**The Foundational Knowledge of Arriving *Here* Together**

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**Abstract**

In 2018, Alberta Education released its *Teacher Quality Standards* with a competency directly related to ensuring Alberta Teachers develop and apply foundational knowledge of First Nations, Métis and Inuit for the benefit of all students (p. 6). The competency may seem to be a step in the right direction; however, it falls short of its goal if Alberta teachers regard foundational knowledge to represent informational knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit. Tensions historically and contemporarily between First Nations, Métis and Inuit and Canadians are not informational issues, they are relational issues. In order to actualize reconciliation, we need to rethink Competency 5 in a relational way by examining, engaging with Land and Place with First Nations, Métis and Inuit. Through personal story work and examination of research on Indigenous pedagogies of place, teachers may begin to understand Land and Place is the foundational knowledge of First Nations, Métis and Inuit and can help us to take up competency 5 in a relational way and meaningful way.

 *Keywords:* Land, Place, Foundational Knowledge, Sacred Sites, Competency 5, Teacher Quality Standards (TQS)

**The Foundational Knowledge of Arriving *Here* Together**

In a talk at the University of Lethbridge titled “*On What Terms Can We Speak*?” Donald (2010) discusses the ongoing challenge for Canadian educators to teach about First Nations, Métis and Inuit perspectives in curriculum. He openly asks the question “what significance are they [educators] going to give them? and “whose Stories are those?”. These are challenging questions for many teachers, as Donald points out the way in which educators take up this challenge is a reflection of the way in which they see the relationship between settlers and First Nations, Métis and Inuit relations. This can be very problematic as many educators have been influenced by past curricula that has furthered the worldview, culture norms and social values of Western Eurocentric governments and society. This notion of inherited colonial narratives from generation to generation-through education is what Battiste (2000) has termed as cognitive imperialism.

The impacts of cognitive imperialism are endured by those whose narratives are not included in curricula, as well as those who continue to teach through it through ignorance or neglect to offer alternative narratives. So where might educators focus in their process of combating inherited cognitive imperialism in a time where information overload exists and demands of educator’s to demonstrate competency in First Nations, Métis and Inuit foundational knowledge increase?

Curricula of past and present is resulting in students learning the stories, experiences, practices and histories of places from afar and in temporal contexts that minimize thousands of years of history in this place once referred to as Turtle Island (Blood & Chambers 2006). Reducing the last 500 years as the history of worth noting in curricula is resulting in both student and citizen not recognizing the narratives, experiences and landscapes within and around their own living landscapes. In *A Topography for Canadian Curriculum Theory* (1999), Chambers states, “This invisibility is even more poignant, and dangerous, perhaps, in that it keeps us from seeing what is *here* as being of any value” (p.140). Through the exclusion of stories of *here* [the lands upon which we call home: albeit Canada, Alberta or our local hometown] and the imposition of stories of *elsewhere* [overseas or the United States], ambiguity of where one comes from, where *here* is can lead to a sense of displacement and lack of belonging (p.147). Settler and immigrant populations may find themselves unable to connect to this place and impede their opportunity to see what this place offers in terms of knowledge, identity and relationship. The lack of stories from *here* beginning with First Nations and Inuit stories of significant sites has continued this myth that Canada’s is a new world without any ancient wonders. This myth overlooks that Canada is situated within hundreds of sites that are older than Stonehenge or the pyramids, according to the late Elder Narcisse Blood (Alberta Education, 2012). Such sites in Alberta that deserve such attention include but are not limited to Majorville Medicine Wheel, Viking Ribstones, Rumsey Cairn, and Red Rock Coulee. Such significant sites largely remain unheard of in today’s curricula and common citizen knowledge.

As Indigenous sites of significance face erasure from current inhabitant’s consciousness, we may also be erasing the ability to formulate common ground for reconciliation, a shared identity and meaningfully coming to terms with the complex past and present relations including treaty relations, between Canadians, First Nations, Métis and Inuit and what it means to be *here*. It is my belief through exploration of First Nation, Métis and Inuit stories of significant sites, educators may further their competence in First Nations, Métis and Inuit foundational knowledge while making renewed connections to their own identity and connection to the land upon which they call home. It is therefore my intent through this paper to inquire into the possibilities of how First Nation [[1]](#footnote-1)stories of Land and Place[[2]](#footnote-2) assist educators in formulating a renewed relationship with Indigenous peoples and *here*?

**Awîna Niya? Tânti Ochi Niya? Who am I and Where am I from?**

At a very young age, even before my memory can really recall, I was taught to introduce myself in terms of whom my parents are, whom my grandparents are, and what lands we were related to. The introduction was something as such: my name is Carla Badger, I am the third oldest child to Joe Ronald and Ellen Badger. My dad’s Cree name is wâkwut (Crooked Nose), sometimes family call him Ron. My kokum and mosom are Joe and Caroline Badger. We are from Sucker Creek. It was a simple but long introduction for a young child. At that age, you would think that just my name and my parents’ names would have been enough, but it wasn’t. And perhaps you may have thought the purpose of the introduction was just in case I got lost, but it wasn’t. The reason behind the introduction was actually for the opposite reason: it was to ensure that I would never be lost. As a young girl, that introduction was my ticket to meeting extended family; an invitation to listen to family stories and a form of grounding to a community, histories, and land base. Today that introduction is much longer.

My birth name is Carla Badger, my Nehiyaw[[3]](#footnote-3) name is Soweyakan Kihew Iskwew (Jingle Bell Eagle Woman), which refers to the bells used in a sacred ceremony that our ancestors jingle to announce their arrival. I am the third oldest of seven children to Joe and Ellen Badger. My mother is Norwegian and my father is Nehiyaw. My mother is a first generation Norwegian-Canadian, both of my grandparents came to Canada from the Buskerud region in Norway. In July of 1926, my grandfather Olav Steinbru, came to Canada and made his way out west. In 1928, he filed for homestead in Hythe, Alberta and received two-quarter sections of land. My grandmother Magnhild Jorgine Halvorson arrived in Canada aboard the RMS Franconia in December of 1949. She too made her way out west to Hythe, Alberta where a fellow cousin lived and had a farm. One day at a community social in Valhalla, Alberta, my grandmother and grandfather met and wed shortly thereafter. My mother is the youngest of her four siblings. They were raised on the homestead and spoke Norwegian as their first language; learning to speak English later through their formal K-12 education.

As far as I know, my family on my father’s side has always been *here*. There are no stories of coming from *elsewhere*. The stories from this side of the family are of *here* and are believed to be from time immemorial. My father is the third oldest son of 15 children to Joe and Caroline Badger of Sucker Creek. My mosom[[4]](#footnote-4) Joe was born to Casimir Badger and Eualalie Andrews. My câpan[[5]](#footnote-5) Caismir was originally from the Sturgeon Lake area, but one day he travelled to the High Prairie area in search of moose and elk. While camping, he was approached by Chief Moostoos and Chief Kinosayo who were curious about who he was and what business he had in the area. After learning that he was a hunter, he was asked if he would be willing to join the membership list of Sucker Creek because they could use a good hunter for the community. He accepted their offer and shortly after met my other câpan Eualalie and wed shortly thereafter. My kokum[[6]](#footnote-6) Caroline was born to George Okimaw and Mary Campion from Driftpile First Nation. My câpan George was present at the signing of Treaty 8 at Willow Point [[7]](#footnote-7)when he was 6 years old. A bit too young to have witnessed the event himself; however, he was raised by those who were present in his family and community and heard the stories of the spirit and intent of Treaty 8. Câpan George only spoke Nehiyaw, so when we visited with him, we needed an interpreter. He passed at the age of 103 years. My câpan Mary, passed before I was born and unfortunately at this time, I am still learning more about who she was to her community and our family.

I share this familial history as Kovach (2010) explains, “within Indigenous research, self-location means cultural identification” further explaining how “it shows respect to the ancestors and allows community to locate us” (p. 110). I also share this familial history to illustrate that I carry and participate in both First Nations and settler knowledge, history and ways of knowing because it is and continues to be a part of who I am and where I come from. This influences how I interpret experiences, events and connections to both Land, Place and society. It is my hope by continually reflecting upon my dual heritage and culture that I refrain from interpreting the research solely from one lens creating and adding to the danger of the single story (Adichie, C., 2009). The single story being that these identities cannot exist together; part Norwegian, part Nehiyaw. I view my dual heritage fluidly through this Land and Place.

 As a learner I grew up with a familial curriculum filled with the narratives of treaty, time immemorial and homesteading. On the other hand my K-12 formal education privileged the history and knowledge associated with my settler heritage; reducing a large percentage of my Nehiyawak history and knowledge. The imbalance of representation in the K-12 education system has motivated me both professionally and personally to seek out ways in which we can weave these two in complimentary and critically reflective ways. As a curriculum developer for the Government of Alberta, I recognize the efforts many Alberta teachers undertake to include First Nations, Métis and Inuit experiences and histories, especially since the implementation of the Professional Practice Standards (Alberta Education, 2018). As an educator, I understand how overwhelming the task of bringing these two knowledge systems together can be, especially when there is so much to learn. It is for this reason, I look to using First Nation stories of Place and use of Land as text to assist educators in uncovering the foundational knowledge of *here*. To do this research, I will draw upon storywork and my personal and professional experiences in learning and visiting with First Nations sites. The scope of this research inquiry will be limited to First Nation and Métis epistemologies (specifically Blackfoot, Cree, Stoney Nakota, Tsuu T’ina, Dene Tha and Dene Suline) as these cultures are specific to the lands that are now referred to Alberta.

**Land and Place as Foundational Knowledge: Lit Review**

 Many papers have been written on narrowing the achievement gap between First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students and their student counterparts e.g. Ledoux, (2006) or providing culturally responsive schooling e.g. Castagno et al., (2008), to eliminate the achievement gap. In both cases, the focus of these literature reviews situate First Nations, Métis, and Inuit learners as needing access to their own culture through First Nations, Métis, and Inuit specific course offerings, content, and pedagogy in the learning environment. This approach is problematic. As Donald (2010) shares, when educators identify the cause of the issue to be informational, it continues to deny exploration of relational tensions between First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and Canadians over time to present day. In other words, Dr. Donald is saying if educators believe the achievement gap is informational, they will search for what they believe is the right information for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students. This may result in disregarding the opportunity to examine the historical relations and tensions between First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and the Crown and Canadians over time from a critical lens. For educators who believe the issue is informational, competency 5 in the *Teaching Quality Standard* (TQS) most likely will also be viewed as purely informational. Such an approach to the TQS would likely continue the existence of the achievement gap. So, how might educators take up First Nations, Métis, and Inuit foundational knowledge in a relational way? Do we start from a place where stories of *elsewhere* and *here* begin? Could it be as simple as common ground, literally? (Chambers, 2008). I hope that by inquiring into research on the topic of First Nations epistemologies and pedagogy of place, we may find a way forward to demonstrate Foundational Knowledge from and with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit relationally.

This article explores Indigenous peoples knowledge of Land and Place in order to explore TQS Competency 5 through a lens of relationality. As a part of the process to explore the research and its possibility to apply TQS competency 5 in a relational way, I will be weaving my personal stories of coming to know this Land as a descendant of both Nehiyaw and Settler identity. This approach of interweaving autobiographical narratives serves to assist the reader as a starting point for further interpretation or reveal of the theme at hand and is known as Métissage (Donald, 2004). According to Donald (2004), "Creating texts of Métissage implies an attempt to describe the braided and polysemic character of our lives, experiences, histories, and memories that are all contemporary, and personal as well as collective.” (p. 24-25). This approach of using Métissage illustrates that although this research is from authors of First Nations or Métis descent, it is of value and necessary for all Albertans to come to know and understand, albeit settler, newcomer, or First Nations, Métis or Inuit. The headings that follow are a thoughtful progression of themes based on the research: Land as First Teacher; Elders/Knowledge Keepers as Guide; Mis-Placed Knowledge; Rethinking Temporality in Education; Re-Matriation of Sacred Sites; Creating Pentimento for Reconciliation; and Implications for Approaching First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Foundational Knowledge.

**Land as First Teacher**

As a young girl, I often played outside with my siblings. We did not have much money, and we most certainly did not have many toys. We had spaces, places, and a whole lot of creativity. I often reminisce about these spaces and places. The Beauty Tree. The Lost Paradise. The Rock Pile, and The Tarzan Rope.

 The Beauty Tree was perhaps the most perfectly symmetrical tree anyone had ever seen. When the wind blew through her leaves, it sounded like beads being poured slowly into a glass jar. The Beauty Tree was awesome for climbing and made it easy to see the forest for the trees. I often visited The Beauty Tree both alone and with my siblings. When we went together, it was for play, and when I went alone, I needed someone to listen to me. She was a place for emotional wellness. She held no judgments, and she was never too busy for a visit. She was like a grandmother: patient, strong, and comforting.

 At the foundation of Indigenous epistemologies is the understanding that land is the first teacher (Marule, 2012; Mitchell, 2013; Styres, 2011). Since the inception of human beings, the Land has taught First Nations that they are a part of a whole and not separate from the world (Little Bear, 2000; Mitchell, 2013). “The idea of land as first teacher considers the interconnectedness and interdependency of relationships, cultural positioning and subjectivities that extend beyond the borderlands of traditional mainstream conceptualizations of pedagogy.” (Styres, 2011, p. 722). Furthermore, First Nations know this Land intimately through participatory, experiential, spiritual and process-oriented actions with the Land. These actions are reciprocal in nature; after all, if Land can be seen as a teacher it also implies that it is also living or a sentient being (Little Bear, 2000). This belief of Land being a living being is in direct contrast to western scientific beliefs of viewing Land as an inanimate object. According to Chambers (2012), First Nations have learned “what is appropriate to do here” by observing and experiencing a millennia of cyclical changes and how thousands of flyers, crawlers, walkers and swimmers have responded, adapted, or adjusted to these changes. This knowledge has been transferred to others in the form of oral traditions passed down through Elders or stored in mnemonical devices such as crafts, pictographs, petroglyphs, rock formations, stories, carvings, and place names. These mnemonical devices are just as important for us as a society now living in these lands as they were at the time of their inception, as "many of these traditional concepts cannot solely be learned through abstraction, from a textbook, or in a classroom" (Mitchell, 2013, p. 35). What these mnemonical devices need is a key to understanding them, albeit a knowledgeable Elder or Knowledge Keeper with the inherited knowledge and skills. Herman Mitchell (2013) refers to these Elders or Knowledge Keepers as the first philosophers apprenticed from the Land. According to Marule (2012), to benefit from the knowledge of the Land, you must be connected to it. In other terms, to understand this Land intimately (to relate to it), you must learn from and with First Nations people of the territory on which you occupy. First Nations and Inuit are the original apprentices turned journeymen of this Land.

**Elders/Knowledge Keeper as Guide: Coming to Know Land**

It was summer 2017, and it was the wrap-up of Dr. Donald's EDSE 610 course titled: *Four Directions Teachings: A Holistic Inquiry in Support of Life and Living.* As part of the course, we visited seven sacred sites utilized by the Blackfoot, Cree, Tsuu T'ina, and Stoney Nakoda. Our first visit was the Viking Ribstones, located approximately 152 km East on Poundmaker Road (Highway 14) from Edmonton, Alberta. I had seen pictures of the Viking Ribstones, but had never visited them and did not know much about the place other than it was sacred and visited by many First Nations for blessings.

As we turned off Poundmaker Road and onto a gravel road, I wondered what if I pass it. After all I wasn’t too sure I knew what I was looking for. As we came up to another road titled Ribstone Road, I knew we were very close. As we climbed up the gravel road, it appeared; it was unmistakable. The site rested on the top of a hill surrounded by a beautiful vista.

As we parked our vehicles, the women began putting on their long skirts, and both women and men began to prepare their offerings for blessings. As I began to prepare my own offerings of red prayer cloth and tobacco, I could recall the voice of Blackfoot Elder Andy Black Water “We approach these sites as if they are Elders. When we visit the sites, we offer gifts of tobacco, cloth, and things of personal value. These offerings feed our ancestors. They are the sustenance of the sacred people of the past." (Alberta Education, 2012).

In Blackfoot, Cree, Dene, Stoney Nakoda, and Métis belief systems, the Land is the equivalent of an Elder. Land has a history, stories of events, and other beings attached to its existence. In some cases, particular locations have had such significant events and connections to other beings that they have their own stories, songs, histories, and ceremonies. For the Blackfoot, Dene, Stoney Nakoda, and Métis, knowledge is tethered to landforms and landscapes (Chambers & Blood, 2012; Donald, 2009; Marule, 2012; Wildcat, 2005). When this occurs, these particular locations become a sacred Place, "These places are the equivalent of books, encyclopaedias, libraries, archives, crypts, monuments, and historical markers" (Chambers & Blood, 2009, p. 261).

As we gathered just outside the entry point to the ribstones, I gazed upon the pile of rocks. I thought about how rocks are considered grandfathers because they are old and wise beyond any human years. I wondered if I would perhaps feel some sort of connection or perhaps have a vision when we set foot into their space.

We gathered in a circle, listened to Dr. Donald share what he knew of the site, and smudged our offerings and ourselves. He shared how this site connects to a few other places. The first is *Mistaseni*[[8]](#footnote-8), a 400-tonne rock that the Nehiyaw and Nakoda/Dakota revered on the Qu'Appelle Valley, the other site where Papamihaw Asiniy [[9]](#footnote-9)fell. After taking our time listening to the connections, we made our way to visit with the ribstones.

In what is now Alberta, many of these sacred places are natural formations curated from creation, such as Roche Bonhomme, Pocahontas Mountain, the Badlands Guardian, Crowsnest Mountain, Ookotok, Red Rock Coulee, and Bitscho Lake, to name a few. Some sacred Places on Land are complemented by human-made formations such as rock cairns, earth lines, pictographs, and/or petroglyphs. Such sacred places of this sort include Majorville Medicine Wheel, Viking Ribstones, Rumsey Medicine Wheel, Writing-on-Stone, and Kleskun Hills; again to name a few. Regardless of natural form or complimentary human formations, each of these places “are repositories of knowledge left by the ancestors," events, and a deep layer of meaning that helps us connect with our more-than-human relatives (Chambers & Blood, 2009, p. 261).

Before the EDSE 601 field trip, I thought about visiting the site but didn’t because I was unsure what I would do when I got there. I worried that there wouldn’t be any tourist informational boards to assist me, and I would not understand its significance. I also worried about not knowing how to visit this site in a meaningful way.

Had it not been for Dr. Donald's guidance at the site, I can honestly say I would have behaved like a tourist rather than a visitor. The information he shared helped bring the Place to life in more ways than the Alberta Tourism plaque ever could. He helped us understand that these Places, as ancient as they are, have relevance to our lives and our more-than-human relatives today.

Knowledgeable Elders and Knowledge Keepers act as keys or guides for bridging what these Places meant in the past and what they mean today. They help learners to read the Land beyond the limits of sight. Elders and Knowledge Keepers help us participate in an education of awareness that requires learning with your whole body, so you develop a keen awareness for recognizing limitations, expectations, and actions between oneself and those at these Places, including with the more-than-human (Chambers, 2008).

What this means is that in order to apply foundational knowledge in a relational way, educators will need to rethink “applying foundational knowledge **about** First Nations, Métis and Inuit” to applying foundational knowledge **with** **and from** First Nations, Métis and Inuit. First Nations, Métis and Inuit Elders and Knowledge Keepers will need to be your journeymen and journey woman and journeypersons to indenture us into learning with and from the Land.

***Mis-Placed* Texts and Encyclopaedias**

When I entered into the space where the Ribstones lay, my eyes followed a worn path left by previous visitors. As I walked the path around the Ribstones, I noticed areas where the grass was laid down. This was where people would sit beside the Ribstones to have their visit. There were offerings of many different kinds on top of the Ribstones, below them, and at their sides. I pulled out my offerings and placed one near the Calf Ribstone and one near the Grandfather Ribstone. I shared my intentions and what blessings I was hoping to receive. I left the offerings with the Ribstones as many others before me had. Some of the offerings I seen at the site were food, tobacco, beaded jewelry, hunting ammunition, and trinkets. I thought of those that left these items behind. So many of these items told you what were being asked of these Ribstones.

I recall on a return visit; I found a daily prayer book. I picked up the book and read the prayer on the page it was turned to. Looking upon the date, the person who left this item had visited the week before. I turned the page to the current date, read the prayer, marked the page, and put it back where I found it. On another visit, I found the book still there opened to a new page with a new prayer. I do not know who put the book there, nor am I religious; however, something very spiritual occurred knowing that perfect strangers could hold a bond to each other through this Place. I recall while my friend and I were visiting the Ribstones and picnicking, a family pulled up in a van: two young daughters with their mother and father. They were visibly not First Nations. Both groups acknowledged each other's presence with a small hello, nod, and continued with our own proceedings. The little girls were inquisitive about the site and were quick to touch the Ribstones, and one of the girls picked up a feather near the Grandfather Ribstone. I remember the parents recoiled in horror and were quick to admonish the daughter. They quickly grabbed her arms and told her not to touch anything, as it was disrespectful behavior. Immediately they ushered the girls away from the site. Both girls began to cry. They wanted to stay and learn more.

I understood the parent’s reaction, but I also understood the girls' reaction to wanting to touch and pick up the things that were present. As a society, we have been trained by art galleries and museums to learn about a person or object by observing and reading the plaques and to refrain from using our sense of touch. "Look, but DO NOT Touch!” These places do not have the same rules; in fact, they are quite the opposite. These Places want and need interaction. We need interaction to understand these Places.

For many Albertans and Canadians to recognize significant sites such as the Egyptian pyramids, Stonehenge or Machu Picchu is an easy task. A less simple task is identifying sites comparable and much older in our own territory. Why, as a society, do we honor the existence of sacred sites of *elsewhere* but know so little of the ones *here*? Could this be a reflection of Canadian’s relationship with First Nations, Métis and Inuit?

Education is a powerful tool for learning. Education is also a tool for power and control. In *The Pedagogy of the Fort: Curriculum, Aboriginal-Canadian Relations, and Indigenous Métissage*, Dr. Dwayne Donald (2009) explains how curriculum has been used for centuries to separate the experiences, realities, and knowledge systems of Indigenous peoples and Canadians. He uses the Fort as his metaphor to illustrate how curriculum and pedagogy have positioned Indigenous people’s histories and experiences as "outside the concern of Canadians." (p. 3). The Forts in Canadian history served as safe places for defense and safety for settlers and traders. Safe from an uncivilized world outside of the fortified walls. Although these Forts are no longer used for their intended purpose, Donald points out that they continue to perpetuate and illustrate a great division between First Nations, Métis and Inuit and Canadians. The Indian Village remains outside of the walls. The “Indian” actors speak, dance, and live outside the fort walls.

The reserve system (similar thinking as the Fort) was designed to limit Canadians and Indigenous peoples' interactions. In implementing these borders, Indigenous peoples could no longer freely access sacred places, nor were their knowledge systems included in the curriculum. According to Wildcat et al. (2014):

Settler colonialism has functioned, in part, by deploying institutions of Western education to undermine Indigenous intellectual development through cultural assimilation and the violent separation of Indigenous peoples from our sources of knowledge and strength – the land. (p. 11).

Another unfortunate implication of separating First Nations from their lands and sacred places is that settlers who came upon many of these places lacked the ability to read and connect with these Places. Confined to the reserve system, First Nations would not have been able to play a role in guiding settlers to understand these sacred Places. Ultimately, the separation of First Nations having access to these sacred Places has led to the destruction of many out of ignorance, racism, and knowledge erosion of these sites' existence. The destruction of these sites are the equivalent of burning encyclopaedias. Mitchell (2013) declares, "to displace and disconnect Woodlands Cree people from the land is to sever the umbilical cord and lifeblood that nurtures an ancient way of life.” (p. 38). Although Mitchell identifies this as impacting Woodland's Cree people, it is also true for all First Nations.

 Although confinement to the reserve system is no longer an impediment to access these sacred places, private land ownership and the threat of trespassing laws still provide significant barriers. There is also the lingering cloudiness of the location of some of these sacred Places as decades of non-access has resulted in their *mis-placement*. In some cases where sacred Places are still in existence today, anthropological theories are held in reverence over the First Nations, Métis and Inuit stories and practices of these Places and continue to perpetuate a *mis-placement* of knowledge located at these sites.

 As part of the assessment of Competency 5 an indication of competency includes “understanding the historical, social, economic and political implications of: treaties and agreements with First Nations; legislation and agreements negotiated with Métis and residential schools and their legacy;” (Alberta Education, 2018, p. 5). If we apply the research to these indicators, educators will need to explore how Land is regarded throughout various historical, social, economic and political events between the Crown, Canadians and First Nations, Métis and Inuit. The underlying connection being, if Land and First Nations, Métis and Inuit are so interconnected, whatever happens to Land ultimately happens to First Nations, Métis and Inuit and vice versa. When we erase the history of First Nations, Métis and Inuit from the curriculum, we evidently also erase the history, language, and voices of the Land.

**Future| Present Past: Rethinking Temporality in Education; for Reconciliation**

As the Elders gathered into the room to begin their advisement of matters related to K-12 curriculum development, I noticed one of the Elders whom I had not seen in over a year. Delighted to see Lois, I quickly walked over, hugged her, and asked how her work up North with the Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning was progressing. After some time, the topic turned to the development of a digital timeline about the genesis of Residential Schools and its impact on First Nations and Métis in Alberta. Lois asked me if the timeline was going to be linear. I wasn’t too sure what she meant, but I had responded, "well, I guess we could put it into a circle." She smiled politely and shared the most mind-blowing philosophy of time. "In our [Indigenous Peoples] worldview and ways of knowing, time is not linear. Time is not past, present future. The future is behind us because we cannot see it. The past is in front of us because we can see it. If the past is taught as behind us, we repeat past mistakes because we do not use them as our textbook for daily living."

History and geography are often presented in education as a linear sequence focussing on European arrival and Canada's development as a country (Donald, 2004; Wildcat, 2007). Usually, any history addressed before 1492 is European history using a temporal scale situated in Christianity. History is also situated as being relative to human existence. Wildcat (2007) discusses the work of the late Vine Deloria Jr. who challenges the practice of viewing history based on a timeline situated around human existence. Wildcat describes this sort of practice of treating time as a sequence of past, present, and future regarding human existence as problematic in that the future is not a clear goal with no real explanation of where things are heading or how humans are interconnected to the more-than-human world. Wildcat explains the idea that human history existing unto itself is a foreign concept in Indigenous peoples ontologies. In fact, he describes human history as part of a larger history that cannot be separated from the biological and geological history of this Land (p. 434).

In Blood & Chambers (2005), Dr. Leroy Little Bear shares how the Blackfoot people view temporality differently in terms of the alignment of past, present, and future. Little Bear describes temporality in Blackfoot paradigms as immediate and within recent memory: two days forward or two days back. When an event is older than the immediate or older than recent memory, both references amalgamate, and the event is told as though it is two days fresh. Sharing stories in this manner ensures their relevance as tools for contemporary living. It also keeps these sacred Places current and existing in the minds of those who are listening, viewing, and visiting these sacred Places. I wonder had this same temporal view existed in England, how much more we might know today about Stonehenge, the Pyramids or the Moai.

As a means of reconciliation in curriculum, Donald (2004) shares the need for educators to re-discover the historical and current relationships between First Nations, Métis and Inuit and Canadians through a critical lens as unpleasant tensions and actions between these groups has largely been ignored or left out of curriculum. Critically re-visiting and re-reading historical events intentionally, as Donald suggests, will assist educators in understanding a deeper and relational way to achieve Competency 5 Indicator C. Which states:

Using the programs of study to provide opportunities for all students to develop a knowledge and understanding of, and respect for, the histories, culture, languages, contemporary contexts of First Nations, Métis and Inuit; (Alberta Education, 2018, p. 5).

**Re-Matriation of Sacred Sites**

A year after the EDSE 610 course, I accompanied my friend Naim and his class on a river valley Walk with Dr. Donald. I have been on a few of Dr. Donald's river valley walks, and they are never the same, even if the location is the same. With each walk, each step seems a little more familiar and little more like home. We met North of Hub mall and made our way down the winding path to the river valley trails where we sat in a circle and listened to Dr. Donald share the story of Buffalo Child Stone[[10]](#footnote-10). As I listened to the story I wondered if that was another layer of story that longed to be reunited with the Viking Ribstones.

When the walk was over, I asked Dr. Donald if the story of Buffalo Child Stone was about the Viking Ribstones. He let me know that the story was the origin story of Mistaseni; however, the two sites are connected. It made sense.

When I visit the Ribstones today, before I even enter into the enclosure, I prepare myself with a smudge and prayer and then re-tell all of the stories that I have learned over the years that belong to this place or tie it to another place. As these stories are shared, it feels as though I am reciting genealogy and lineage to people and places. It is important to do so. Although I am in one place, this process breathes life and gives sustenance to our ancestors and these many sites that no longer exist as they once did. Mistaseni is one such site. In 1966, the government ordered the destruction of Mistaseni to make way for the flood path from Gardiner Dam to what was to become Lake Diefenbaker (National Post, January 25, 2015). By visiting the Viking Ribstones and sharing this story, I pay homage to Mistaseni as I also visit with the Viking Ribstones.

In 2005, University Professor Dr. Cynthia Chambers, Professor, and the late Elder Narcisse Blood from Red Crow Community College collaborated to create a graduate-level course on Blackfoot sacred sites. As part of the course, students were to complete a study tour of five sacred sites: Majorville Medicine Wheel, Writing on Stone, Ohkotok, Woman’s Buffalo Jump, and Sundial Medicine Butte. During the first few study tours, both professors and students realized that the museum approach to learning about these sites was not enough. The study tour was then replaced with the Blackfoot practice of visiting sites where students participated in the traditional practices of making offerings, feasting, and storytelling. This pedagogical shift resulted in students and professors learning from and with these Places as opposed to solely an Elder's story or a professor’s lecture. A deep connection was created for all participants. Chambers and Blood have referred to this repatriation of sacred Places as an act of ethical relationality (Chambers & Blood, 2009).

In learning and applying Indigenous epistemologies and pedagogical approaches to Land and Place, educators play a key role in the process of reconciliation by acknowledging the authentic intelligence of *here* and making connections between First Nations, Métis and Inuit knowledge of Place, scientific interpretations and anthropological theories. In other words, in order to teach foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit in Alberta, we must first understand what is foundational about this Land from and with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit community Elders, Knowledge Keepers, stories, experiences, knowledge systems and traditional practices. By educator’s applying this into action, they will also be demonstrating Competency 5 through indicator d)., which states: “supporting the learning experiences of all students by using resources that accurately reflect and demonstrate the strength and diversity of First Nations, Métis and Inuit.” (Alberta Education, 2018, p. 5).

As a note of interest, according to Chambers & Blood (2009), "Siksikaitapiiksi [Blackfoot] imagine a future where they have repatriated all that from which they have been dispossessed. Repatriation, the root of which is the Latin patria, literally means to "return to the fatherland." (p. 266). Being that Blackfoot, Cree, Nakoda/Nakota, Dene, and Métis refer to themselves as matrilineal societies and refer to the Land and ultimately Places as life-givers, it may be more appropriate to use the term re-matriating than repatriating when referring to the act of visiting these Places to come-to-know them.

**Creating Pentimento for Reconciliation**

The Viking Ribstones is now near and dear to my heart. This sacred Place seems to call to me even when I am not there. Two years ago, my friend Naim shared a video[[11]](#footnote-11) about the Viking Ribstones from Kainai Community member Ryan Heavy Head. In Ryan's video, he shares how the Blackfoot used these Ribstones to attract and call in Buffalo herds. The Ribstones lay high on a hill with a 360-degree view of the land. From that point, one could see the Buffalo herds approaching for days at a time. Looking up to the land's highest point, from a Buffalo's point of view, the Ribstones would have resembled a Buffalo Calf lying on the ground. With the addition of a calf call of distress, Buffalo, not having excellent sight and being quite a curious animal, would have moved towards the site to inquire. When the herds would arrive, they would have been directed to a particular running path to be hunted in number. These Ribstones to the Blackfoot people are referred to as Iinisskiimm (Buffalo Calling Stones). This knowledge became a new layer of meaning to this place. This knowledge now becomes part of the story I inquire into as I visit this site. This Place holds significant stories of the Nehiyaw and the Blackfoot. One day I hope this site continues to share its significance to others as more and more of us become wisely aware of its being.

Through the act of visiting sites and re-telling stories, repatriation and relationality take place (Chambers & Blood, 2009; Donald, 2004; Donald, 2009; Marule, 2012; and Styres, 2011). According to Goodman (as cited in Filler, 2008), stories have a powerful influence in oral cultures, and through "the act of re-telling the same stories over generations results in "revealing more and more coded knowledge according to the listener's level of understanding and spiritual development." (p. 111). This type of coded knowledge must be practiced and taught from and with First Nations, Métis and Inuit. When we rely on Western anthropological knowledge of these sites, the knowledge at these sites, including the Indigenous Knowledge of these sites, is viewed and treated as artifacts or relics, denying and overlooking the relevance of sacred Places such as these continuing to produce knowledge (Wildcat, 2005). Anthropological knowledge of these sites in isolation is like treating these sites as taxidermy: fixed and lifeless.

Through the re-visiting and re-matriation of sacred Places with and by First Nations, Métis and Inuit, old stories, songs, ceremonies, and new stories are made. Although Donald (2004) describes how many of these Places may be sites of complication and contestation due to some being sites of historical trauma (epidemics, famine, and/or massacre, or relocation and dispossession), these sites also carry the hope of spiritual and communal renewal between First Nations, Métis, and Canadians. The idea of sharing in the stories of these Places and making new layers with the old and present ones he refers to as a Pentimento. To engage in the process of pentimento is to illustrate “the desire to recover the stories and memories that have been “painted over.” (p. 23). From Donald’s perspective, it is in this manner of pentimento of these sites that “a new form of Canadian citizenship can be imagined.” (p. 23).

Through the visitation of and re-matriation of sacred sites, not only will educators breathe life into ancestral knowledge in real-time with Elders and Knowledge Keepers, but also begin the process of weaving a story of their own. By Educators and First Nations, Métis and Inuit creating pentimento together, they restore and renew their relationship between each other through Land and Place. This restoration, renewal and reconnection is the embodiment of reconciliation.

***Re-Placing* Relationships, Arriving *Here* and Conclusion**

Growing up I always knew I was Nehiyaw and Norwegian. I was fortunate as a young girl to meet my câpân George (Great-Grandfather). My Câpân lived to the ripe age of 103 years old and had seen life change rapidly after the signing of Treaty 8. He shared stories with my Uncles about our Nehiyaw family coming up north through the United States. He would share how Lesser Slave Lake is a holy lake. He made sure to share that the reserves of Kapaweno, Sucker Creek, Driftpile, Swan River, and Sawridge were its protectors and that is why these reserves surround the lake. These stories that were shared amongst our family were not stories taught or discussed in the school curriculum.These stories only existed in my familial curriculum.

It was the fall of 2000 and I was in grade 12, Social Studies 30 to be exact. My teacher was discussing nationalism and wanted to discuss treaty rights. She began the conversation stating that treaties were outdated and were not meant to go on and on which is the cause of First Nations dependency upon federal handouts. Her narrative account of treaties was in direct conflict with my own and family’s knowledge of those agreements. I was shocked by her opinion, so much that I am sure my glare in her direction is what made her realize that perhaps I had something to share with the class. Unfortunately, caught off guard, when she asked if I could explain treaties to the class, I quickly declined. That day I was utterly ashamed of myself. As I recount this story, I still feel ashamed for not standing up for what I knew. I suppose if I recall the wisdom of Dr. Donald (2010), my social studies teacher was taking up the topic of treaties in the same manner in which she viewed the relationship with First Nations: something of the past and irrelevant.

To be better, we must do better. Educators have been called upon by the Ministry of Education to apply foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit for the benefit of all students (Alberta Education, 2018). This is direction not suggestion. The TQS and its related Professional Practice Standards are being implemented for system wide change. In the case of Competency 5, it attempts to explore where the relationship went wrong and how we can move forward together, but falls a bit short of its intention according to the research. However; foundational knowledge **about** First Nations, Métis and Inuit, will also not be enough to close the achievement gap nor the divide between Canadian and First Nation, Métis and Inuit relations. Informational approaches to narrow the divide between First Nations, Métis and Inuit are neither new nor what is needed. According to the research, educators need to learn to apply foundational knowledge **with** and **from** First Nations, Métis and Inuit and must begin with Land and Place. This is the first critical suggestion for direction for Alberta Education and educators who think better relationships stem out of books and not actions and relations. Other critical suggestions for direction include: Elders and Knowledge Keepers are needed in education to unlock learning from *here*. Canadians and First Nations, Métis and Inuit need to re-place sites of significance that have been mis-placed through colonial acts of violence and ignorance. Educators need to adopt new temporal understandings so curriculum can speak on common ground without the division of linear and sequential historical impositions. Educators need to rekindle their relations through Land and Place through visits guided by Elders and Knowledge Keepers. It is important to acknowledge that we have all been influenced by stories of *elsewhere*, they have their purpose and place, but do not shy away from owning what it means to be *here*. Actualize what it means to be from *here*, to be of *here*, and to learn from *here*. Begin with your *here* and let it grow like a handful of dirt on a Turtle’s Back. As educators we need to make new stories of *here* together to arrive at what it means to be *here* with and for our students*.* It may be 500 years late, but it is best we are arriving *here* together than not arriving *here* at all.

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1. The sites shared in this article are specific to First Nations. Sites significant to the Métis and Inuit exist within the borders of what is now Alberta; however are not discussed in this article. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Place is capitalized to emphasize its view related to First Nations, Métis and Inuit epistemology and to distinguish it from its common noun use in Western knowledge. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Nehiyaw is the correct term to describe a person of Cree heritage. Cree is an imposed term with French/latin roots. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Mosom is a nehiyaw word to describe a grandfather or great uncle. In this case, it is used as grandfather. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. A nehiyaw word to describe a great grandparent. The term câpan is gender neutral and pronounced cha-pan. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. A nehiyaw word for grandmother or great aunt. In this case it is grandmother. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Willow Point is located in Grouard, Alberta and is the location of the original site where Treaty 8 was signed. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Mistaseni in English refers to the Big Rock. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Papamihaw Asiniy in English refers to the Flying Rock a.k.a. the Manitou Stone. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The story of Mistaseni and the story of Buffalo Child Stone can be found here: <https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/in-1966-a-sacred-aboriginal-rock-was-blown-up-to-make-way-for-a-man-made-lake-now-divers-search-for-reminants> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wAQ_16jUCps> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)