

**Wisdom Holders in Practice:
syilx and Métis Teachings for Ethical Animal-Assisted School Counselling**

by

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Dedication or Acknowledgement

It is with profound gratitude and humility that I acknowledge the wisdom shared by authors like Jeannette Armstrong, Cynthia Chandler and Aubrey Fine, alongside the Knowledge Keepers and Elders in my community who have generously offered glimpses into Métis wahkootowin and syilx captik^{wł}. As a learner touching only the surface of these sacred teachings, including the stories of snk'lip and tmix^w, I remain open and committed to deepening my understanding through ongoing relationships with Knowledge Keepers, always practicing reciprocity, cultural safety and humility. In sharing what little I've gathered about integrating animals into classroom and counselling spaces, I honour this guidance, forever thankful for Kona's loyal spirit, who selflessly gifts her wisdom each day to those paying attention - a true extension of love and healing.

This capstone is dedicated to my family, friends, and colleagues. May it offer insights that prove valuable in your own endeavours, or at the very least, provide a deeper glimpse into my worldview and the principles that shape my professional practice.

A note on orthography: In keeping with nsyilxcən language conventions, which reflect an egalitarian worldview where no word is elevated above others, terms like syilx, snk'lip, captik^{wł}, and tmix^w are written in lowercase throughout this capstone (B. Louis, personal communication, November 27, 2025).

Abstract

This capstone explores the integration of *syilx* and Métis teachings into ethical animal-assisted therapy in counselling (AAT-C) within school settings, emphasizing animals as wisdom holders and kin rather than tools. Drawing from *nsyilxcən* oral traditions, such as *captik^{wł}* stories of *snk'lip* (coyote) and *tmix^w* (earth beings), and Métis *wahkootowin* (relational ethics), the project advocates for decolonial, reciprocal approaches to youth mental health support. Through a literature review of attachment theory, and human-animal bond research, alongside Indigenous epistemologies like Two-Eyed Seeing, the project addresses trauma, anxiety, and disconnection among youth. Practical lesson plans incorporating therapy dogs, like the author's companion Kona, are provided, with ethical guidelines aligned to standards from the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (2024) and Human Research Standards Organization (2023), prioritizing animal welfare and cultural safety. The significance lies in fostering wholistic wellness by repositioning more-than-human relations as central to healing, offering school counsellors culturally responsive strategies that honour Indigenous worldviews while promoting mutual flourishing. Recommendations include ongoing collaboration with Knowledge Keepers to adapt AAT-C practices, ensuring reciprocity, and avoiding anthropocentrism. This work contributes to bridging Western and Indigenous paradigms in education, ultimately supporting resilient, relationally grounded youth.

Table of Contents

Dedication or Acknowledgement	iii
Abstract	iv
Chapter 1	1
Introduction.....	1
Background Information.....	3
Statement of the Problem.....	5
Purpose of the Paper	7
Research Question or Thesis Statement.....	9
Positionality Statement	9
Theoretical Framework.....	10
Significance of the Study	12
Definition of Terms.....	12
Outline of the Remainder of the Paper	14
Chapter 2: Literature Review	15
Introduction.....	15
Review of Research Literature.....	15
Defining Animal-Assisted Interventions (AAI) and Navigating Terminological Tensions.	15
Animal-Assisted Services (AAS)	16

<i>Animal-Assisted Treatment (AATx)</i>	16
Animal-Assisted Education (AAE).....	17
Animal-Assisted Support Programs (AASP).....	17
The Canadian Context for Animal-Assisted Therapy in Counselling (AAT-C)	18
History of the Human-Animal Bond (HAB) and Indigenous Teachings	20
swit askwist? Who is your name?.....	22
Attachment Theory, Indigenous Wholistic Wellbeing and Dogs	23
Weaving HART into the Kinship Web: Chandler’s Gifts for our Shared Stories	26
Human-Animal Bond (HAB).....	27
Animal-Assisted Therapy in Counselling (AAT-C).....	29
Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA) - Animal Assisted Therapy in Counselling (AAT-C) Chapter.....	31
Dreamcatcher Nature-Assisted Therapy Association	31
Decolonial Animal Ethics: Insights from Indigenous Literature	32
Animal-Assisted Relational Practices (AARP)	34
Play as a Relational Portal: Puppetry, captik ^{wl} and Animal-Assisted Play Therapy in the Circle	38
Chapter 3: Summary, Recommendations and Conclusions.....	42
Summary.....	42
Recommendations.....	44

Conclusions.....	47
References.....	50
Appendix A: Ethical Considerations Before Implementing Lesson Plans	61
Appendix B: Co-Learning in Community: Lesson Plans for Relational Healing	65

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Start where you are. I write to you from the traditional, unceded land of the syilx people in the Okanagan, where I live, work, learn and play. As local Chief Dan Wilson stated in his opening address at the second annual What Happens Upstream youth conference (personal communication, October 20, 2025), archaeological evidence dates Indigenous presence here back 7,500 years. I am a descendant of the Métis from the Red River in Canada with Mi'kmaw, Ukrainian and French settler ancestry. My Auntie once told me that loving Kona is loving you because she is just an extension of you. Kona is my ten-year-old cairn terrier. She is attached to my hip most of the time and has been working with me, doing Animal-Assisted Education (AAE) since she was a puppy. This past year, I embarked on the adventure of becoming a school counsellor, and because of our physical and literal attachment, Kona tagged along. She is an incredibly intuitive creature who I have watched with curiosity and awe over the years. Kona has magic that I am learning to magnify the more I practice patience and work with her.

The Métis practice of kinship relates to our extensive networks and shared experiences within the natural and spiritual world, as simply defined by the Cree term *wahkootowin*, or *all my relations*, a concept common to many Indigenous cultures. With “an emphasis on the extended family fostered through the creation of physical and spiritual relationships between people (living, ancestral, those to come), land, the spirit world, and creatures with whom they shared physical space... everyone, therefore, was taught that who they were as individuals could only be

understood in relation to their family relationships and which, in turn, reflected relationships to the community, environment, sacred world and outsiders” (Macdougall, 2017, p. 1). Through Kona, I witness the magic of kinship - her presence softens barriers, invites trust, and reminds us of our interconnectedness with all beings. I explore this work with an open heart, a willingness to take risks to bridge the gaps between cultures and a hope that my vulnerability will build belonging, connection and healing for those in my community and beyond.

As I move into the realm of school counselling with a relational, Indigenous worldview guiding my interactions, I want to better know the guidelines for Animal-Assisted Treatments in Counselling (AATx-C) in Canada while ensuring I practice ethically honouring Kona as a relational partner - embodying the spirit of *wahkootowin, all our relations* (MacDougall, 2017, p. 9) through reciprocal consent, cultural protocols, and vigilant advocacy for her well-being as a sentient teacher, healer and member of our school community. I want to learn ethical protocols for blending AATx-C with local Indigenous *syilx* teachings, protecting Kona while amplifying her wisdom for youth agency and community wellbeing. I've seen it in the students' eyes, those tears in kinship that manifest into gaps later – parental role reversal, intergenerational trauma, maladaptive stress management, showing up as depression, eating disorders, PTSD, anxiety, and other mental health disorders (Bosmans et al., 2022; Messina et al., 2023; Thompson et al., 2022; Curry-Catanese, 2022). Too many students miss the chance for opportunities that bring them back to practices that are culturally relevant where more-than-humans heal, handing out trust and that quiet “you're enough” without strings. Kona's gentle nose nudges to say, “you matter”, make a difference.

Although 93.7% of medical practitioners in a 2017 Italian survey viewed animal-assisted counselling favorably for therapeutic purposes, it is still rarely used in schools, where it tends to

be limited to sporadic visits or informal programs rather than integrated therapy (Pinto et al., 2017). This capstone bridges that gap by exploring how AATx-C can be used in everyday school counselling, while interweaving my journey learning with Kona through a Métis lens of kinship and reciprocity. By centering Indigenous teachings, this inquiry offers a unique perspective to the field, inviting school counsellors to consider culturally attuned, relational approaches that honour more-than-human partners. This work offers hope. It could inspire deeper connections, fostering school communities where healing emerges from shared bonds grounded in a more-than-human ethic, ultimately enhancing youth agency and wellbeing far beyond my own practice.

Background Information

Animal-Assisted Services (AAS) refer to a range of structured practices that incorporate animals into human services, including therapy, education, and activities, to support physical, emotional, and social well-being (Binder et al., 2024). These services have roots in early 20th-century observations of human-animal bonds but gained momentum in the 1960s with formal recognition of their therapeutic potential, such as in child psychotherapy (Levinson, 1969). Over time, AAS have expanded globally, with research highlighting benefits like reduced stress, improved mood, and enhanced social interactions across various populations (Fine, 2015). While these benefits are well documented in therapeutic settings broadly, their application in counselling - and particularly in schools, reveals both promise and significant gaps.

In counselling settings more generally, animal-assisted approaches are integrated as adjuncts to traditional methods, helping to build therapeutic alliances and address issues like anxiety, depression, and trauma (Chandler, 2024). For instance, practitioners report that animals can serve as non-judgmental facilitators, encouraging client engagement and emotional

expression in ways that human therapists alone might not achieve (Stewart et al., 2013). Despite positive attitudes among many mental health professionals - such as the 93.7% of surveyed Italian medical practitioners who viewed AAS favorably - implementation remains inconsistent due to concerns over training, ethics, and standardization (Pinto et al., 2017). Nowhere is this inconsistency more visible, or more consequential, than in school environments, where AAS are increasingly used with vulnerable youth.

The World Health Organization (2025) estimates that 14.3% of 10–19-year-olds worldwide have mental health conditions, most of which go untreated and unrecognized. In school counselling contexts specifically, AAS are increasingly explored for their role in supporting student mental health and academic success, though they are still not regulated (Gee et al., 2015). Programs often involve therapy dogs or other animals in brief interventions to boost attendance, reduce behavioral issues, and foster a sense of belonging, particularly for students facing challenges like trauma or social isolation (Brelsford et al., 2017). Evidence suggests these approaches can enhance empathy, cognitive skills, and overall engagement in educational environments, making them a promising tool for school-based support (Gee et al., 2017). Yet this promise is undermined by a shadow practice. Many professionals bring their animals into schools without adhering to established guidelines, fostering a true “underground culture” that promotes unethical treatment of dogs and jeopardizes the welfare of both animals and students.

Western counselling often glances past the ethics of relating to animals, blind to how colonialism shredded those sacred kinships we hold dear (Snowshoe et al., 2016). My research seeks to repair that rupture by integrating Indigenous ethics into school counselling practices. Seeing Kona not just as a therapy dog but as a relational partner embodies the Métis principle of *wahkootowin* - all our relations (MacDougall, 2017, p. 9) - and echoes *syilx* reciprocity in *tmix*^w,

where humans hold duties to sustain interconnected lifeforms as part of our responsibility to the greater whole (Fan, 2024, p. 255). For me, it's why Kona's not "just a dog." She's the echo of Auntie's lesson, pulling us back into wahkootowin with a wag that says, "We're in this together." A significant gap remains in AAS research that truly honours diverse Indigenous worldviews, blending syilx and Métis teachings to reshape ethical practice in schools. What if we filled it with captik^{wł} - stories that weave local wisdom into our work with more-than-human kin?

Statement of the Problem

There is no research that considers AAS in the context of culturally relevant Animal-Assisted Treatments in Counselling (AATx-C), specifically integrating Métis and syilx teachings in a school counselling context. AAS's that promote cultural awareness, competence and sensitivity are needed in the field and is an area of growth that I am trying to address through exploration of the literature, existing services and through conversations with Knowledge Keepers about best practices moving forward. Recent years have shown a "gradual yet increasing interest in the cultural underpinnings of animal-assisted interventions (AAIs). This can be potentially traced to the field's development as it serves larger populations across social categories" (Mueller et al., 2025, p. 150). Informal AAI's have been a part of my district's mandate since 2015 when I began to investigate the appropriate steps to work with canines formally in schools with the help of a colleague, Andrea Schiller who was working on her master's in education at the time. Formal processes to ensure ethical work of AAIs in our buildings were implemented in 2017 through dedicated efforts from teachers and district leaders. Schiller's (2018) recommendations were implemented, and formal meetings were hosted within the district to educate our colleagues and administrators.

Eileen Bona was a keynote speaker at our conference. She is a Canadian registered psychologist with a master's in education (M.Ed.), specializing in animal-assisted therapy (AAT) and nature-based therapeutic practices. She is the founder, CEO, and executive director of Dreamcatcher Nature-Assisted Therapy, an organization she established in 2003 on a 40-acre property in Ardrossan, Alberta, which serves as a sustainable psychology practice, academy, tourism business, and not-for-profit charity dedicated to providing AAT programs. With over three decades of experience in supporting individuals through mental health challenges, Bona has been practicing AAT for more than 19 years, making Dreamcatcher one of the largest such programs in Canada, where animals and nature are used to facilitate healing, reconnection, and personal growth. She is also an author contributing to publications like the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association, and she has shared her expertise in podcasts and articles on the benefits of AAT for various populations.

Eileen collaborated with educators from School District 22 and the Vernon Teachers' Association (VTA) - a group of animal-assisted educators in Vernon, British Columbia - to host a presentation on animal-assisted interventions and activities for health and wellbeing within schools. This took place on February 22, 2018. Since then, a handful of teachers have taken up the call to include canines in their programming as Animal Assisted Education practices throughout the district. There are no counsellors formally using dogs in their practices beyond myself, as a counselling intern where I continue to gain hours of experience and shift my pedagogical approach with Kona to one that revolves around therapy instead of education highlighting the ethical perspective of Indigenous Worldviews and the ethical use of more-than-human beings in counselling work.

By incorporating animal-assisted therapy and working alongside a dog, we can open new, culturally sensitive pathways to foster wellness in our school communities. My goal is to become skilled in ethically drawing on Kona's wisdom to co-create healing spaces within my counselling practice - honoring her as a relational partner while nurturing a healthy school environment and contributing culturally attuned understandings of wholistic care through *syilx* and Métis lenses.

Rooted in *captikwł* (story), and *tmix^w* (lifeforms) highlighting Kirkness and Barnhardt's (2001) four R's for First Nations and Higher Education: Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity and Responsibility as an ethical framework, I lend my Indigenous perspective to AATx-C while inspiring others to critically examine the work they do and invite them to work with my ideas to promote kinship-based healing in clinical and educational contexts. The challenge and gift are being in the in-between. As a Métis counsellor I long to collaborate with my local *syilx* colleagues. As my confidence and knowledge grows in this field, I become more skilled at sharing the information within my circles of influence and effecting change slowly but steadily with the hope that more people will respond positively to integrating AATx-C ethically and responsibly in their work.

Purpose of the Paper

Indigenous youth experience historical traumas that have disrupted kinship with land and animals; relational AATx-C can restore balance through ethical, reciprocal practices while integrating local teachings to honour and respect the sacred ties to animal kin, calling us all to listen deeper without the old hegemonic noise drowning out the wisdom (Snowshoe et al., 2016). The dominant hegemony calls the shots on which stories are told, how they're spun, and who's listening. Hegemony "refers to the maintenance of domination not by the sheer exercise of force, but primarily through consensual social practices, social forms, and social structures produced in

specific sites such as the church, the state, the school, the mass media, the political system, and the family" (Armstrong, 2013, p. 39). Helen Armstrong (2013) explores story as a subversive act, highlighting the dominant hegemonic nature of whose story is told, while challenging this through years of work to indigenize the curriculum in Manitoba, Canada using counter hegemonic narratives of Indigenous people to bring attention to the inherent wisdom in their stories. Armstrong (2013) writes, "the utter denigration of the relationship of Aboriginal peoples with their animal kin was encouraged by a dominant culture" (p. 39). I approach this work with an Indigenous axiology. Axiology is like the heart of what we value - what we see as good, right, or meaningful in life, guiding how we act and relate (Wilson, 2001). From an Indigenous worldview, it's not just about individual morals but a relational ethic - valuing harmony with all kin, human and more-than-human, through reciprocity, respect, and responsibility to the whole web of life (Kirkness, et al., 1991, Wilson, 2016). It's asking, "What's the good way to live together?", like in *syilx* teachings, where *tmixw* calls us to give back as we take, ensuring balance for generations (Armstrong, 2009). For me, this axiology shapes ethical practice with Kona. Her wellbeing isn't secondary; it's woven into mine and the students', a shared duty rooted in love and accountability, not just rules. It's hopeful, this value system reminding us that ethics bloom from connection, not control.

This capstone links Kona's story, which is inherently mine, to *captikwł*, weaving local *syilx* and Métis teachings with AATx-C, validating Indigenous peoples storied lives, and inviting all readers to consider the inherent wisdom available if they are open to exploring it. My husband reminded me to ensure this work serves a purpose beyond reflection, "make it useful", he said, so I offer it now in the spirit of reciprocity. May it spark curiosity and vulnerability in others, urging them to weave the rich, sacred teachings of Indigenous peoples into their own practices,

for we stand to gain immeasurable insight from the enduring wisdom of this land's First Peoples.

Research Question or Thesis Statement

How can a school-based counsellor ethically engage in relational practices with more-than-human kin (therapy dogs) through an Indigenous lens, integrating local syilx and Métis teachings to thoughtfully incorporate a dog as a wisdom holder in school counselling?

Positionality Statement

As a Métis woman of Red River descent with Mi'kmaw, Ukrainian, and French settler ancestry, I live, work, and learn on the unceded tmix^w of the syilx people in the Okanagan, approaching this capstone from a relational worldview rooted in wahkootowin -“all my relations” - a Cree-Métis teaching of interconnectedness shared across Indigenous cultures. My social location as a white-passing, middle-class woman, shaped by a family prioritizing achievement, exercise, and emotional self-reliance - my mother a psychologist who emphasized resilience yet struggled to address vulnerabilities - has deepened my awareness of systemic pressures like performance expectations and their role in mental health challenges.

My lived experiences, including an eating disorder during my 1995–1997 national biathlon career amid intense scrutiny, isolation, and inadequate support, have forged my values of compassion, resilience, and embodiment. Triggered by biological factors (e.g., PCOS and family mental health history), psychological shame, and social sport culture's focus on appearance, this struggle - compounded by grief and transitions - led me to yoga, breathwork, and community as healing paths, reinforcing wholistic, non-judgmental approaches that view the body as an ally.

These threads converge in my enduring bond with animals, inspiring this capstone's inquiry into ethically integrating therapy dogs like Kona as wisdom holders through *syilx* and Métis lenses. Kona, my cairn terrier co-therapist, embodies reciprocity, amplifying my person-centered practice (Rogers) with unconditional positive regard, empathy, and congruence, while Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (Hayes) support values-based action amid uncontrollable stressors. Colonial legacies impacting Indigenous wellness further guide my decolonizing commitment, emphasizing cultural safety, equity, and empowerment in school counselling.

Upholding ethical practice, I prioritize confidentiality while breaking it for harm risks (e.g., abuse, self-harm), informing students transparently and involving them along the way. Ongoing supervision bolsters my growth, ensuring I meet clients where they are, fostering self-acceptance while honoring biology, psychology, and social contexts. This positionality fuels my capstone's exploration of Animal-Assisted Relational Practices, blending Western models with Indigenous ways to nurture youth agency and community wellbeing - one reciprocal connection at a time.

Theoretical Framework

Two-Eyed Seeing draws me in like a deep inhale - integrating both *Mi'kmaw* and Western knowledges (Marshall & Bartlett, 2010), letting *syilx tmix^w* and *captik^{wł}* stories hum alongside AATx-C guidelines. Practitioners need skills in Two-Eyed Seeing (Marshall et al., 2010) for culturally safe Animal-Assisted Services (AAS). School communities would benefit if spaces for reciprocal learning with animals as kin were created. Snowshoe & Starblanket (2016) reinforce in their research on the role of the Lac La Croix Indigenous pony for First Nations youth mental wellness that the importance of culture for positive mental health outcomes is critical. This is my attempt to weave Indigenous worldviews into the evolving and fast-growing

discipline of AAS (Trevathan-Minnis, 2021; Mundy, 2025). Bartlett and colleagues express, “Two-Eyed Seeing acts as an important guiding principle for one’s journey while here on Mother Earth” (2011, p. 4). In the context of AATx-C, I can use this lens to encourage ethical integration of local *syilx* and Métis teachings in my work - drawing on *syilx* principles through the use of story, where local *captik^{wł}* ,and *tmix^w* guide responsibilities to kin like animals - positioning Kona as a co-teacher who embodies wisdom for healing trauma, building trust, and nurturing community wellness. It's that fuller sight for safe, balanced spaces, where Kona's curiosity mirrors my own. What if her nudge is the story unfolding, healing one shared glance at a time?

At the heart of the *syilx* worldview lies a deep harmony among all natural beings, woven through give-and-take bonds, and it's all rooted in their sacred origin tales (Armstrong, 2009). Armstrong (2013) writes: “For the stories will teach each of us – if we are willing and can learn to listen to them – how we might serve as an agent for change. That is the power of the story. We are and always have been *in* the story, in negative and positive ways” (p.61). This capstone as an inquiry weaves my story into my evolving practice working with Kona as a co-therapist in the room positioning me as a relational facilitator, embodying Two-Eyed Seeing to integrate Western counselling with Indigenous wisdom.

As I lean into Two-Eyed Seeing, I feel the pull to decenter humans in this work, challenging the anthropocentrism that cries we're the center of it all - humans as the measure of worth, with animals like Kona reduced to helpers in our stories (Kopnina et al., 2018). Anthropocentrism, that unspoken assumption, often unconscious notion of human superiority, has long shaped Western therapies, privileging our healing over the agencies of our more-than-human kin, often leading to their instrumentalization without true reciprocity (Besthorn, 2013). In *syilx tmix^w*centrism and Métis *wahkootowin*, Kona isn't just a bridge for us; she's a wisdom

holder with her own voice, inviting us to listen and learn in harmony, where healing flows both ways (Armstrong, 2009; Macdougall, 2017). What if we stepped back, letting her intuitive movements guide the room, reminding us that true wellbeing blooms when we honour the web, not just our place in it? This inquiry calls me to inquire deeper, weaving in an axiology - an Indigenous way of valuing what's good and right, what is beautiful (Wilson, 2016), that roots ethics in relationships, not dominance.

Significance of the Study

What if a small cairn terrier's gentle presence could bridge the gaps in our fractured systems, inviting Indigenous wisdom into school counselling and buildings to heal not just individuals, but communities? This capstone holds significance by addressing the "underground culture" of unregulated therapy dog use in Canadian schools, where well-intentioned practices often overlook ethical animal welfare, cultural safety, and decolonial frameworks (Vardy et al., 2025). By weaving local *syilx captik^{wł}* and Métis *wahkootowin* into Animal-Assisted Relational Practices (AARP), it offers a Two-Eyed Seeing model that decenters anthropocentrism, positioning dogs like Kona as kin and wisdom holders rather than tools - fostering reciprocal healing for youth facing trauma, anxiety, and disconnection (Parish-Plass, 2021; Stefanini et al., 2015). Beyond my practice, this work contributes to the field by providing ethical protocols, lesson plans, and reflections that empower educators to integrate more-than-human relations thoughtfully, potentially transforming school mental health supports into culturally relevant, restorative spaces that honour *tmix^w* and ripple outward to mend colonial separations for generations to come.

Definition of Terms

captik^{wł} (kuh-PTIHK-whł) - oral stories

more-than-human kin - encompasses animals, land, and spirits as relational partners in Indigenous worldviews, challenging anthropocentric hierarchies.

nƚawq̣nwix^w (nuh-WUK-nwih-KWH) - consensus building or meetings using syilx rules of order

snk'lip (sehn-KLEEP) - Coyote, the trickster teacher.

sqilx^w (s-keel-khw) - dreaming ones-bound together, humans

syilx (see-ilkh) - the people who speak nsyilxcen

swit askwist? (sweet ask-weest?) "Who is your name? In nxyilxcen, your name is not a "what"; it is a "who" that connects you to the networks of relatives, friends, people and places.

tmix^w (tuh-MEEKWH) - "tmix^w refers to the whole life-force of the life form including the capacity to generate enough single entities required to regenerate itself as well as to provide for the needs of other tmix^w as a part of their life-force", all lifeforms.

tmix^wcentrism (tuh-MEEKWH centrism) - the syilx way of reciprocity with all life-forms, calls us to sustain the land's pulse - no taking without giving back, a simple duty to the web, reciprocity embodied

wahkootowin - Métis Kinship - "all my relations" as a web of interconnectedness with animals as spiritual and ecological kin

wisdom holder - animals like Kona as intuitive guides embodying cultural teachings for healing and community balance.

xatma?sqilx^w - first people translated as "in-front-of-us" or "first people," often meaning the-people-to-be in captik^w stories

ǰ^waƚylx^w (khwa-uh-yilkhw) – fox, and snk'lip's brother

Outline of the Remainder of the Paper

In Chapter 2, I explore the literature on animal-assisted practices, beginning with definitions and tensions in terminology, including Animal-Assisted Interventions (AAI), Animal-Assisted Services (AAS), Animal-Assisted Treatment (AATx), Animal-Assisted Education (AAE), and Animal-Assisted Support Programs (AASP), while proposing relational alternatives like "Animal-Assisted Relational Practices" (AARP) and "Kinship Assisted Healing" (KAH) to better align with Indigenous reciprocity. The review traces the history of AAS from Western perspectives on human-canine bonds to Indigenous teachings, such as *syilx captikwł* stories and the role of *snk'lip* (Coyote) as a mental health model. I connect attachment theory with Indigenous wholistic wellbeing, showing how dogs like Kona support emotional regulation and secure relationships. Chandler's (2024) Human-Animal Relational Theory (HART) is examined through its key components – Human Animal Bond (HAB), Significant Human Animal Relational Moments (SHARM), Human Animal Relational Processing (HARP), and Human Animal Relational Therapeutic Impact (HARTI), to highlight reciprocal healing. The chapter details AATx-C's skills and ethical principles, contrasting Western harm reduction (e.g., via Canadian bodies like Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association and Dreamcatcher) with relational accountability, and incorporates decolonial insights from Indigenous literature to address gaps and center Kona's voice.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

What if the literature we gather isn't just pages in a book, but threads in a Métis sash, each one carrying the colours of Western research and Indigenous wisdom, woven together to hold the weight of healing?

In this chapter, I turn to the voices of scholars and knowledge keepers to build the basket for my inquiry, exploring the evolving language of animal-assisted services, the ancient human-animal bond through *syilx captik^{wł}* and Métis kinship, the interplay of attachment theory and wholistic wellbeing, Chandler's (2024) Human-Animal Relational Theory as a bridge, and the ethical protocols that safeguard us all - human and more-than-human alike. Guided by *wahkootowin* and *tmix^w*, this review isn't a distant survey, it's a living conversation, inviting us to question colonial hierarchies and imagine practices where Kona's gentle presence magnifies reciprocity, one hopeful connection at a time.

Review of Research Literature

Defining Animal-Assisted Interventions (AAI) and Navigating Terminological Tensions

Animal Assisted Interventions (AAI) weave animals into human healing spaces, traditionally used in settings like hospitals, schools, and counselling rooms to ease anxiety, build trust, and spark connection - think Freud inviting his dog Jofi to sessions or Levinson's breakthroughs with children in the 1960s (Fine, 2015; Trevathan-Minnis et al., 2021). From a Western lens, AAI encompasses structured activities where animals support therapeutic goals, often as adjuncts to talk therapy, promoting emotional regulation and social bonds (Chandler, 2024). But in Indigenous contexts, it's deeper - animals as kin, like in *syilx captik^{wł}* where *snk'lip* teaches through relational mishaps, or Métis *wahkootowin* viewing dogs as spiritual

partners in the web of life (Armstrong, 2009; Macdougall, 2017). This echoes traditional uses among Indigenous peoples, where animals have long been co-healers in ceremonies and daily wellness, fostering *mino-bimaadiziwin*, the good life free from disconnection (McGinnis et al., 2019).

Animal-Assisted Services (AAS)

In my work with Kona, where her nudge softens a student's guarded edges, I have seen how these interactions are not just "interventions" - that's too clinical, too one-way. Formerly known as AAI in the research (Mundy, 2025, p.2) Binder et al. (2024) propose AAS as the newer more inclusive terminology aimed to streamline the important work people are doing with animals. Like a welcoming circle, supporting the development of healthy attachment, mediated, guided, or facilitator-led practices, programs, and human services weave specially qualified animals into therapeutic, educational, supportive, and/or ameliorative processes to nurture human well-being, while fiercely guarding the animals' welfare. This new umbrella term honours diversity, letting us tune in deeper to what each role truly calls for.

Animal-Assisted Treatment (AATx)

This term is at the heart of the work, swapping out "therapy" for "treatment" (Binder et al., 2024) to embrace the experience - like how Kona and I co-regulate with the student, not as a quick fix but as part of their goal-oriented healing path (Mundy et al., 2025). AATx is a class of mental or physical health professional treatment modalities where animals (direct or indirect) are a critical thread in the professional's approach, grounded in goals, techniques, and measurable outcomes for the individual's education, social-emotional growth, or cognitive/vocational strides (Binder et al., 2024). Providers have a degree and are licensed professionals such as occupational therapists or counsellors, blending evidence-based tools with a dog's intuitive grace, all within

ethical bounds to protect them as co-healers. It's a hopeful reciprocity. We repair ruptures, one session at a time, while staying within our scope of practice.

Animal-Assisted Education (AAE)

This feels familiar and a lot like *captik*^{wł} unfolding in a classroom circle - stories shared, wisdom exchanged, where Kona's presence sparks a shy reader's voice without the pressure of "fixing." AAE is any educational program folding animals in as a vital part of ongoing learning, targeting academic, social-emotional, psychoeducational, cognitive, vocational, or personal/organizational growth - like kids learning empathy through her gentle nudges (Binder et al., 2024). This term remains unchanged and supports continuity in the field. Providers might be certified educators or trained non-degreed handlers, structuring sessions with reflection and evaluation, in spots from schools to stables. It's that *tmix*^w balance. Not therapy, but a bridge to relevance (learning), where youth reclaim their agency through play in the interactions they have with Kona.

Animal-Assisted Support Programs (AASP)

If AATx is the deep dive and AAE the guided lesson, AASP is the warm space - those visits where Kona's physical presence eases a youth in hospital or boosts a courthouse kid's courage. Programs engaging animals (direct or indirect) to support and improve wellbeing for both human and non-human, sparks motivation, eases loneliness, quiets anxiety, offering moments to be present to discover connection despite the challenges (Binder et al., 2024). Often volunteer-led, with temperament-tested animals, these are adjuncts to treatment or education - think reading buddies or crisis companions - delivered to show up to meet a need at the moment. It is pure *wahkootowin*. Humble, heart-led exchanges that remind us of belonging.

These labels keep us accountable, like n̄awq̄n̄wix^w dropping thoughts gently into the circle - no blurring lines that could dim the wisdom. Binder et al. (2024) lay out clearly the new changes in the terminology to streamline and improve the standards of practice and the quality and appropriateness of the interactions. The newly adopted changes should provide more clarity and guidelines for understanding the requirements of the different scopes of practices that include animals to benefit humans (p.2).

The Canadian Context for Animal-Assisted Therapy in Counselling (AAT-C)

In Canada, the field of Animal-Assisted Therapy in Counselling (AAT-C) is expanding, driven by recognition of the human-animal bond's (HAB) role in mental health support. However, without mandatory national regulations, practitioners rely on voluntary standards to ensure safe, ethical, and effective integration of animals like Kona into therapeutic work. This context highlights the need for frameworks that prioritize both human wellbeing and animal welfare, aligning with my relational approach grounded in syilx and Métis teachings.

A key development is the 2023 National Standard of Canada (NSC) for Animal-Assisted Human Services (AAHS) (Human Research Standards Organization, 2023), which encompasses AAT-C as a subcategory (Moss, 2024). Spearheaded by the Canadian Foundation for Animal-Assisted Support Services (CF4AASS), this voluntary standard addresses long-standing gaps in integrated frameworks for healthcare, social, justice, and correctional services in Canada. Moss (2024) emphasizes AAHS as interdisciplinary practices bridging natural sciences, humanities, veterinary medicine, and applied sciences, including service animals and interventions like Animal-Assisted Activities (AAA), Learning (AAL), and Therapy (AAT). The NSC promotes transparency, accountability, and innovation by uniting silos - such as dog and horse industries - through consensus-building among stakeholders. For my practice, this means viewing Kona not

just as a co-therapist but as a Human Services Assistance Animal (HSAA), whose welfare is safeguarded through requirements like written procedures for rest, stress prevention, and ethical use (Human Research Standards Organization [HRSO], 2023). This resonates with tmix^w's reciprocity, ensuring Kona's needs are as central as those of the youth I support.

Complementing the NSC are the Canadian Counselling Psychotherapy Association's (CCPA) Suggested Guidelines for Practice in AAT-C, updated in 2024 by the AAT-C Chapter (Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association [CCPA], 2024). These voluntary guidelines outline five competency areas: formal training, counsellor knowledge, cultural considerations, professional values, and development. Formal training requires intentional integration of AAT-C into one's model, with supervised experience and collaboration in models like the "diamond" (where a handler supports the animal). Counsellor knowledge stresses species-specific knowledge, humane training, and animal advocacy, such as recognizing stress cues and allowing opt-outs - directly applicable to reading Kona's signals for mutual consent. Cultural considerations urge respect for diverse views on animals, echoing wahkootowin by adapting to clients' backgrounds and avoiding assumptions. Professional values like empathy for all beings and development through ongoing education reinforce ethical growth. These align with the CCPA Code of Ethics, emphasizing boundaries of competence and risk management, such as infection control and liability awareness.

Together, these resources provide a foundation for ethical practice in Canada's unregulated landscape. The NSC's broad AAHS focus fosters national unity, while CCPA guidelines tailor to counselling, both supporting my inquiry into blending Western standards with Indigenous reciprocity. In working with Kona, they guide me to prioritize her as kin, while

maintaining appropriate standards ensuring our sessions honour cultural safety and shared healing for students.

Yet, the field's evolving terminology stirs tensions for me - the shift to "Animal-Assisted Human Services" (AAHS) here in Canada and "Animal-Assisted Services", along with "Animal-Assisted Treatment" (AATx), feel cold, institutional, like a clinical coat over something warm and alive (Moss, 2023; Binder et al., 2024). These terms load the relationship with "treatment" language, implying a one-way fix where humans direct and animals serve, echoing anthropocentrism's hierarchy (Kopnina, et al., 2018). It doesn't resonate with my heart - Kona's wag isn't a "service"; it's reciprocity, a shared dance. She is present to provide therapy and healing, helping the client feel empowered by their choice to attend. Clients aren't broken but have an agency in their therapy. Instead, I choose relational terms like "Animal-Assisted Relational Practices" (AARP) or "Kinship-Assisted Healing," (KAH) honoring wahkootowin and tmix^w, where Kona is co-therapist, not adjunct (Snowshoe et al., 2016). This de-centers the institutional chill, inviting vulnerability. What if we named it from love, letting the language reflect the web we're all in?

History of the Human-Animal Bond (HAB) and Indigenous Teachings

From a Western lens, the bond between canines and humans stretches back over 35,000 years - starting with wolves as spiritual partners and hunting kin, evolving into dogs like Kona, who never stray far from our side (Kotrschal, 2018). Those wolves turned into dogs with domestication, teaming up with us, reading our emotions with empathetic eyes. "They can adjust to them in an empathic way" (Kotrschal, 2018, p. 2). Horowitz (2009) explains that dog's strengths in communicating with humans relate to their predisposed ability to inspect our faces for critical information, for reassurance, and for guidance. Once needed for survival tasks, they

have become a part of our lives as emotional anchors. What Fine (2015, p. 5) calls the human-dog bond - a quiet gift of connection and grounding us in the present.

Shifting to an Indigenous view, and it's deeper still. The Ojibwa creation story "Learning the World from Ma'iingan" paints the wolf as a noble teacher, guiding us to live well, their fates entwined, "to protect wolves is to protect humans and to harm wolves is to harm the Ojibwe prospect for survival" (Eisenberg et al., 2023, p. 157). *syilx kin honor snk'lip* (coyote) as a trickster shaping morality, paired with his wise "good twin" fox (Armstrong, 2009, p. 98), while Great Plains people saw wolves as wisdom symbols, guarding family life without a hunter's arrow (Kotrschal, 2018, p. 7). Dogs have padded through creation tales and our timelines, their eyes decoding our faces like open stories, offering that steady affection that soothes pain and knits us closer (Kotrschal, 2018; Horowitz, 2009). *syilx captik^{wł}* on the origin of dogs:

Coyote continued on his journey. He had not gone far when he saw monster-dog (*kika-waupá*)...saw the sharp teeth...ready to eat him...Coyote ran...to a mole hole...thought of his faithful wife mole...told her to dig many underground holes...monster-dog soon uncovered Coyote...Coyote begged for time to smoke his pipe...monster dog agreed...Coyote smoked and called on his *squ-stenk*' powers...large stones were given him... began striking monster-dog...as he (dog) jumped over the trenches of mole, he would lose his balance and fall. Struck until he killed him (dog). From the remains...ran a small dog...Coyote...said to it...after this...you will never kill unless ill-treated...you will be the most faithful of animals that man can have...you will be owned by old men and old women whom you will fear. (Armstrong, 2009, p.117)

Trevathan-Minnis et al. (2021) traces a professional connection to dogs to over 50 years of the HAB growing from scattered sparks to a steady flame, especially as an adjunct therapy catching fire in the last decade. They point to the early roots of Freud's inclusion of his dog, Jofi, in sessions to Boris Levinson's 1969 book *Pet-Oriented Child Psychotherapy*, dog-aided breakthroughs with autistic kids, building on a hunch that animals ease human burdens (Trevathan-Minnis et al., 2021, p. 2). Research has exploded since, suggesting human-animal

interactions as a wellspring for health and wellbeing - less fear, more calm, prosocial effects that Schramm et al. (2015) back with meta-analyses showing mental health improvements and depression's decrease. For me, it is Kona's wag feeling like home in school, sparking wellness with every curious sniff, asking, "What if we're all kin learning together?" Kona's presence offers a thread of reciprocity tying Western evolution of the field to Indigenous wisdom.

swit askwist? Who is your name?

The Coyote figure in *syilx captik*^{w1}, *snk'lip*, reminds me of my uncle. Both are tricksters, using humour with their sense of purpose to teach lessons in life. In Derrickson (2024), *snk'lip* emerges as a leadership model rooted in humility and transformation, where Coyote's flaws (greed, impulsivity) lead to downfall, only for revival to spark community laws - mirroring how youth's struggles, like isolation or anger, become teachable paths to wellbeing. "The crux (for me) in this story is that he was resurrected (or woken) by his twin brother, Fox and carried on with his walk, remembering what he was supposed to do." (Derrickson, 2024, p.4) Cohen (2010) weaves this into education, portraying Coyote as the "failed student" who reshapes schooling through Fox's guidance, challenging rigid Western models with relational, experiential knowing that honors *tmix*^w's web. For my AAT-C work, *snk'lip* isn't a distant story - he's a mental health advocate inviting Kona as co-teacher with her intuitive "tricks" (a tail wag cracking a guarded smile, or her pause signaling a kid's overwhelm) echoing Coyote's stumble-into-growth, fostering mental health by modeling vulnerability and reciprocity without judgment and evolving through transformation (Ben Louis, personal communication, October 28, 2025). In school counselling, this local *syilx* teaching transforms AAT-C from add-on to kin-centered practice. *snk'lip*'s journeys remind me to co-regulate with youth, turning "monsters" like trauma into personal growth, much like Kona's presence softens barriers for healing. What if sessions draw on

Coyote's revival - kids sharing "messy moments", knowing it's important to pick up and try again, with Kona's nudge, rebuilding trust through play, guided by the Four Rs? It's hopeful reciprocity where honoring Snk'lip's lessons integrates syilx knowledge ethically, while also respecting Kona's magic.

Attachment Theory, Indigenous Wholistic Wellbeing and Dogs

John Bowlby's attachment theory (Bretherton, 1994) placed relational bonds at the heart of human development, proposing that the attachment system is an evolutionary mechanism designed to ensure safety and survival. At its core are two functions: the secure base - a trusted presence from which an individual can explore - and kinship relations - a reliable circle of relations to return to in times of stress or threat (Thompson et al., 2022). These dual functions remind me that much of counselling is about helping young people feel safe enough to explore their own lives, emotions, and identities; while knowing they can return to support when distress arises. Kona, stroked by the client while she lies in a chair next to them or snuggled on their lap, enhances the therapeutic relationship through comfort and acceptance, aligning with attachment theory.

Bowlby's (Bretherton, 1994, p. 447) idea of Internal Working Models (IWM) also resonates with me. These mental representations of self and others are formed early through relationships and shape how individuals expect others to respond to them. Secure attachments foster models of the self as worthy and others as reliable; insecure patterns can lead to anxiety, avoidance, or ambivalence. Current research emphasizes that while attachment has a degree of stability, it is also open to change across the lifespan through corrective experiences and relationships (Thompson et al., 2022). This is a hopeful and powerful reminder for my work with

students. No one is “stuck” with the attachment patterns they first learned. Counsellors, and therapy dogs, can become trusted and secure attachment figures to help clients heal.

This Western lens on attachment, though vital, gains fuller breath through Indigenous wholistic wellness thinking (Linklater, 2014, p.100), where bonds aren't just survival tools but threads in a relational web that nurtures the whole self: body, mind, spirit, and community. From the Anishinaabe (also known as Ojibwe or Ojibway) language, "Strong and healthy relationships between human and more-than-human beings have long been understood by Indigenous peoples as critical to achieve *mino-bimaadiziwin*, the way of a good life or living life in its fullest sense, free from illness and misfortune (McGinnis et al., 2019, p.162). In sylvan and Métis teachings, dogs like Kona aren't mere animals; they're kin, wisdom holders inviting wholistic balance, repairing the kinship disruptions of trauma by modelling acceptance without judgment. For youth carrying intergenerational wounds, this means attachment healing isn't isolated. It's a circle where Kona's steady gaze cues spiritual safety alongside emotional calm, fostering *n̄awq̄nwix̄w* “the reciprocal gentle dropping of thoughts, like water, into everyone’s minds to address the issue at the centre of discussion” (Fan, 2023, p.255) (gentle consensus), and healing in our sessions.

Recent literature has deepened my understanding of how attachment works by situating it within learning theory. Bosmans and colleagues (2022) argue that attachment security develops through processes of safety learning. When caregivers consistently respond with comfort, children learn to expect safety, and those expectations consolidate into secure-base scripts. Conversely, inconsistent or rejecting care teaches avoidance or hyperactivation of attachment behaviours. This lens is particularly useful in practice, because it translates attachment theory into observable, modifiable processes. Safety learning can be disrupted, but it can also be re-

established. For me, this makes sense of how AAT-C can operate: therapy animals become non-judgmental co-regulators that cue safety, consistency, and acceptance, giving students the chance to “relearn” secure-base scripts in the present moment. Layering in Indigenous wholistic wellness (Linklater, 2014, p.100) here, we see safety not as linear learning but cyclical connection - where Kona's presence, guided by the Four R's, respects a student's cultural story (Relevance), invites two-way trust (Reciprocity), and empowers them to hold responsibility for their healing (Kirkness et al., 1991). It's like snk'lip (Coyote) teaching through play: messy, but transformative, rebuilding emotional regulation as part of spiritual reconnection (Armstrong, 2009, p.98).

Attachment is also intimately tied to emotion regulation, which is a central theme in a counselling practice. Messina et al. (2023) highlight that individuals with insecure attachment styles often rely on maladaptive interpersonal emotion regulation strategies. Anxious individuals may excessively seek reassurance, while avoidant individuals suppress and distance. Both patterns can limit flexibility and increase distress. Understanding the attachment background of a student allows me to better recognize the roots of their regulation strategies and then invite them, gently, into more adaptive ways of being. Often the students attach first to Kona. She becomes the bridge to me where together we help students work on emotional regulation strategies. Zilcha-Mano et al. (2011) show how therapy animals can offer corrective attachment experiences, allowing clients to approach emotional vulnerability within a safe relational frame. AAT-C with dogs aligns with attachment theory, where dogs serve as emotionally safe figures (Fennig et al., 2022). Evidence shows that therapy dogs enhance therapeutic alliances and reduce emotional withdrawal, particularly in youth with eating disorders (Stefanini et al., 2015). The animal serves as a model of secure attachment, allowing generalization to other relationships and

becomes a conduit for helping the client build a wider support system (Zilcha-Mano et al., 2011). In my healing space, Indigenous wholistic wellness (Linklater, 2014, p.100) invites us to go beyond quick emotional band-aids and embrace full-circle thriving - where Respect honours the student's ancestral kin, both human and more-than-human, and Responsibility encourages them to build acceptance alongside Kona, stitching it into their inner world like the careful threads on a Métis sash, each one carrying tales of deep connection and quiet resilience as they step forward into their future with true agency and hope.

Attachment theory helps me make sense of why a student withdraws or clings, why they may distrust me or lean heavily on me, and how change becomes possible through consistent, attuned interactions. Emotions are rooted in the attachment system - fear, joy, distress, and acceptance are central to survival and relationship building. AAT-C provides a relationally safe, embodied context for safety learning where I can invite students to work with cognitive and behavioural tools for cultivating flexibility in the face of emotional pain within a connected and safe space. When grounded in attachment principles, AAT-C creates opportunities for students to experience themselves differently- culturally safe, connected, and capable of growth. Blended with Indigenous wholistic wellness (Linklater, 2014, p.100), it becomes a living invitation: Through the Four R's, Kona and I hold space not just for secure bases, but for reciprocal journeys where youth reclaim their place in the web - whole, honoured, and connected.

Weaving HART into the Kinship Web: Chandler's Gifts for our Shared Stories

Diving into Chandler's (2024) Animal-Assisted Therapy in Counseling (AAT-C) feels like finding an old trail marker on my dad's the trap line - simple, steady, pointing toward that deeper experience where Kona's presence with me in my role as a counsellor isn't just a moment, but a reminder to be in the moment and of what we are here to do, together. It should not

surprise the reader to know I carried my new puppy into my dad's trapline when we spread his ashes. I have had dogs in my life for as long as I can remember, and they have been there for me at critical times like that one. I choose to move forward using Chandler's (2024) terminology AAT-C, because it aligns with the Canadian standards and feels more authentic to the work I do. In addition, she has delved more deeply into the magic that happens in a counselling session for the therapist who is paying attention.

Chandler's (2024) Human-Animal Relational Theory (HART) is a map for how we co-create healing with our more-than-human kin, echoing the reciprocity of *wahkootowin*, by naming the magic in those quiet exchanges. It's hopeful, like Auntie's words reminding me that Kona's love is mine extended - mutual, values based, and full of quiet power. These are Chandler's gems. Each one is a nudge to listen closer, honoring the web.

Human-Animal Bond (HAB)

At its core, the HAB is that living pulse between us and our animal kin - a dynamic, give-and-take dance shaped by behaviors that lift both our spirits and health, from emotional whispers to physical play, all tangled with the land around us (Fine, 2015). Mueller et al., (2025) emphasize the HAB as the bedrock of AAI, where animals like Kona become integral to therapeutic processes, fostering attachment, social support, and biophilia - the innate human affinity for life. This bond isn't static; it's evolutionary, rooted in millennia of coexistence that promote mutual benefits, such as reduced stress, enhanced empathy, and improved mental health outcomes across lifespans.

For me, this resonates deeply with Auntie's words: loving Kona is loving myself extended. In my sessions, it's the unspoken agreement - Kona's steady gaze cues my calm, and a student's hand on her fur invites a story - whole beings nurturing whole beings, repairing and

healing one shared breath at a time. Fine (2015) describes the HAB as a bidirectional relationship, where animals provide unconditional acceptance, mirroring secure attachments that Bowlby's theory links to human development. Yet, blending this with Métis wahkootowin and syilx tmix^w adds layers: Kona isn't just a companion; she's kin, embodying reciprocity where her wellbeing sustains ours, challenging anthropocentric views that reduce animals to tools (Mueller et al., 2024). This understanding guides my practice, reminding us that no one stands alone - it's the web holding us all, inviting ethical care that honors both human vulnerability and animal sentience for true community wellness.

Chandler (2018) takes the HAB to another level where she sees it as the foundation of Human Animal Relational Theory (HART). In her 2018 article outlining HART as a guide for animal-assisted counselling, Chandler describes it as a framework that elevates the bond into a structured therapeutic process, emphasizing the relational dynamics between humans and animals as co-creators of healing (Chandler, 2018). HART positions the animal not as a passive tool but as an active participant, whose presence fosters profound, transformative interactions that ripple through counselling sessions. This aligns with my evolving practice, where Kona's role mirrors the reciprocity in wahkootowin - mutual and sacred, extending beyond human-centered outcomes to honor all kin.

Central to HART are three interconnected components that build on the HAB. First, the Significant Human-Animal Relational Moment (SHARM) captures those pivotal, unscripted exchanges - like Kona's soft nudge against a student's leg during a vulnerable share - that spark immediate connection and open pathways for trust (Chandler, 2018, p. 432). Chandler notes these moments are often subtle yet powerful, driven by the animal's intuitive empathy, which can disarm defenses in ways words alone cannot. In my school sessions, a SHARM might unfold

when Kona's calm demeanor invites a quiet youth to speak, echoing *syilx tmix^w*'s call for balance among lifeforms.

Next, Human-Animal Relational Processing (HARP) involves collaboratively reflecting on the SHARM, either verbally or non-verbally, to integrate its meaning - me, the student, and Kona co-processing the shift (Chandler, 2018, p. 434). This step encourages clients to explore emotions and insights, with the animal's presence as a gentle anchor. For instance, after Kona mirrors a student's anxiety with a reassuring lean, we might discuss how her acceptance models self-compassion, weaving in *captik^w* stories of *snk'lip*'s revival to frame growth through relational learning.

Finally, the Human-Animal Relational Therapeutic Impact (HARTI) represents the lasting change from SHARM and HARP combined, reshaping clients' internal worlds and relationships long-term (Chandler, 2018, p. 436). Chandler's equation - SHARM + HARP = HARTI - illustrates how these elements cascade into outcomes like reduced isolation or heightened resilience. In blending HART with Métis kinship, I see Kona's contributions fostering not just symptom relief but wholistic thriving, where youth reclaim agency in the web of relations, guided by the Four Rs.

Chandler's work, including her advocacy for ethical standards and training in AAT-C, reinforces HART as a practical map for counsellors (Chandler, 2018). It reminds me that true healing emerges from shared vulnerability, much like Auntie's lesson - loving Kona extends love to all, sustaining our school community's interconnected wellbeing.

Animal-Assisted Therapy in Counselling (AAT-C)

AAT-C using a dog requires a significant number of skills in multiple domains, ranging from handling skills to developing a deep understanding and knowledge of the therapeutic

process (Fine, 2015; Chandler, 2024). Despite what may initially seem like an easy addition to a counselling practice, there exists very deliberate and important aspects to the integration of a dog for effective animal-assisted counselling. AAT-C involves specific goal-oriented interventions that include the trained mental health professional, a therapy animal and a client, participating with consent to work with the animal to support improved mental health outcomes for the client (Evans, 2024). The ethical use of the animal is paramount. Serpell, Coppinger, and Fine (2006) provide basic ethics principles for the use of animals in AAS:

1. All animals utilized therapeutically must be kept free from abuse, discomfort, and distress, both physical and mental.
2. Proper health care for the animal must be always provided.
3. All animals should have access to a quiet place where they can have time away from their work activities. Clinicians must practice preventative health procedures for all animals.
4. Interactions with clients must be structured to maintain the animal's capacity to serve as a useful therapeutic agent.
5. A situation of abuse or stress for a therapy animal should never be allowed except in such cases where temporarily permitting such abuse is necessary to avoid a serious injury to, or abuse of, the human client. (p. 471)

AAT-C has been demonstrated to support building the therapeutic alliance more quickly (Fine, 2015) while Chandler (2024) has suggested the relationship between the therapy pet and the client supports the building of rapport between the client and the counsellor. Dogs have been called “social lubricants” facilitating relationships within the therapeutic context, but also within the walls of the community with which they reside. Dogs can support the physical expression of emotions and enhance the therapeutic conditions (Fine, 2015, p. 145; Stewart, 2013, p.331).

Therapeutic touch is another aspect of the benefits to having a dog present during a session, offering physical connection where it is not possible to offer it professionally (Fine, 2015; Stewart, 2013).

From a Western perspective, ethical practice in AAT-C hinges on clear rules to minimize risk - things like informed consent for clients (checking allergies, fears), rigorous animal welfare standards (no abuse, regular vet care, rest periods), and adherence to policies from bodies like the Animal Assisted Services International (AASI, n.d.). In Canada, AAT-C is supported by national counselling associations and specialized therapy organizations that emphasize ethical integration, animal welfare, and cultural considerations

Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA) - Animal Assisted Therapy in Counselling (AAT-C) Chapter

This group acts as a primary guiding body for Canadian therapists, promoting understanding and ethical practice in AAT-C. It provides a forum for knowledge sharing, networking, and resources like training information. Their 2024 Guidelines for Practice outline competencies across five areas: formal training (e.g., supervised practice, theory integration), counsellor knowledge (e.g., animal ethology, welfare using the Five Domains Model, risk management), cultural considerations (e.g., addressing diverse attitudes toward animals), professional values (e.g., empathy for humans and animals), and ongoing development (e.g., consultation with experts) (Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association, 2024). These voluntary guidelines align with the CCPA Code of Ethics, emphasizing informed consent, animal opt-out rights, and competence within scopes of practice (Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association, 2024).

Dreamcatcher Nature-Assisted Therapy Association

Based in Alberta, this organization leads in developing and adhering to national standards for Animal-Assisted Human Services (AAHS) in Canada (Dreamcatcher Nature Assisted Therapy, n.d.). Founder Eileen Bona contributed to the Canadian Standards for Development of a Management System for AAHS, focusing on ethical animal involvement in therapy (Dreamcatcher Nature Assisted Therapy, n.d.). They offer certification in Animal-Assisted Human Services (AAHS) and provide training workshops for therapists, emphasizing humane methods, animal welfare, and integration into counselling for issues like trauma and mental health (Dreamcatcher Nature Assisted Therapy, n.d.). It's particularly influential for nature-based AAT and equine-facilitated counselling (Dreamcatcher Nature Assisted Therapy, n.d.).

Additional governing bodies support professionals in Canada who are interested in equine assisted therapies as needed, such as the Professional Association for Equine Facilitated Wellness (Pro-EFW), and Eagala (Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association).

Decolonial Animal Ethics: Insights from Indigenous Literature

As I reflect on the ethics of inviting Kona into the counselling room, Eden Robinson's *Trickster Trilogy*, as analysed by Krásná (2024), offers me direction toward a decolonial animal ethic - one that sees colonization of Indigenous peoples and nonhuman kin as intertwined threads in the same web. In the *Trilogy*, nonhuman characters like vengeful otters and resilient beavers aren't mere symbols; they're agents resisting "animal colonialism" - the Western imposition of hierarchies that exploits animals for profit, erasing their sacred roles in Indigenous cosmologies (Krásná, 2024, pp. 12-14). This mirrors the fur trade's devastation, driving species like otters to near-extinction while disrupting *syilx* and Métis kinship ties, where animals are wisdom holders, not resources (Armstrong, 2009; Macdougall, 2017). Krásná highlights how Robinson decentres

humans by granting these kin voices, challenging anthropocentrism's binary of "wild" vs. "domesticated" and envisioning egalitarian interspecies bonds (Krásná, 2024, p. 12).

For my practice, this axiology - rooted in relational values of harmony and reciprocity - shifts ethics from Western harm reduction "rules" (e.g., consent forms, rest protocols) to love and accountability with Kona as expert co-therapist (Wilson, 2001). In the Trilogy, coywolves - hybrids born of human-driven habitat loss - embody anthropocene precariousness, their "otherness" a colonial construct that justifies violence (Krásná, 2024, pp. 22-23). Similarly, without "qualified" supervision, I learn with Kona through quiet observation, her wag a reminder that ethics mean mutual flourishing, not dominance. What if we spoke with our more-than-human kin, as Robinson does, letting their stories guide healing? It's vulnerable, this path, but hopeful - reimagining AAT-C as "kinship-assisted healing" (KAH), where Kona's intuition challenges institutional "treatment" language and honours tmix^wcentrism's give-and-take (Armstrong, 2009). Krásná's (2024) reading urges us to contest speciesism, fostering decolonization for all beings in our shared circle.

As a new counsellor, the lack of supervision from a "qualified" expert - someone versed in both counselling ethics and AAT- C intricacies, feels like walking a trail without a map, especially with AAT as an adjunct to counselling therapy, adding layers of learning (Trevathan-Minnis et al., 2021). "Qualified" might mean licensed trainers or mentors like Eileen Bona, but in my district, resources are sparse, leaving me to build knowledge through self-study, peer consultations, and ongoing education (at least 10 hours yearly on canine behaviour) (Johnson et al., 2023). Ethically, this means vigilant self-accountability. Journaling sessions to reflect on Kona's cues, seeking informal Elder guidance for cultural safety, and prioritizing her welfare amid my growth curve. It's vulnerable, this in-between space, but rooted in reciprocity - learning

not over her, but with her, as *tmix^w* teaches (Armstrong, 2009). Hope whispers here again as I gain hours, this becomes shared wisdom, inspiring ethical protocols for others in similar gaps while learning about and integrating standards already in place to support the welfare of everyone involved.

Harm reduction is key. Structuring sessions to prevent stress for Kona (limiting time, reading cues like yawning or avoidance) and ensuring safety for all, like the district protocols we built in our school district (Schiller, 2018). It's practical, protective - never allowing distress unless to avert greater harm. But this feels like a checklist sometimes, focused on avoiding wrong rather than nurturing right. In my practice, I long for more. Working from love and care, with accountability to Kona as more-than-human co-therapist, echoing Indigenous axiology where ethics mean reciprocal bonds (Wilson, 2016). What if we blended the rules with heart - honouring her sentience through daily rituals of thanks, ensuring her "yes" in every session, being flexible where rules dictate black and white? It's that hopeful shift from risk management to relational flourishing.

Animal-Assisted Relational Practices (AARP)

As a new counsellor on *syilx* land, my Métis heart leans into Two-Eyed Seeing, blending Western guidelines with Indigenous wisdom to honour Kona not as a tool, but as kin - a wisdom holder in our shared work. The Four Rs—Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, Responsibility - guide this path (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991), ensuring my work celebrates Indigenous stories while nurturing both youth and Kona's well-being. Animal-Assisted Relational Practices form the foundation of what I am creating. Here is what recent voices teach me about ethical practice, weaving evidence with *tmix^w*'s call to listen deeper.

First, Respect means vigilant advocacy for Kona's welfare - her consent, her rest, her spark. Trevathan-Minnis et al. (2021) stress that ethical AAT-C demands competencies beyond counselling. Handler skills to read Kona's "enough" cues (like ears back, lip-licking or a tucked tail) and knowledge of canine behaviour to prevent burnout (p. 11). It's not just about the student's healing; it's ensuring Kona thrives too - checking her for stress, limiting sessions to two hours, and honouring her as sentient partner, not prop. Stewart et al. (2013) echo this, urging a "highly developed handler-animal relationship" grounded in mutual trust, where my bond with Kona models the therapeutic alliance, we offer youth (p. 336). In *syilx* terms, it's *n̄awq̄n̄wix̄*^w - gentle consensus where her needs speak as loud as ours. Chandler (2018) advises maintaining a close watch on the cues Kona shares, such as displacement signals of posture, including moving away or towards, or some other shift in energy. Alerting signals are also key behaviours or expressions (either vocal or non-vocal) which may direct attention (p.430). A dog pacing back and forth, a quick sneeze (alerting me to joy or worry) places Kona in a position of "emotional-distress detector" where she can possibly smell the emotions from a client long before either of us are aware of them.

Relevance calls for cultural humility, especially for Indigenous youth carrying intergenerational wounds. Vardy et al. (2025) found educators see animals like Kona boosting engagement - attendance and confidence up (p.7). Trevathan-Minnis et al. (2021) highlighted a "need for more focus on advocacy, diversity, and appreciation of the role of culture and background" in AAS (p. 3). A student with trauma tied to dogs needs pre-session talks to ensure safety, not harm. This echoes Métis *wahkootowin*, where Kona's role must align with a student's story - maybe weaving *captik̄w̄l* tales of *snk̄'lip* to invite trust. Consent prior to connection is essential (Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association, 2024, p.11). Beasley (2013)

notes AAT's power to lower stress in special education settings, but without cultural checks, we risk missing the mark (p.17). What if we ask, "Does this honour their stories?" before inviting Kona in? Remaining present in the moment to determine relevance and direction for both client and Kona.

Reciprocity is the heart of it - co-creating spaces where youth, Kona, and I learn together. Stewart et al. (2013) frame AAT-C as enhancing the counsellor-client bond, with dogs as "facilitating the rapport-building process" (p. 331). Stewart et al., (2013) highlights the positive impact on therapeutic climate, enhancing and building the therapeutic relationship between counsellor and client. "They are a social lubricant, it's a conversation starter, it's an icebreaker. It just changes the feel and tone of the office, and I think it changes me as a therapist as well" (p.340). Kona's lap-sit isn't just comfort; it's a shared moment, highlighted by the counsellor noting the SHARM (Chandler, 2024), evolving into trust. Trevathan-Minnis et al. (2021) push for transdisciplinary skills - knowing when to pause for Kona's rest or a student's reflection, ensuring two-way consent (p. 4). In Métis teachings, it's beading acceptance into their IWM, each stitch a mutual gift. Use "yes/no" cues to check if a student is ready for Kona, mirroring syilx consensus, n̄sawq̄nwix̄w̄. Reciprocity also speaks to the mutual benefit from therapist to therapy animal to client.

Finally, Responsibility binds us to the whole - students, community, land. Vardy et al. (2025) warn of practical hurdles: Allergies, phobias, or untrained dogs can disrupt (p. 9). Practitioners need protocols - vet checks, consent forms, district process, training and trauma screenings - to protect all. Stewart et al. (2013) add that AAT's impact hinges on professional training to integrate Kona's cues into therapy goals, not just lean on presence (p. 338). Based on the CCPA Guidelines (2024), formal evaluative coursework is essential (p.9). For syilx youth,

this means tying sessions to tmi^w - maybe a circle where kids share dog stories, or capti^w to reclaim agency, always checking, “Are we meeting the student where they are at?” “Are we working within our boundaries of competence?” This ethical weave - Respect for Kona’s sentience, Relevance to cultural stories, Reciprocity in our circle, Responsibility to the whole - feels like Auntie’s lesson. Loving Kona is loving us, extended.

The formally known Animal Assisted Intervention International (AAII) is now Animal Assisted Services International (AASI). They have developed a Standards of Practice outline, though the document does not reflect the newly adopted terminology (Winkle et al., 2022). AAS is defined by them as a goal-directed weave of specially trained animals into therapeutic plans, fostering physical, cognitive, psychosocial, behavioural, and emotional growth in humans - always evaluated, documented, and led by licensed professionals with intermediate to advanced training (Winkle et al., 2022). At its heart, it's reciprocity in action. Involving the participant, handler (me, reading Kona's cues like snk'lip's tricks), and dog as equals, with focus on welfare - no force, coercion, or exploitation. Preparation necessitates pre-visits, emergency plans, and tailored goals (p. 45); qualifications demand ongoing education in dog behaviour, handling, and ethics, ideally 8 hours yearly (p. 45); mentoring guides newcomers, documentation safeguards confidentiality, activities stay goal-specific and measurable, and termination, including both the end of sessions with a client, retirement of the therapy dog or the sudden death of the animal, honours shifts in health or harmony (p. 45–46). For me, this isn't a checklist - it's essential consensus - nṡawqnwix^w in motion, to protect Kona's spark while inviting youth into connection one hopeful, ethical step at a time (Winkle et al., 2022).

When I take a moment to step outside, taking responsibility to move and breathe for the sake of Kona, but also for myself, I am reminded of the concept of self-care and what is

necessary for me and for Kona to be well in this field. Kona was that force when she came into my life just over ten years ago that helped me regroup and focus on what was right in front of me. She has done this throughout the capstone process as well, and daily when I'm in the counselling space with others. Richard Wagamese (2016), Ojibway writer and inspiration wrote:

Keep what's true in front of you, Old Man said. You won't get lost that way. I was asking about making my way through the bush. He was talking about making my way through life. Turns out, all these years later, it was the same conversation. (Wagamese, 2016, p. 72)

I take a deep breath, grounding myself in the practice of being present with Kona, taking in the light, the trees, the wind, the colours around me, her joy in chasing a pinecone and take one more step forward into the unknown knowing I am held by wahkootowin and tmix^w all around me.

Knowing that I'm on the right path; keeping what's true right in front of me.

Play as a Relational Portal: Puppetry, captik^{wl} and Animal-Assisted Play Therapy in the Circle

What if play is not a child's diversion, but the oldest medicine we have - the way my uncles always taught through laughter, teasing, mistake-making, and wonder? In syilx and Métis ways, children learn by doing, by becoming the story, by touching the fur, hearing the voice, feeling the lesson land in their bodies rather than their heads. Play is how we slip past the walls that trauma builds. It is how we let snk'lip tumble into the circle without fear, let children speak through his mouth the words they cannot yet say with their own. Play is how people connect and learn.

Play therapy, particularly child-centered and non-directive approaches, has long been recognized as uniquely powerful for young children because it meets them in their native language: symbol, metaphor, imagination, and relationship (Axline, 1969; Landreth, 2012). Through play, children externalize internal chaos, rehearse new endings to old stories, and rebuild secure attachment in a space where they are the authors of meaning. When trauma has taught them that the world is unpredictable or unsafe, play offers predictable safety and unconditional positive regard - the very conditions Kona creates simply by breathing beside them.

Yet Western play therapy rooms, for all their sand trays and miniature worlds, can still feel clinically distant from Indigenous ways of healing. Risë VanFleet and Tracie Faa-Thompson's *Animal Assisted Play Therapy (AAPT)* (2017) offers a bridge I cherish. It is playful, relationship-centered, non-directive, and places the animal's welfare and agency at the very heart of the work. In AAPT the dog is never a prop; she is a full co-facilitator whose choices, moods, and consent cues shape the session. This resonates deeply with *tmix^wcentrism* and *wahkootowin* - the animal is kin, not tool. When I read VanFleet's description of "reciprocity of play" between children, therapists, and animals, I felt Kona's tail thump against my leg in agreement.

Puppets extend that reciprocity into the story world. They are not toys; they are vessels. In the circle, the *snk'lip* puppet and the *ǰ^waŷylx^w* puppet are treated as respected visitors who carry ancestral teachings. Children are taught this explicitly - we do not throw them, yank them, or silence them. We greet them. We listen when they speak. We thank them when the story is finished. We might smudge them or offer tobacco if an Elder guides us to do so. They are

handled with the same reverence we offer Kona, because both are more-than-human teachers, one in fur, one in felt, but both alive with *captikʷł*.

This deliberate relationality with objects itself is a decolonizing act. Colonial education trained us to see puppets as mere playthings, disposable. Indigenous teaching trains us differently. Everything that carries story carries spirit. When a child gently places the *snkʷlip* puppet back in its special box after circle, they are practicing the same respect they show when they wait for Kona to choose whether to approach. Both actions teach the same truth - consent, kinship, and humility belong to all beings.

The lesson “Who Is Your Name”? *swit askwistʷ?*” (see Appendix) embodies this weaving. Puppets enact the *captikʷł* of How Names Were Given, allowing children to meet Coyote’s arrogance and Fox’s loyalty at a safe distance, then watch Kona model calm presence in the center of the circle. One child might whisper to the *snkʷlip* puppet, “I got in trouble too, but I fixed it,” and feel the medicine of not being alone in mistake-making. Another might simply watch Kona’s deep gaze and realize, for the first time, that being seen without judgment is possible. The puppets hold the story; Kona holds the living reminder that the story is still breathing all around us. None of this is undertaken lightly.

Every story shared with puppets has been offered or approved by local *syilx* Knowledge Keepers. Pronunciations are practiced until they feel like prayer. The circle rules are co-created, so children themselves articulate the respect required. When we invite *captikʷł* into the room, we do so knowing these stories were never meant for entertainment; they were meant for transformation. We become accountable to that purpose. The puppets are stored with care,

spoken to with gratitude, and never left lying on the floor - because even in stillness they are listening.

In this blended space, Two-Eyed Seeing makes flesh and fur, felt, and small nervous-system hearts happy - play becomes a relational portal rather than an intervention. Children learn through their bodies that they belong to a web far older and wiser than the trauma they carry. They learn that snk'lip survives his mistakes because he is loved anyway, that ǎʷaʃylxʷ revives him because no one walks alone, that Kona chooses to stay because she feels safe enough to rest among us. And in that gentle, playful circle, they begin to believe the same might be true for them.

This is how teachings land - not as lessons to memorize, but as living relations to carry in the heart. Play, when done with reverence, reciprocity, and relentless respect for all beings in the circle (fabric, fur, and flesh), becomes one of the most powerful ways I know to help children reclaim their place in the great story of tmixʷ.

Chapter 3: Summary, Recommendations and Conclusions

Summary

What if the foundations laid in Chapters 1 and 2 are not just words on a page, but living breath - the gentle rise and fall of Kona's chest beside a student who is finally brave enough to speak their truth? In Chapter 1, I began where I am, on the unceded land of the syilx people in the Okanagan, carrying my Métis ancestry from Red River, with Mi'kmaw, Ukrainian, and French settler roots woven in. I introduced Kona - my ten-year-old cairn terrier, my heart walking on four paws and the inquiry question that pulses through this entire capstone. How can a school-based counsellor ethically engage in relational practices with more-than-human kin (therapy dogs) through an Indigenous lens, integrating local syilx and Métis teachings to thoughtfully incorporate a dog as a wisdom holder in school counselling? Through Two-Eyed Seeing, I named the gaps: the "underground culture" of unregulated dog use in schools, the colonial blindness that reduces animals to tools, the anthropocentrism that silences their agency, and the urgent need for practices rooted in wahkootowin (all my relations) and tmix^w (the interconnected web of all life forms). I positioned Kona not as an adjunct, not as "therapy dog," but as co-therapist, wisdom holder, and kin - an extension of love itself, as my Auntie taught me.

Chapter 2 wove the literature into a stronger basket. I traced the shifting terminology (from AAI to the newer AAS/AATx framework) while gently resisting its cold, human-centered language, proposing instead Animal-Assisted Relational Practices (AARP) and Kinship-Assisted Healing (KAH) as names that honour reciprocity over treatment. We walked the ancient trail of the human-animal bond - from 35,000-year-old wolf partnerships to syilx captik^{wł} that teach us dogs were once monsters transformed by Coyote into faithful companions who must never be ill-

treated. I lingered with snk'lip, the trickster-teacher whose flaws and resurrections mirror the messy, beautiful healing journeys of people.

Next attachment theory met Indigenous wholistic wellness with Kona as secure-base provider, co-regulator, and living reminder that mino-bimaadiziwin - the good life, is impossible without healthy bonds to more-than-human kin. Chandler's Human-Animal Relational Theory (HART) became a cherished guide: SHARM moments that crack hearts open, HARP processing that weaves meaning together, and HARTI - the lasting therapeutic ripple when we truly listen across species. Ethically, the chapter braided Western standards (CCPA 2024 Guidelines, National Standard for AAHS, Serpell et al.'s five principles, Dreamcatcher's work, AASI Standards) with decolonial animal ethics and the Four Rs (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991):

- Respect - for Kona's sentience, consent cues, and right to rest
- Relevance - culturally safe practice that centers syilx and Métis ways of knowing
- Reciprocity - mutual healing, mutual consent, mutual flourishing
- Responsibility - to the youth, to Kona, to the land, to the ancestors and those yet to come

Together, these chapters have built a nest of story, theory, and ethics - strong enough to hold the weight of real practice, soft enough for vulnerable hearts and paws.

Now, in Chapter 3, I step fully into the circle. Here I offer what I have learned so far - protocols I live by, session structures that breathe, lesson plans that weave captik^{wł} and wahkootowin into everyday school counselling, reflective of the work Kona and I do everyday offering practical tools for other counsellors who feel the same call. This is tmix^wcentrism in motion - youth, dog, counsellor, ancestors, land, and stories learning together in community. May it serve the others, honour Kona, and ripple outward - one day at a time.

Recommendations

What began as a personal inquiry - how to ethically bring Kona into the counselling room through syilx and Métis eyes - has grown into something much larger. This work is not mine alone; it is an offering to every counsellor, teacher, and school community who feels the exhaustion of colonial, human-centered, individualized mental health supports that so often fail our young people.

The implications reach far beyond my office door. When we decenter humans, honour animals as wisdom holders, and root our practices in local Indigenous teachings of reciprocity and interrelatedness, we begin to heal the deepest wound of colonialism: the illusion of separation. Students learn, in their bodies, that they are never alone - that healing flows through fur, story, land, ancestor, and peer alike. School cultures shift from punitive and pathologizing to relational and restorative. Trauma responses soften. Attendance rises. Empathy deepens. Youth agency awakens because they experience, viscerally, what it feels like to belong to a living web rather than to survive in a system. Counsellors and teachers who adopt even fragments of this approach - whether through play circles, animal presence, captik^w shared with permission, or simply asking “Who is your name?”, contribute to a quiet revolution in education - one where wellbeing is no longer an add-on program but the ground from which everything else grows. Yet the implications are not small, and neither are the demands. This path asks for slow, deliberate, lifelong commitment. It requires:

- Time and Patience - Relationships with Elders, Knowledge Keepers, animal educators, and the animals themselves cannot be rushed. Years of listening, showing up, training, practice, making mistakes, and repairing are the price of admission.

- Institutional Courage - A school and district willing to write policies, manage allergies and fears, fund professional development, and defend the work when parents or colleagues push back.
- Financial Reality - Most of us pay out of pocket for dog training, certifications, vet care, liability insurance, continued education, and cultural offerings (tobacco, gifts, etc.). This work is currently a labour of love, not a funded mandate.
- Personal Sustainability - Supervision specific to AAT-C is rare in Canada; formal coursework even rarer. Many of us (me included) step into the role while still completing certification, trusting the visible magic we witness in students while simultaneously holding the ethical tension of practicing at the edge of our current scope. I mitigate this through ongoing consultation with others - animal-assisted colleagues, and my clinical supervisor, and by maintaining meticulous records of Kona's consent cues and welfare.
- The Pain of Letting Go - Perhaps the hardest thing is planning for retirement. Kona is ten. I already watch for subtle signs - slower recovery after busy days, less enthusiasm for certain environments, limping and pain, changes in hearing or vision. Objectivity is brutal when love is involved. I have promised her (and myself) that I will seek external behavioural assessment annually working closely with my veterinarian and certifying body Companion Paws Canada, and that the day she shows consistent stress or reluctance, she retires immediately to the couch, the lake, and endless treats - no exceptions. The students will grieve; I will grieve; but her wellbeing is non-negotiable.

This work is not only for Indigenous practitioners. Any counsellor or teacher can walk this path with cultural humility, respect, and accountability. The key is to lean hard into local protocols - never pan-Indigenize. What I offer here is deeply syilx- and Métis-specific; your

place will have its own stories, its own *tmix^w* relatives, its own ways of asking consent from the land and the animals. Begin by asking: Whose land is this school on? Who are the Knowledge Keepers here? How do they wish *captik^{wł}* or land-based teachings to be shared? Connect with people in your local community, then listen longer than you speak. Practical recommendations for others wishing to decolonize their counselling or teaching practices, with or without animals:

- Join or form learning circles with local Indigenous educators, Aunties/Uncles programs within your school district, or provincial Indigenous teacher networks (as I have with Métis teachers across British Columbia through the MNBC).
- Seek out Elders or Knowledge Keepers for story approval and protocol guidance before ever bringing *captik^{wł}* into the classroom. Collaboration at the school district level has been helpful.
- Pursue specific AAT/AAI training (Dreamcatcher, Pet Partners, or equivalent) and then layer cultural safety training on top.
- Build animal-assisted peer consultation groups - mine meets regularly, often for a dog walk, and has saved my practice (and Kona's wellbeing) countless times through peer support and objective feedback on challenging situations.
- Document everything: consent cues, session impacts, cultural consultations, wellness checks - not just for liability, but for humility and learning.
- Advocate at the district level for funded positions, policies, and professional development days dedicated to relational, land-based, and animal-assisted practices.
- I remain a perpetual beginner. Cultural humility is not a certificate; it is a daily practice.

This capstone is not the end; it is a doorway. Kona and I will keep walking through it, one gentle paw-step, one shared story, one slow circle at a time - trusting that every person who reads these words and feels something stirred in their chest is already part of the circle. May our collective work help mend the sacred circle, for the young ones, for the four-legged, for the land, and for the seven generations yet to come.

Kona is sleeping now, curled on my grandmother's knit blanket on the chair beside my desk, one paw twitching in whatever dream-world dog's visit. I watch the slow rise of her chest and know, with the certainty that lives in my bones, that this capstone is not an ending. It is a continuation of something that started for me, long ago, with the stories of my ancestors that were shared with me by my mom. It lives now like a small stone dropped into the Okanagan waters whose circles will keep travelling long after I am gone.

Conclusions

Two-Eyed Seeing has been the heartbeat of this entire work. It is not a decorative lens I picked up for the literature review; it is the way I walk in the world. One eye sees the rigorous, evidence-based beauty of Western counselling and animal-assisted practices - the attachment research, the neurophysiological co-regulation, the ethical standards that protect both child and canine. The other eye sees the ancient, living wisdom of *syilx tmix^w* and Métis *wahkootowin* - the truth that nothing exists alone, that a dog's presence can carry the same medicine as a *captik^{wł}*, that healing is always reciprocal or it is not healing at all.

When these two eyes learn to work together, something sacred happens. The best of both worlds do not compete - they complete each other. The Western eye gives us structure, accountability, and replicable protocols. The Indigenous eye gives us soul, relational

accountability, and the humility to remember we are only one small part of a vast, intelligent web. Together, they allow us to create counselling spaces where a child who has never felt safe in a human office can lean against warm fur and finally exhale. Where snk'lip's mistakes become laughable and loveable instead of shameful. Where "Who is your name?" replaces "What's wrong with you?" as the first question we ask.

Colonial structures will not crumble tomorrow. They live in our funding models, our ethical codes, our very language that still calls Kona a "therapy tool," our unconscious anthropocentrism that measures success only by human outcomes. They live in the exhaustion of Indigenous colleagues who are asked to educate while grieving, in the silence around missing and murdered Indigenous women, in the fact that most school districts still have no policy for therapy animals, let alone for doing this work in a good way. But every time a counsellor chooses to sit on the floor instead of behind a desk, every time we ask permission of the land before we begin, every time we let a dog decide whether today is a working day, every time we bring forward a captik^{wl} only after it has been gifted by a Knowledge Keeper - we are refusing the colonial story that says some beings matter more than others, that efficiency matters more than relationship, that healing can ever be extracted without reciprocity. This is how we challenge the structures: slowly, persistently, joyfully, one relational act at a time. We do it by remaining beginners forever. By staying in the discomfort of not knowing. By paying for the training ourselves, by writing the policies, by grieving when our animal kin age and still choosing to love them enough to let them go. We do it by building circles instead of hierarchies, by measuring success not in how many sessions we deliver but in how many hearts remember they belong. I began this capstone with Chief Dan Wilson's words about 7,500 years of syilx presence on this land. I end it with a promise for the next 7,500 years.

May we become ancestors who make the young ones proud - ancestors who remembered that the good life is never lived alone, who listened when the dogs spoke, who let Coyote teach us through laughter and mistake, who kept both eyes open until the children could finally see themselves clearly in the reflection of the water. Kona sighs in her sleep, stretches, and places one paw on my foot. All my relations. All our relations. Thank you, School District 22, for giving me the chance to have this experience. It is done. And it is only just the beginning.

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Appendix A: Ethical Considerations Before Implementing Lesson Plans

Before integrating these lesson plans into school counselling or classroom settings, it is essential to prioritize ethical considerations that honour the relational principles of wahkootowin and tmix^wcentrism. These guidelines draw from the capstone's theoretical lens, emphasizing Two-Eyed Seeing to blend Western ethical standards (e.g., CCPA Guidelines, AASI Standards) with Indigenous values of respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991) with AAT-C. They ensure Kona is positioned as a wisdom holder, not a tool, while protecting cultural integrity, participant safety, and animal welfare. Failure to adhere could risk cultural appropriation, animal stress, or unintended harm, undermining the inquiry's goal of kinship-assisted healing. Animal Welfare and Consent (Respect for More-Than-Human Kin):

1. Core Ethical Principles for Animal Welfare (Western and Decolonial Perspectives)
 - Freedom from Abuse, Discomfort, and Distress: All therapy animals must be always protected from physical and mental harm. This includes providing proper health care, preventive procedures, and access to quiet rest spaces away from work activities (Serpell et al., 2006; CCPA, 2024; HRSO, 2023). Avoid any situation of stress or abuse unless it's temporarily necessary to prevent serious injury to a human client.
 - Structured Interactions to Preserve Capacity: Sessions must be designed to maintain the animal's ability to function as a therapeutic agent, such as limiting session length (e.g., no more than two hours) and monitoring for burnout (Serpell et al., 2006; Trevathan-Minnis et al., 2021).

- Decolonial Shift to Relational Ethics: Move beyond anthropocentric "harm reduction" rules to an Indigenous axiology of love and accountability, viewing animals as kin and wisdom holders rather than tools. This challenges colonial hierarchies and emphasizes mutual flourishing, where the animal's wellbeing is intertwined with humans (Krásná, 2024; Wilson, 2001; Armstrong, 2009).
2. Consent and Reciprocal Participation
- Animal Consent and Opt-Out Rights: Recognize the animal's sentience by reading behavioral cues (e.g., yawning, lip-licking, tucked tail, pacing, sneezing, or posture shifts) as signals of consent or withdrawal. Allow the animal to opt out without coercion, ensuring no force or exploitation (CCPA, 2024; Chandler, 2018; Stewart et al., 2013; Winkle et al., 2022).
 - Mutual Reciprocity in Sessions: Treat the animal as an active co-therapist in a bidirectional relationship, where their needs (e.g., rest, play) are as central as the client's. Use Indigenous frameworks like wahkootowin (all relations) and tmix^w (reciprocity with lifeforms) to ensure give-and-take, such as daily rituals of thanks and checking the animal's "yes" before sessions (Macdougall, 2017; Armstrong, 2009; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991).
 - Human Consent Integration: Obtain informed consent from clients (e.g., checking for allergies, fears, or cultural attitudes toward animals) while ensuring the animal's consent aligns, creating a culturally safe space (CCPA, 2024; Trevathan-Minnis et al., 2021).
3. Preparation, Training, and Risk Management
- Handler Competencies and Ongoing Education: Practitioners must have species-specific knowledge (e.g., canine ethology), formal training (e.g., supervised experience, at least 8-

10 hours of annual education on behavior and welfare), and a strong handler-animal bond. Seek mentoring or peer consultation, especially in unregulated contexts like Canada (CCPA, 2024; Winkle et al., 2022; Trevathan-Minnis et al., 2021; Johnson et al., 2023).

- **Pre-Session Protocols:** Conduct pre-visits, emergency plans, vet checks, temperament screenings, and trauma assessments for the animal. Use tools like the Five Domains Model for welfare evaluation (Mellor et al., 2020) and district-specific processes (e.g., School District 22 protocols) to minimize risks like infections or stress (HRSO, 2023; Schiller, 2018; Vardy et al., 2025).
- **Cultural Relevance and Humility:** Adapt practices to diverse backgrounds, incorporating Indigenous teachings (e.g., *captik^{wł}* stories, *nŕawqnxix^w* for consensus) to ensure relevance and avoid assumptions. This honors the Four Rs: Respect (advocacy for the animal), Relevance (aligning with client stories), Reciprocity (co-creating trust), and Responsibility (protecting the whole community) (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Snowshoe et al., 2016).

4. Broader Considerations for Ethical Integration

- **Alignment with National and Organizational Standards:** Follow voluntary Canadian frameworks like the NSC for AAHS (emphasizing rest, stress prevention, and ethical use) and CCPA guidelines (focusing on empathy, boundaries, and development). Organizations like Dreamcatcher and AASI reinforce no-force policies and goal-specific activities (Moss, 2024; CCPA, 2024; Dreamcatcher, n.d.; Winkle et al., 2022).
- **Self-Reflection and Accountability:** Journal sessions reflect cues and prioritize self-care for both handlers and animals to sustain the practice. View ethics as relational

flourishing, not just checklists, blending Western standards with Indigenous reciprocity for wholistic wellbeing (Linklater, 2014; Wilson, 2016).

- Termination and Transition Planning: Prepare for endings, such as the animal's retirement or unexpected loss, with protocols that honour shifts in health and harmony (Winkle et al., 2022).

These points highlight a balanced approach - practical safeguards from Western literature combined with relational depth from Indigenous perspectives. They ensure AAT-C lessons are conducted ethically, moving towards Animal Assisted Relational Practices with the animal's welfare as a non-negotiable foundation. If implemented, they mitigate risks while fostering healing reciprocity. By centering these considerations, the lesson plans become tools for ethical, transformative practice, fostering agency, connection, and healing in the spirit of wahkootowin. Always prioritize vulnerability and openness. As Auntie taught, loving Kona extends love to all.

Appendix B: Co-Learning in Community: Lesson Plans for Relational Healing

Circle Talk – Day One

Lesson 1: Introduction to Circle Talks and Teachings - Walking Together in Equality

Context Fit/Grade level: Group sessions - kindergarten to Grade 3 (Ages 5–9);

Adapt for 1:1 session by focusing on personal reflections with Kona

Duration 30–45 minutes

Learning Objectives

- Students will practice emotional grounding and non-judgmental observation through Kona's presence, building trust, and reducing anxiety in group settings.
- Students will understand the purpose and protocols of a circle talk (sharing circle), including that everyone is equal; no one is more important than another, and speaking only occurs when holding the talking stone/stick.
- Students will explore themes from Elder Albert Marshall's book *Walking Together*, such as Two-Eyed Seeing (Etuaptmumk), gratitude for nature, and reciprocal relationships with the land, water, and living beings.
- Students will learn syilx teachings about captikwł (traditional stories that teach natural laws and how to live in harmony with the land) and tmix^w (all lifeforms, including the Four Food Chiefs who represent sacrifice, leadership, and interconnectedness).

- Students will connect Métis teachings on sharing circles as safe spaces for listening, understanding perspectives, and solving problems respectfully, drawing from traditions shared by Métis Elder Theresa "Corky" Larsen-Jonasson.
- Students will experience elements of Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT) by quietly observing an animal (e.g., Kona) as a more-than-human being in the circle, fostering respect and awareness of non-verbal communication from all tmix^w.

Materials

- Book: *Walking Together* by Elder Dr. Albert D. Marshall and Louise Zimanyi (illustrated by Emily Kewageshig).
- Book: *The Sharing Circle* by Theresa "Corky" Larsen-Jonasson (optional, for Métis-specific storytelling; if unavailable, use a summary of its key teachings).
- Talking stone or stick (a smooth stone, feather, or decorated stick representing respect and turn-taking; explain its cultural significance without appropriating - e.g., many Indigenous groups use talking pieces to ensure equitable sharing).
- Chart paper or whiteboard for co-creating circle rules.
- Optional: Printed images or props representing the syilx Four Food Chiefs (Black Bear/skəmxist for strength and protection; Spring Salmon/ntytyix for cycles and distribution; Bitterroot/spiłəm for roots and perseverance; Saskatoon Berry/sʔiyá for sweetness and community gathering).
- Animal for AAT: Kona (e.g., a therapy dog), supervised by a trained handler to ensure safety and welfare.

Preparation

- Acknowledge the land: Begin by recognizing the traditional territories your class is on (e.g., "We are on the unceded territory of the syilx Okanagan People" or adapt to your location). Emphasize that teachings may vary across Indigenous nations, and we're learning with respect.
- Arrange seating in a circle on the floor to symbolize equality, with space in the center for Kona.
- Safety Review: Ensure the space is inclusive; students can pass if they don't wish to speak. For AAT, remind students to sit quietly without calling Kona's name. For AAT, remind students to sit quietly without calling Kona's name, taunting, or reaching out - observe respectfully as she moves or rests in the center, modeling calm presence.
- Introduce Kona safely respecting her presence and needs as they arise
- Align with ethical considerations in Appendix A, including animal consent cues and cultural humility.
- Consult local syilx or Métis Knowledge Keeper pre-lesson for story adaptations and invite them to co-facilitate if possible.

Introduction (10-15 minutes)

- Hook: Gather students in a circle. Introduce Kona in the center as a more-than-human community member (part of tmix^w in syilx teachings). Explain: "Today, Kona joins our circle to help us learn through Animal-Assisted Therapy. We watch and listen quietly to what she might be telling us with her body language - like how she shows calm or curiosity. No calling her name; just observe with respect, as we do for all beings."

- Quick Pre-Reflection: Before we start, let's check in with ourselves. On a scale of 1-3 (show emojis: 😞=1, 😐=2, 😊=3), how do you feel about sharing in a group and connecting with others right now? We'll check again at the end to see if anything changes!
- Teach Circle Protocols: Explain that circle talks (or sharing circles) are traditional practices in many Indigenous cultures, including Métis and syilx, where everyone sits equally - no one is above another, including animals like Kona. In Métis traditions, circles create safe spaces to share stories, solve small problems, and build understanding, as taught by Elders like Theresa Larsen-Jonasson in her book *The Sharing Circle* (where animals use a circle to resolve conflicts peacefully). In syilx culture, circles align with teachings of harmony and respect for all *tmix^w*, reminding us we're all connected like in *captikwł* stories - Kona helps us practice this by being present.
- Co-Create Rules: As a group, brainstorm and chart rules using the talking stone (pass it around for input). Examples: "We listen with our ears, eyes, and hearts." "Speak only when holding the talking stone." "Everyone is equal - no interrupting." "We can pass if we choose." Add AAT-specific: "Observe Kona quietly; what is she teaching us about listening and being grounded?" Tie this to the idea that circles promote peace and equality, like in Indigenous problem-solving.
- Connect to Themes: Introduce *Walking Together* as a Mi'kmaq-inspired story about seeing the world through "two eyes" (Indigenous and Western knowledge) to care for nature. Link to syilx teachings: Just as the book honors gifts from Mother Earth, syilx *captikwł* stories teach us to respect *tmix^w* through tales like the Four Food Chiefs, who gave themselves so people could thrive - Kona represents living *tmix^w* in our circle.

Main Activity: Reading and Integrating Teachings (20-30 minutes)

- **Read Aloud Walking Together:** Read the book interactively, with Kona in the center. Pause at key spreads (e.g., observing spring signs like frogs croaking or maple sap) to ask: "What gifts is nature giving? How can we say thank you? Look at Kona - what might she be noticing or teaching us right now?" Use Two-Eyed Seeing: "How might syilx people see this through captikwł - stories that teach living in balance with tmix^w, including animals like Kona?"
- **Integrate syilx Teachings:** After reading, share a short captikwł summary (adapt for age - keep simple and engaging). Example: Tell the story of the Four Food Chiefs (Black Bear, Salmon, Bitterroot, Saskatoon Berry) who met in a council (like a circle) to decide how to feed the people-to-be. They sacrificed parts of themselves, teaching generosity and interconnection - all tmix^w are relatives deserving respect. Ask: "How does this connect to Walking Together's message of caring for nature? What is Kona showing us about being part of tmix^w?"
- **Optional: Introduce a syilx Coyote (snk'lip) Story:** Share this short captikwł about snk'lip bringing salmon to the Okanagan: Long ago, snk'lip the coyote wanted to help the syilx people by bringing salmon to their rivers. He tricked some sisters who had dammed the river, blocking the salmon. By becoming part of their family, he made a fair alliance and broke the dam, letting the salmon swim free. He asked communities if they wanted salmon, and snpinktn (Penticton); he requested a home and wife in return, which they gave. This story teaches us to live in harmony with nature, respect tmix^w like salmon, keep promises, and treat everyone equally without greed - showing all beings are connected in the circle of life, just like in our sharing circle

with Kona. Ask: "How does snk'lip's adventure connect to respecting nature and equality?"

- Integrate Métis Teachings: Draw from Métis traditions by referencing The Sharing Circle (or summarize if no book: Animals in a forest use a circle to share feelings and solve issues, showing equality and listening). Explain that Métis Elders like Larsen-Jonasson use circles for healing, fun, and decision-making, emphasizing "speaking from the heart" without judgment - observe how Kona "listens" quietly.

Closure (5 minutes)

- Revisit rules and key teachings - ask what students noticed about Kona (e.g., "What did she teach us?").
- On the same scale of 1-3, (show emojis: 😞=1, 😐=2, 😊=3) how do you feel now? What changed for you from the beginning to the end - like feeling more connected, calmer, or learning something new from the circle, teachings, or Kona? Share one word or drawing if you'd like." Compare pre- and post-responses to note differences in comfort, engagement, or sense of belonging.
- End with a group thank-you: "We thank the Elders, teachings, and Kona for guiding us today."

Assessment

- Formative: Observe engagement during reading, discussions, and quiet observation of Kona (e.g., connections to teachings).
- Journal prompt: "What did Kona teach you about listening/being connected?"

- Self-assessment scale

Differentiation

- Consider breaking this lesson into two separate lessons to have the time to read both stories and to practice the circle experience
- For K-1: Focus on pictures and simple questions; use visuals for tmix^w.
- For Grades 2-3: Encourage deeper connections between the book, teachings, and Kona's role.
- Inclusivity: Allow non-verbal responses (e.g., gestures); provide sentence starters.

Notes on Cultural Respect

- Ensure AAT follows ethical guidelines, prioritizing animal welfare.
- This lesson adapts elements from existing resources on Walking Together, sharing circles, syilx captikwł, and AAT practices to create a cohesive experience centered on equality and nature.
- Avoid pan-Indigenizing by noting differences in Indigenous cultures. Invite local Elders, if possible, for authentic sharing. Focus on learning from teachings, not appropriating.

Circle Talk Lesson Plan: Introducing syilx teachings with snk'lip and ǰ^waƒylx^w. swit askwist? Who is your name?

Grade Level: Kindergarten to Grade 3 (Ages 5–9)

Duration: 30–45 minutes

Learning Objectives

- Students will understand the syilx teaching of introductions using the question "Who is your name?" swit askwist?" to honor identity, community, and respect for all beings.
- Students will learn about syilx beliefs regarding snk'lip (Coyote) as a trickster, teacher, and transformer who prepares the world for humans, often through mistakes and lessons, and ǰ^waʃylx^w (Fox) as Coyote's brother and helper who revives and supports him.
- Students will explore the captikwł (traditional story) "How Names Were Given" (also known as "How Coyote Got His Name and Powers"), focusing on Coyote's role and the importance of names, purpose, and humility.
- Students will practice active listening and respectful sharing in a circle talk by introducing themselves using the syilx-inspired question and response.
- Students will foster empathy and community by recognizing that everyone (human and more-than-human) has a name and purpose, avoiding pan-Indigenizing by noting these are specific syilx teachings.
- Students will experience elements of Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT) by quietly observing an animal (e.g., Kona) as a more-than-human being (tmix^w) in the circle, fostering respect and awareness of non-verbal communication, and connecting to how animals like Coyote and Fox have names and purposes in syilx teachings.

Materials

- Puppets: snk'lip (Coyote) and ǰ^waʃylx^w (Fox) – use to dramatize introductions and parts of the story.
- Talking stone or stick (a smooth stone or decorated stick for turn-taking; explain its significance in promoting equality).

- Chart paper or whiteboard for co-creating circle rules and noting key teachings.
- Printed or digital copy of the captikwł "How Names Were Given" (adapted for age; full version below for reference).
- Art supplies: crayons, markers, paper for optional reflection drawings (e.g., "Draw yourself with your name and purpose").
- Optional: Images or props of syilx tmix^w (lifeforms) like salmon or bear to connect to broader teachings.
- Animal for AAT: Kona (e.g., a therapy dog), supervised by a trained handler to ensure safety and welfare.

Preparation

- Acknowledge the land: Recognize the traditional territories (e.g., "We are on the unceded territory of the syilx Okanagan People"). Emphasize learning with respect and that teachings vary across Indigenous nations.
- Arrange seating in a circle on the floor to symbolize equality – no one is more important than another - with space in the center for Kona.
- Review safety: Inclusive space; students can pass if they don't wish to speak. For AAT, remind students to sit quietly without calling Kona's name, taunting, or reaching out - observe respectfully as she moves or rests in the center, modeling calm presence as a tmix^w with her own "name" and purpose.
- Introduce Kona safely.
- Familiarize yourself with pronunciations: snk'lip (sin-kleep), ǰ^waʃylx^w (khwa-uh-yilkhw), swit askwist? (sweet ask-weest? – meaning "Who is your name?").

- Adapt the story for K-3: Keep engaging, pause for questions, use puppets to act out Coyote and Fox.

Introduction (10 minutes)

- Hook: Gather in the circle with Kona in the center. Introduce the puppets and Kona: "Today, we meet two special teachers from syilx stories - snk'lip the Coyote and his brother ǰʷaʃylxʷ the Fox - and our friend Kona, a more-than-human being joining as part of Animal-Assisted Therapy. We watch and listen quietly to what Kona might be telling us with her body language, like calm or curiosity - no calling her name; just observe with respect, as she has her own 'name' and purpose, like the animals in captikwł." Use puppets to "introduce" themselves: snk'lip puppet says, "Who is your name? swit askwist? I am snk'lip, the trickster who teaches lessons. Fox puppet responds, "I am ǰʷaʃylxʷ, helper to my brother." Ask: "What might Kona's 'purpose' be in our circle today?"
- Teach Circle Protocols: Review that in syilx traditions, circles promote harmony and respect for all tmixʷ (lifeforms). Everyone is equal, like in captikwł stories where animals gather as equals - including Kona. Co-create rules using the talking stone: "Listen with hearts," "Speak only when holding the stone," "Everyone equal," "Pass if you choose." Add AAT-specific: "Observe Kona quietly; what is she teaching us about being connected?"
- Connect to Teachings: Share syilx beliefs: snk'lip is a mischievous trickster sent by the Creator to fix the world for humans, teaching through adventures (good and bad - like bravery but also humility).ǰʷaʃylxʷ is his loyal brother, reviving him when he errs,

showing support and balance. Names carry power and purpose in these stories. Link to Kona: Just as animals in syilx teachings have roles, observing Kona helps us see animals as teachers too.

Main Activity: Story and Practice (15–20 minutes)

- Read Aloud the Captikwł: Share "How Names Were Given" (focusing on Coyote), using puppets for dialogue and pausing to observe Kona. Adapt for engagement: Pause to ask, "What might snk'lip learn? Look at Kona - what 'lesson' is she showing us right now, like patience?" Full story (syilx/Okanagan version):

A long time ago, there were only Animal People on this earth. The Great Spirit called them together, saying new People-To-Be would come, and each Animal Person needed a name and job. Excited, snk'lip bragged he'd get the best name, like Grizzly Bear or Eagle. His brother ǰʷaʃylxʷ warned him, but snk'lip stayed up all night, propping his eyes open. But the Great Spirit made him sleep. He woke up late - all names were given except him. Sad, snk'lip learned he had a special purpose: to destroy monsters and prepare the world, with power to change shape. But he'd make mistakes and get killed, so ǰʷaʃylxʷ would revive him. snk'lip kept his name, becoming the trickster teacher. Discuss: "How did snk'lip get his name and powers? What does this teach about humility and purpose? How does ǰʷaʃylxʷ help? What 'purpose' might Kona have, like reviving calm in our circle?"

- Circle Talk Practice: With Kona in the center, pass the talking stone. Prompt: "Ask the person next to you, 'Who is your name? swit askwist?' and share your name and one 'purpose' (e.g., 'I am [Name], helper like ǰʷaʃylxʷ' or 'learner like snk'lip'). Or share what

you observe from Kona as her 'teaching!.' Model with puppets: snk'lip asks Fox, who responds. Encourage passing; reinforce equality and quiet observation of Kona.

Closure (5 minutes)

- Revisit key teachings: "Names hold power in syilx ways - snk'lip teaches us to learn from mistakes, ǰ'waŝylxʷ shows support, and Kona reminds us animals are part of our community." End with group thank-you: "We thank the syilx Elders, snk'lip, ǰ'waŝylxʷ, Kona, and each other."
- Optional: Quick draw - "Your name as a tmixʷ (e.g., brave like Coyote, calm like Kona)."

Assessment

- Formative: Observe participation (respectful listening, using phrase, quiet observation of Kona). Note connections to teachings in shares or drawings.
- Self-Reflection: Thumbs up/down: "Did I feel equal? What did snk'lip or Kona teach me?"

Differentiation

- For K-1: Use puppets more; simple shares (just name); draw instead of writing.
- For Grades 2-3: Add "Why is your name special?" or connect to personal stories.
- Inclusivity: Non-verbal options (gestures, drawings); sentence starters like "My name is... and I like to..."

Notes on Cultural Respect

- Blend syilx perspectives to highlight diversity - note Coyote and Fox stories vary by nation; focus on learning from, not appropriating. Invite local syilx Elders for authenticity if possible. Use puppets respectfully as teaching tools, not for play. Ensure AAT follows ethical guidelines, prioritizing animal welfare.

This lesson adapts syilx captikwł and teachings for an engaging, respectful introduction to identity and community.