalis's and you are

at Gwa'ni. Hearing this story while at Gwa'ni you are able to listen to the river, listen to the wind in the trees, listen to the animals flying in the sky or living on the land, and you may be able to get a sense of what awi'nakola is. This river exists because the first Nimpkish man wanted to find a way to care for his people for as long as the water of this river flowed. This story may lead someone to want to care for the salmon stocks that should be abundant in this river. The context in which you are told the story will influence the parts that you take on. Knowing the story in its English translation does not take away its meaning, but if we allow it to, we may be able to engage in a dialogue with our ancestors. cuucqu (Rosborough & Rorick) reflects on this type of encounter when she describes a crab on the beach yelling at her to learn her language. When she later shared this encounter with elders, she was told stories of a crab who was the ancestor of her people. She opened herself up to the experience and instead of brushing it off she made meaning of it and decided that she would learn language.

Places can be a moment in time, but what happens if you allow yourself to feel the significance a place holds when it is your ancestral territory. Hunt (2014) and Isaac (2010) both ask their readers to consider this. Isaac beautifully describes a field trip she took her students on during one of the science units she was using in her research. She talks about arriving on Hanson Island, "This island is sacred and the minute you step off the boat you can feel that there is something special about this place" (p. 70). Isaac talks about the cultural significance of Hanson Island and how the current caretaker has ensured its environmental and cultural protection through scientific research he has done on the nearly 3000 culturally modified trees. This is a feeling Isaac had just while stepping off the boat, and something she mentions because of the significance she felt, not because it was something she anticipated. She did not create a piece of

her lesson that would address this, she did not document this part of the field trip. In writing about it she expressed her gratitude that it was something that she just allowed herself to feel.

Culturally modified trees have become an important way to engage in talks about land preservation. When you think about the topic it becomes apparent that Kwakwaka'wakw people never took more than they needed. Hunt (2014) engages in a discussion about K'waxalikala (tree of life). She does her best to convey the concept that does not have a direct translation, but rather is a metaphor our people lived by. The metaphor being:

> Our Indigenous worldview acknowledges the principle that trees are people and people are the forest; they are community. We are all one—the land, animals, and everything that grows is a family. A healthy tree is a healthy forest; therefore, the healthy individual is a healthy community. Elders consistently reinforce and guide us in this belief by teaching us that we must look within ourselves and within our own communities and use the teachings of our ancestors to realize our paths and to sustain us as we navigate our Indigenous and Western worlds (p. 13).

Hunt (2014) and Isaac (2010) both speak of the cultural significance of the cedar tree and how the cedar tree sustains much of daily living. The cedar tree gives us its roots, its bark, and its trunk to make clothing, baskets, ceremonial regalia, boxes, canoes, masks and totem poles. Our ancestors said only take what you need, so some of the trees can be examined and hold a place in time by showing bark has been stripped but the tree was still able to grow. One artist has used his craft to help bring awareness to preservation of our ancient forests because of cultural significance they hold. Cook (2018) has engaged in conversation about the significance of forests and has contributed a piece of art to the conversation. Isaac's (2010) story of setting foot on an

island that holds this same significance really demonstrates the importance of preserving forests that once helped sustain a people.

Imagine the work that can be done when something like this is approached with intention. If you allow participants to be in the moment, but create discussion about it afterwards? This can be achieved when you consider the work of Child (2016) and Hunt (2014) and the atmosphere Nawalakw (2022) intends to create when you consider awi'nakola, when people are intentionally walking in the steps of their ancestors and reflect on that history. Child (2016) asks us to consider how using the language while on the land can help strengthen the relationships we have with, not only the land, but our ancestors who lived upon the land. People immerse themselves in the language while intentionally engaging in a relationship with everything around them.

I can only imagine, as I think I would be classified as a beginner when it comes to engaging with the kwak'wala language. Willie (2021) helps me imagine what this could mean when she discusses how she engages with the language, how she encourages the use in her household. Something that really struck me: "As I was lying in bed with Kwak'wala words running through my mind, I could simultaneously feel my heart beating to the words and other physical responses happening in various parts of my body, and I also sensed a spiritual awakening. I thought to myself, 'I'm feeling my language,' and for me this was a profound and similar experience to that of falling in love" (p. 231). Willie (2021) is being very intentional as she engages with the language and speaks about the importance of land-based learning as well. I can only imagine what it could feel like if she were to engage in the language on the land of her ancestors.

Willie (2021) discusses how she is learning her language in the traditional and ancestral territory of the Snuneymuxw. She engages in this in a very intentional way, being aware of

cultural protocols of conducting traditional learning in someone else's territory. Walkus (Longmuir, 2013, 0:31:54) helps me understand what it means to step onto the land of your ancestors when she says "I want to describe it but I can't…at one point I felt like my ancestors were with me. I could hear little kids in my head but it was just a scene that went by real fast."

The feeling of speaking your language and the feeling of being amongst your ancestors must be very powerful, and if you allow yourself to be in the moment, it must bring you a sense of belonging. Smith, G. (Longmuir, 2013, 0:49:20) talks about this feeling of being home. The reserve she lives on, and grew up in, does not feel like home to her, but participating in the trip to her traditional home she felt like she was home. That is not a feeling that people who attending IRS were allowed to have. Brotchie (Longmuir, 2012, 0:29:41) talks about being scared of authority and scared of the religion he was being taught because children were told they would burn in hell if they kept believing in the ways of their people. Cranmer (Nagmis, 1983, 0:19:22) talks about the need to teach children when they are little and when they are teenagers. Not like when they grabbed us and, all of a sudden, we are Indian. We have spent our lives trying to live like the white people.

Because I learn and take things on by relating them to my own life, this made me wonder when have I ever had a feeling like the one Willie (2021) describes? Three times in my life I have been overtaken by something that I was doing and, although if I described it, it would not be how Willie describes it, I think it is a similar feeling of letting my body take it all in. I will share one of the moments in which my body was completely overtaken. When I was a teenager, I was involved in a Kwakiutl dance group. We were not language speakers, but our director was and she helped us by teaching us the movements that went with the words that the signers were using. We were learning the last part of the hamasta (wild man of the woods) and for reasons I

am not sure I fully understand, I was remembering the movements and other group members watched me. One particular night we were practicing and our director noticed the other members watching me, so asked me to get up and "perform" for the group. I did the usual entering of the of floor, turning to the left and proceeded to dance. Something overcame me and I could sense that I was in the room, but it felt like I was somewhere else too. My body felt like everything was going slow but fast at the same time. I was fulling engaged in the dance and went with it; it was like no one was there even though I knew they were. This experience makes me wonder what it would be like if I was a language speaker and was able to fully engage in the cultural and spiritual practices of my people. The spiritual is what gives the dances their weight (Cranmer, 2017). You might be wondering why I mentioned that I turned…well I have heard that we turn because the dance floor is the supernatural or immortal world. We turn to enter as we are symbolically entering the supernatural realm, and we turn when we exit in order to return to the mortal realm. For this brief moment I was brought somewhere and allowed myself to be one with the singing and dancing.

Child (2016) talks about a conversation she had with her mother: "When we teach our children how to dance, without our language, they are just like puppets putting on a performance" (p. 11). Where do we find the balance? In one moment in time, I became connected to the dance that I was performing. What do we need to do to maintain that connection consistently? Voyager speaks about how the spiritual part of our people is a part that is lacking (Cranmer, 2017, 0:20:47). She believes it's the part that gives weight to the songs and the dances. Walkus, B. (Longmuir, 2012, 0:46:29) suggests that the importance may lie in creating an interest and/or a connection for you with your people. When she was a cultural teacher, she could see the pride created in the children when they were learning. It may be a spark that is

needed to encourage more learning. Henderson, T. (Longmuir, 2012, 0:46:58) speaks about how engaging the children in culture helps engage the community with the school. Every year, the children have days where they share ceremony and invite community members. Henderson shares how now, on those days, its standing room only for the community members who attend.

Finding ways to engage the community is essential, as community is central to a Kwakwaka'wakw existence. Child (2016) talks about how Willie, M. worked to revive the Hitligila ceremony by studying the work of Franz Boas. The Hitligila is a ceremony held for babies when they reach their tenth moon. It is at this moment that the baby has made the choice to remain in the mortal world with their family. Child (2016) notes that the more the ceremony has been conducted, the more rooted it is becoming amongst the Kwakwaka'wakw. Is finding these ways the starting off point? How do we make meaning of something that has not been passed down through traditional methods? Let me reflect on the spiritual meaning behind the ceremony. The child has decided to remain in the mortal world; that means they came to us from somewhere else. Reconnecting or finding modern ways to incorporate those spiritual concepts is rooted in language. Child (2016) maintains that language is the root of our culture and trying to separate out pieces may take away some of the meaning.

Child (2016) proposes a camp experience that helps bring youth back to some central ideas of a Kwakwaka'wakw existence while engaging in discussions about what they can do to bring back traditional ways of being. One thing that stood out for me was when she laid out the schedule for the day. It started with Gilakas'la ka'oxda nalax (welcome the day). Why this stood out to me was because multiple people in the Longmuir (2012) film spoke about their father or grandfather greeting the day. What they were describing ties to the concept of awi'nakola giving thanks to air, land and water for providing us with what we need; giving thanks for all the people

in their lives. These are all concepts that are known to our people no matter what tribe they may belong to. The language helps create a worldview and sometimes we just need help shifting it back to the Kwakwaka'wakw worldview. The youth camp that Child (2016) proposes can help young people reframe their worldview.

Our worldviews shape who we are and how we relate to those around us. But something I think we need to take pause with and understand is that everyone will arrive at the need to take back what was once ours in their own time. Not everyone will have the same level of commitment. Not everyone will have the same capacity to realize what they need to do to reclaim parts of themselves. What I think is maybe this is where modern western counselling practice comes in. Not in reclaiming, but helping people find what they need; maybe it is this type of connection, maybe it is something else totally. I think this is where art can play a role. More specifically, this may be where a particular piece of art I have in mind can play a role.

One artist that has stuck out for me for the duration of my graduate studies is Carey Newman. Newman was commissioned to make an art piece that would stand in history as a marker of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Graham et al., 2017; Lederman, 2014). Newman entered the process as a way to honor his father who was a former student in the Mission Residential School. When viewing the film "Picking up the Pieces", they underwent the process of collecting pieces to be utilized in the art installation. I was struck by the commitment his whole family made to the process. The piece that Newman created is known as "The Witness Blanket". In the forward, Newman's wife shares the idea of bearing witness. This art project was going to bear witness to the Indian Residential School era. Assembling pieces gathered from old school sites, or from Residential School Survivors or their descendants, could collectively tell a

story. Newman helps us with this as there is an interactive piece to engage with on the Witness Blanket website. Some of the pieces come with an explanation of their place in the installation.

Figure 3. Witness Blanket, 2015

His team travelled the country collecting items that he assembled into a large installation that takes on the idea of a blanket. A blanket he says, because "in the tradition of my Salish ancestors a blanket is gifted to uplift the spirit, protect the vulnerable and honor the strong" (Graham et al., 2017). Newman and his team took great care in the creation of the Witness Blanket. One story that stood out for me was that of a woman who was not sure she had a place in the story he was creating, because she had a good experience in the Indian residential school. She was assured that of course you have a place, we are telling multiple stories and yours is just as valid.

When I have read about Newman's work, I have to sit and appreciate the intention that he entered the work with. How could he make something that could summarize a process that had a great impact on Indigenous people across the country. In the film *Picking up the Pieces* (Graham et al., 2017), it is expressed that each piece "communicates in a different language", that in reality many stories make up the history he was trying to represent, but when you take in the whole installation, maybe we can visualize them all. I cannot help but apply Wilson's (2008) thought that ceremony is the period at the end of a really long sentence. This point is literal for

portions of the process Newman undertook while creating this art piece. For me a very poignant contribution comes from his two sisters who made a contribution of their shorn braids. They entered into eight days of ceremony to cut off their braids and actually hand them over to their brother. I can only guess at the significance of aspects that they shared in the film (Graham et al., 2017). I noted the cold baths they took in both the lake and in flowing water of the river; I noted the tree branches that they brushed off with before the baths and before the cutting of their hair; I noted that they returned those same branches to the flowing water of the river; I noted the ocher applied to the hair at the point the cut would be made; I noted that the cut hair was imbued with the smoke of the fire, and that the braids were placed on tree branches and left in nature for a certain period of time before being given to their brother. The amount of ceremony put into this process only demonstrates the hurt that must have been caused when the hair of children was cut without care.

Newman and his team had the forethought to film the process in order to make a documentary about the Witness Blanket. I found one portion of the film very interesting as it mimicked something I have experienced, not in the same context, but Newman (Graham et al., 2017) spoke of the moments leading up to the unveiling of his art piece. He said it was “like life was moving at two different speeds.” This is the sensation I had while I danced for my peers in the dance group. “The team came to share an unspoken respect for the responsibility we had begun to carry along the way. We each had a moment where someone or something broke through and touched our souls and we knew that we would never be quite the same.”

As I sit in reflection of this quote, this observation that Newman made while completing his art project, I am left thinking about that shift in worldview that language speakers talk about. How there is a moment in their journey when something that is said to them just clicks and their

perspective is forever changed (FNHA; Willie, 2021). I find it fascinating that Newman talks about respect and responsibility, as those are things that I have found essential for me to be able to write about my people, the Kwakwaka'wakw people. The sense of responsibility can only be greater when you think about what the Witness Blanket was commissioned for. The blanket is made up of pieces of history—a history that is part of over 150,000 children.

Newman (Graham et al., 2017) is a storyteller and he tried to find a way to tell the story of Indian Residential schools, and somehow be as inclusive as possible in telling the story. He had to create a story that was representative, as it was one that would live on well after he completed the piece. Even the strategic choice to make the installation pliable, I would suggest is significant as he tried to make it as much like an actual blanket as possible. Part of the story telling comes in the media coverage that occurred during its creation. In one of the news pieces, I read that one of the people tasked with gathering items talked about the time she accidently took one of the pieces home, and while the piece was in the house her husband experienced nightmares, or having a unsettling feeling in the home because objects collected were kept in the basement (Lederman, 2014). When the team was done collecting the pieces they gathered and took it all in and blessed the items, they could sense a shift in the energy in the house (Lederman, 2014). One of the pieces is wrapped in a red ribbon and surrounded by medicine because of the energy that could be felt from its presence. I think perhaps one of the more interesting things I came across is the door that is the center of the exhibit. On a radio show, it was expressed that the door came from Saint Michaels Indian Residential Schools infirmary and that the door would never be closed (Howden, 2014). I do not recall if this is something I heard or something that occurred to me, but the door will never be closed because it symbolically represents the doors that were shut when the children experienced sexual abuse.

I have spoken about visual art, but some of the research that I engaged in was audio-visual art. I think we can never underestimate the power of film. When I think about film and how it can record Kwakwaka'wakw world views, it seems like it captures moments in time better than the written word. When you watch a film, you may not be within the context that the story teller is, but it can be created and still it feels a little more organic. There may be dangers in trying to create films that depict legends (Chalmers, 2021), but documentary films offer you moments in time. Some moments are becoming more and more valuable when you consider that our population is aging and our knowledge keepers are dying. One of the films I viewed was from the 1980's, and to hear them talk about language and or cultural revitalization from their point of view of the aging population, it makes me think of what Willie (2021) talks about in the decades long efforts to revitalize kwak'wala. It almost feels dire now, and film is a way to document things so they can feel more organic. Child (2014) shares the concern that our Elders have in our language being part of our identity. "The only way you can know that we are *Kwagu'ł* is when we speak kwak'wala." A sentiment shared by Joseph (FNHA, 2021) when he asks what will we be called when we no longer speak kwak'wala? A balance needs to be struck between honoring our teachings and preserving them.

One thing that is very apparent to me is that adjusting how we engage is necessary. There are many people who engage in language and cultural work, and have brought their teaching to social media. One such person that comes to mind is Alfred (YouTube, 2021). She posts content that ranges from language and dancing. Alfred demonstrates dancing by breaking down the dance and telling the viewer the movement that goes with different verses in the song. Willie (2021) talks about utilizing Facebook to engage in projects, one being her calendar project. She, along with other families, gets her kids to record themselves reading the date in kwak'wala. I

think this is a valuable avenue to engage Kwakwaka'wakw who do not live in, or near, their communities. Finding ways to engage interested community members can empower and/or encourage people to find a way to engage with their language, culture, and people.

Chapter three

If art is going to be a way to healing, we first need to fully accept the truth of what happened to Indigenous people in Canada. But, how I go about this work has been the difficult part for me. I have felt blocked and I have worked hard to figure out what that block was. The words I did not have, however, proved to be elusive. When I found them, I found relief? I have spent a great deal of time trying to decolonize my learning. I did not want to be writing for the academic world; I had the desire to write for Indigenous people, for myself, a person who has grown up in multiple worlds. Throughout my education I have been taught to privilege certain voices (Archilbald, 2012; Linklater, 2014; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). Carl Rogers is a name most counsellors will recognize instantly, as he is considered to be one of the founders of client centered therapy. He spoke about feeling hindered in his work. He, a white man, felt like his voice was not strong enough, not privileged enough to create a space to talk about the things he valued as a counsellor (Rogers, 1989). Kovach (2009) talks about giving a presentation and watching the audience and how they were engaging in her discussion. She shares a very important story about an Indigenous student approaching her and wondering where her place in Indigenous research was, as she lived in an urban setting and was not connected her culture. She simply shared the idea of starting where you are. I think this is a very valuable lesson, as starting from where you are has a way of taking you where you need to go. I approached this document putting myself at the center as I decolonized myself.

I have spoken a lot about language revitalization, Kwakwaka'wakw worldviews and art. I found it hard to keep these ideas separate as they instinctively wanted to be kept together. Why are these discussions necessary when you consider healing the legacy of trauma that was left as a result of the Indian Residential schools? I think part of the difficulty arises because we are trying to heal

from the wrong things. How could we not focus on the abuse: sexual, physical, emotional, and spiritual? These are very real and very traumatizing things to heal from. We have been trying to do it without considering the very nature of the school existence: “to kill the Indian in the child”. Engaging in discussions about what it means to be Indian may be where we need to start. For to long, Indigenous people have been made to feel like their beliefs are bad and wrong and that they will be condemned to hell if they do not abandon them (Longmuir, 2012). Kwakwaka’wakw ways of being might be the path to healing. I can only speak from the Kwakwaka’wakw perspective as that is my starting point.

Engaging community members in cultural practices such as singing, dancing, regalia making, or language can help shift their worldview and connect them to their ancestors. What comes next? Indigenous counsellors may need to consider shifting their practice to include immersion into the community. There may need to be a shift in ethics in order to make space to practice within Indigenous communities. Becoming a participant observer can help me engage in the cultural activities of my people. What counselling looks like I do not know. Does the work come in encouraging participation, or does the work come in helping people find their way to what they need? Not completely abandoning the training, but finding ways to adjust it. Realizing that some of the tools are already there, but I just need to shift perspective.

Examining the work on Kwakwaka’wakw scholars helped me recognize there is space for me in my culture and in the counselling practice I can create for myself. Reading Willie (2021) showed me that I can make it work in an urban setting if I consciously approach the work first acknowledging I am not in my own territory. What is next is not something I alone am responsible for. But it is something that I look forward to seeing. If you listen to Nelson (FNHA, 2021) speak, he speaks only of the success of his vision. Creating a space to include language

learning, but with the added component of doing so on the land is inspiring. It is a very loud statement to colonizers/settlers that is echoed throughout our people: we are here, we survived and we will thrive.

Does the goal become helping people experience that out of body, out of time feeling described by Newman (2017), Walkus (Longmuir, 2013), and Willie (2021)? But there is no way to just generate it. It has to be something that happens to people in the moment. So, do we create the opportunity by continuing to engage in singing, dancing, language learning and art? By engaging in these activities with intention and care we may be able to open hearts and minds, and create that respect for all things physical and meta-physical. People need to have the ability to reflect on experiences they have. People need to feel cared for.

I will share one last personal experience I had while engaging in the work of writing this paper. It was during one of my very first courses for my graduate program. The course was Diversity and Culture. We had a guest attend our first residency; he was an Elder and he was drumming while chanting a prayer. My apologies, I do not recall what language he was using; my memory wants to say it was Cree. As he was chanting and I was listening to the beat of his drum, I kept zoning out and three times I brought myself back to the room. The fourth time it happened, something told me I just had to go with it and go wherever it was that this chanting was taking me. As I stood there with my eyes closed, I got this vision come at my face. It was like three rushes of light but the light had tails. As we sat in the circle and were provided the space to reflect on what we experienced, I got this overwhelming feeling that those flashes of light were not light, but people. I had three people come to me as I stood there listening to the beat of that drum. When I was describing my experience, I first described my reluctance to feel whatever it was that was coming to me. The reluctance was because whatever was going on in

my body made me feel like I was disrespecting the song, when in fact that feeling of leaving was the moment. Had I not let go I would not have arrived at the feeling of having seen my grandfather, my father and my brother. It was a powerful thing to accept as they have all made the journey to be with our ancestors. Perhaps one of the things we need to talk about is the feelings that can be generated in the moments where we are communicating with our ancestors, with the awi'nakola.

We may need to consider research that involves asking people engaged in language and cultural revitalization about the connection that they feel to the work that they are doing. To investigate how common it is to feel a response within your body. Asking artists the same type of question will be important as well—to try to understand how important that shift in world view is to the meaning that they make of the work that they are engaging in. I think this can be a very valuable thing to investigate in relation to language revitalization, as is evidenced by some of the words that I have used in my research.

> G̱ilakas'la: (can be translated as) to accept you for who you are in this present moment
>
> Maya'xa̱la: respect for all things; treat everyone and everything how you would like to be treated
>
> Awi'nakola: land, sea and air
>
> Hase': live through the breath of our ancestors and by the breath of our ancestors
>
> k̠'wa̱la'yu: you are reason for every breath that I take

The translations of all these words convey so much about relationships and a Kwakwaka'wakw world view. We are always living in relation to someone or something. The world around us is composed of everything that you can see, hear, touch, smell, or taste. We must always care for

those things as they are what sustain us (Child, 2016; Nawalakw, 2022). If you think about what these words can tell us, imagine what it must be like to be able to communicate in the language fully, and that would include living in the ways of our ancestors. Living your life with intention and in service of something that is greater than yourself. Language work is important for all aspects of cultural revitalization.

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