# Reconsidering Difference: The Curricular and Pedagogical Significance of Holism

by

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**Abstract**

This dissertation posits that the false universalism of liberal philosophy shapes common sense approaches to curriculum and pedagogy. Liberal philosophies prefer sameness which results in increased considerations of sameness at the expense of honouring difference. The concern with common sense approaches is that it flattens out opportunities for holism to manifest in educational contexts and guide students. Consequently, this work reconceptualizes difference because it has been misunderstood in the literature. Insights gleaned from former Aboriginal Studies 30 students' experiences with the holism undergirding the course reveal that holistic insights can help to reposition how young people participate in difficult conversations on difference. Their experiences illuminate the transformative and generative potential of difference that can inspire deepened expressions of connectivity and belonging that are not beholden to Canadian citizenship and nationality. These wonders are expressed through a presentation of métissage that is guided by Cree philosophies and Qur'anic teachings expressed in Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi's poetry. This métissage addresses what is missed on curricular and pedagogical landscapes. Reconnecting with embodied knowledges and shared sacred ecological roots may inspire more balanced ways to live and relate with each other.

## Preface

I contemplate how responding to difference and diversity on educational landscapes is framed as a problem that requires immediate resolution and management. Why is considering difference far too often bemoaned in the very places that champion a passion for welcoming difference? I dwell in these tensionalities. As I write these words, I recall being storied as a problem throughout my K-12 schooling experiences. My location as a Pakistani-Canadian Muslim woman could not be held together in a confluence of ways. As I remember the reduction of my being to neatly packaged categories of representation, I feel rawness and resentment re-entering my body; "my body has kept the score"[1] (van Der Kolk, 2015). Why was I made to feel like I did not belong on educational landscapes that promised to honour diversity? How come proclamations of equity for all, regardless of gender, holistic sensibilities[2], ethno-racial background, sexual-orientation, gender-identification and socio-economic status leave me feeling robbed of my own humanity? Why do I feel further separated from my relations when numerous categories of representation are seemingly made available to address the intricacies of belonging and connectivity?

I pause and revisit the logics that have consistently informed institutional approaches to addressing difference. While I understand that liberalism "is not entirely malevolent" (Donald, 2009, p. 291), something is deeply missing. The false universalism of liberal philosophy continues

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[1] Bessel van der Kolk's (2015) book *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind and Body in the Healing of Trauma* expresses how the body remembers and encodes trauma if left unadressed. Van der Kolk posits that troubles arise when traumatic experiences of the past are not emotionally attended to and silenced.

[2] I understand sensibilities as speaking to ways of relating with kinship relations that are not guided by the intellect alone. Sensibilities specifically refer to how the four parts of my being—the spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical—guide how I learn from, respond to, and live with my relatives.

to insist that there is a singular way to live wisely and well. Following Paine (1999), Turner (2006) and Venn (2002), I conceptualize the false universalism of liberal philosophy as the currency of liberal ideological structures in institutional spaces that normalize the rhetoric of sameness through difference. Conceptions of cosmopolitan communities within the Enlightenment period explicate the origins of sameness through difference. Venn (2002) contends "[t]he idea that very different cultures across the world, indeed cultures that some thinkers at the time thought irreconcilable, could converge towards a cosmopolitan sameness that is inseparable from the twinned birth of European colonialism and of modernity" (p. 65). Creating a new order of cosmopolitan sameness was understood as necessary to alleviate the turmoil of encountering contrasting cosmologies, epistemologies and ontologies. This led to an "emphasis on mechanism and on a secular empirically grounded science of order" (p. 66) during the Enlightenment period. These logics intended to usher in a 'modern' era and ethos that would rely "on nothing more than the proper, free and courageous exercise of freedom" (pp.67-68). Connections to God were replaced by "linear progressive temporality" and "the modern, rational, unitary, self-present subject" (p. 68). The key point in this discussion is that God as Transcendent was replaced by other transcendentals including reason, history and science (p. 68). This construct was introduced and embedded in Eurowestern philosophies and presented as the norm for all cultures to mimic. Those who refused to emulate this model of life and living would be forever caught in a stagnant trap. This blueprint for life and living translated into the conceptual map for creating nation-states. For these reasons, 'modern' nation-states, including Canada, follow the notion of mission civilisatrice which affirms a commitment to the progress of the entirety of humanity. The enshrinement of human progress was dependent on maintaining the narrative that Europe was the pinnacle of development and civilization. It was thus the moral responsibility of the West to civilize seemingly 'primitive

cultures' (p. 70). Centering Eurowestern philosophies as moral agents legitimized assertions of sovereignty.

The normalization of this ethos during the Enlightenment period is undeniably present in the Canadian nation-state context. I draw upon Dale Turner's (2006) work to articulate the genesis of Enlightenment philosophies in the situation of the Canadian Liberal nation-state. Liberalism privileges the individual as the moral arbiter of justice and the notion that the individual counts the most when justice is taken into consideration and that there is an intimate relationship between freedom and equality (p. 13). The caveat here is that the conceptual normalization of freedom and equality will therefore subsume difference (p. 20). The salience of morality in this formulation of equality and individualism suggests that to access a good life and own property individuals must accept free market capitalism as the source of all justice. In this way, all individuals can enjoy the same rights and economic benefits. The problem with liberal conceptualizations of equality, justice and the role of individuals is that it addresses difference through promoting a singular understanding of acquiring the good life. What is even more dangerous within this rendition of equality, is that a failure to abide by free market capitalism denies access to the benefits that liberalism promises and is necessary to promote survival in this view of life and living; maintaining this onto-epistemological model depends on subsuming difference. The imposition of a "universal ethic" (Paine, 1999, p. 332) ironically does not produce the conditions needed to receive the benefits of autonomy and individualism that liberal philosophies propose. An openness to difference and others is lost because the guise of freedom is only granted by the Canadian nation-state if allegiance is given to the recommended "universal ethic". This perpetuates a disconnect from self, shared ecological roots and inner sources of knowledge. While liberal philosophies certainly offer a way to live and indicate that survival and balance is possible by maintaining

fidelity to free market capitalism, a deepened sense of survival is lost that can offer guidance regarding the "restoration of life to its original difficulty"[3](Jardine, 1992).

I venture to say that the false universalism of liberal philosophies contributes to shaping common sense approaches to curriculum and pedagogy. Following Britzman (2003), Kumashiro (2004) and Donald (2019) I conceptualize a curriculum of common sense as enhancing ideologies, that arise from the normalization and invisibilization of superficial knowledge and cultural assumptions. Britzman (2003) shares that superficial knowledge is "ensconced in the situations of visceral knowing [and] is made from the stuff of tacit understandings and practices" (p. 29) that organize the interpretation and enactment of educational life. Britzman emphasizes that cultural myths also inform the production of superficial knowledge in educational settings. Cultural myths and their genesis as cultural assumptions inform ideological conceptions of the ideal citizen that adults have in mind . In other words, adults imagine for their children what their futures ought to look like (Donald, 2019). These ideological conceptions assume that curricular goals must produce citizens that will eventually "hold social, political and economic power in a society" (Donald, 2009, p. 106). Henry Giroux and Roger Simon (1984) contend that "[curriculum] represents an expression of struggle over what forms of political activity, orders of representation, forms of moral regulation, and visions of the past and future should be legitimized, passed on, and debated

[3] This dissertation opens up notions of survival that are not limited to material acquisition. While material survival is important and necessary, a sole focus on material survival alone overlooks deepened understandings and enactments of survival. The externalization of survival perpetuates separation from the self, embodied knowledges and sensibilities that can guide balanced ways of living. For these reasons I conceptualize "restoring life to its original difficulty" (Jardine, 1992) as living in courageous ways that seek balance, renewal, restoration and transformation. Living courageously in this sense refers to honouring the intracacies that we are individually and collectively enmeshed in, learning from nuances, ruptures, ambiguity and the fusion of differences and similarities. The ability to go on in the midst of uncertainty rather than predetermining and managing outcomes encourages the restoration of life to its original difficulty and can inspire acts of survival that are not self-enclosed.

in specific pedagogical sites" (as cited in Britzman, 2003, p. 56). The point to highlight here is how the process of legitimizing the curricular worthiness of particular ideologies is often given little attention. In this regard, curriculum is formulated on the basis of "normative worldviews" (Donald, 2019, p. 106) and thus "become[s] a part of common sense" (Kumashiro, 2004, p. xix). The normative worldviews espoused in common-sense curriculum affirm how adults imagine their children as 'becoming somebody' and receiving the benefits promised by liberal market capitalism.

I will circle back to and repeatedly analyze how the false universalism of liberalism and its manifestations in common sense curriculum promotes imbalance through viewing difference as problematic and seeking assimilation of it. As evidenced, liberal philosophies prefer sameness. Consequently, in most considerations, sameness is emphasized often at the expense of honouring difference. I am seeking a balance, while focusing on difference for the purposes of this dissertation because it has been misunderstood in much curricular and pedagogical literature and discourse. My concern is that a continued adherence to liberalism as a guiding logic of curriculum and pedagogy is bringing damage to students. I am seeking to better understand this in a highly subjective way through an attentiveness to holistic-guided sacred ecological insights. To be clear, I am not suggesting that holism[4] is a panacea for alleviating pathologizing views and responses to

[4] I explain my subjective experiences with holism rather than offering a singular definition of holism. This is because I feel it is inappropriate to limit the expression of holism and the different understandings it holds for other individuals. I however conceptualize holism as recovering my sacred relationship with my ecological roots (Morris, 2002). It is not my intention to speak for all Muslims, nor is it the prerogative of this dissertation to present Qur'anic exegesis in unilateral ways. The Qur'anic interpretive insights expressed in this work reflect how I have learned to come alongside my traditions within the purview of Shi'a Ismaili Islam. Most significantly, the insights articulated reflect my embodied knowings. It is also important to note that while others may regard the fact that I learn and seek guidance from other holistic traditions as conflictual and blasphemous, I do not regard this as problematic nor as a threat to my Muslimness.

difference. I am also not advocating for centering holism within curricular and pedagogical discourse that functions as yet another universalizing logic. Inspiration from holistic sensibilites is one way to approach this problematic. My commitment as a curriculum scholar and theorist is to address the fluxic tension between differences and similarities and the implications of these perceptions for curricular and pedagogical futures as the key feature of this dissertation. For these reasons, I explore the question: **What is the curricular and pedagogical significance of holism in deepening understandings of difference?**[5]

This dissertation is purposefully written in a style that gradually unpacks and ponders the pedagogical insights that arise from my subjective experiences. My decision to write in this manner is necessary to honour the ambitious and complex nature of this inquiry and to address the confluence of wonders that I was gifted with at unexpected moments during the course of my dissertation process. I spend much time addressing my commitments to métissage and what the spirit and intent of métissage re-awakens for me in my own life as a way to evoke ethical relationality. I conceptualize ethics as thinking, acting and living in ways that avoid flattening and trivializing life (Jardine & James, 1996, p. 256). For these reasons I first illuminate my experiences of growing up as a Muslimah[6] in Edmonton, the erasure of holism from my schooling contexts, the imbalance that resulted from this absence , and being unable to connect with deeper meaning and purpose while I was a K-12 student. Following situating my subjective experiences, I will investigate how multiple perspectives and historical consciousness and thinking are popular pedagogical methods that are regarded as having much utility for addressing difference and diversity (Ottman & Pritchard, 2010; Seixas, 2006; Seixas, 2010). I contend that perspectival

[5] Please note that I will explore the research question in greater detail beginning on page 48.
[6] Muslimah translates as “Muslim woman” or a woman who is a believer in Islam.

rendering of difference and historical consciousness overlook deepened understandings of difference because embodied knowledges and kinship sensibilities are left out. To explicate this point, I draw upon the insights of a former Aboriginal Studies 30 student participant, Rose. Regarding multiple perspectives, she reflected:

> It is such an honor [to receive a bundle[7]]. It is the greatest gift that an Aboriginal person can give. It is an experience that no one can take from you. You have it for life. I feel so proud that she picked me. I cried when Jodi[8] gave it me. I can't explain why it means so much to me. It makes me more compassionate. It's not just about me. It's a European perspective, a Spanish perspective, an Aboriginal perspective. I see it as all perspectives going together. When I experience like this it makes me more honest with myself. It is different from just reading about it (R. Salvador, Personal Communication, November, 2014).

I revisit Rose's sacred ecological inspired insights throughout this dissertation to unpack what is meant by perspectival renderings of difference. Next, I will attend to Qur'anic guidance that teaches holistic ways to live as expressed in Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi's poetry, the holistic-guided

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[7] The Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental health(n.d.) explains that bundles play an integral role in the health and well-being for many Indigenous peoples. Physical bundles refer to a collection of sacred items including eagle feathers and medicines that are important to share with others. Bundles are often carried by Indigenous peoples attending ceremony. Particular Indigenous cultures hold the belief that:

> When a child is born they come into the world with a spiritual bundle which holds all of the gifts the Creator gave to them. Both physical and spiritual bundles serve the purpose of helping a person to engage with creation in a healthy and balanced way (The Ontario Centre for Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health, n.d. para. 1).

[8] Jodi Stonehouse co-produces an Indigenous radio program called Acimowin on CJSR. She also co-owns Miyo-Pimatisiwin Productions which is an Indigenous film company. Stonehouse has been a frequent guest speaker in Aboriginal Studies 30.

curricular and pedagogical case of Aboriginal Studies 30[9] and the experiences of four former Aboriginal Studies 30 students. These wonders are conveyed through a presentation of a métissage that interprets Alissa, Rose, Levi and Chauntelle's experiences through the generative interplay between sacred ecological wisdom teachings as expounded in Qur'anic philosophies via Rumi's poetry and Cree traditional teachings. I specifically honour métissage's transformative ethic through bringing to the forefront embodied knowledges that are missed in commitments to safeguard common sense curriculum. The recovery of embodied knowings is inspired by incidents on educational contexts where I felt forced to distance myself from the "ontological Qur'an" (Khalid, 2010) that lives within me and the *ayat*[10] that guides me to live with integrity and openness. I aesthetically represent this recovery through sharing a dialogue between Rumi's poetry and Cree traditional teachings as my hermeneutic sensibility. This is intentional to provoke tensionality, connectivity and transformation. The thematic unity between Rumi's poetry and student participants' inner struggles evidence the pedagogical utility of re-connecting with one's centre and the knowledges that flow from the body. Participant students' experiences learning from sacred ecological teachings while partaking in Aboriginal Studies 30 reveal a recovery of being that has been life changing and has re-awakened a deepened sense of connectivity. The braiding of these texts, holistic insights and dwelling in embodied knowledges brought forth the ethic of wisdom relationality. I later theorize how wisdom relationality, through re-connecting with self, kinship relational networks and engaging in healing can promote wellness and balance. In this scenario, difference is no longer a problem. While we are all related, we are not the same. This

[9] Aboriginal Studies 30 is a provincially mandated senior high course in Alberta.
[10] *Ayat* literally refers to Qur'anic "verses" but also refers to the ways in which human beings and other life forms are reminded of their connectivity and mutual survival. In this regard, *Ayat* translates as the "signs" that remind us that our existence is in fact not-self enclosed. Shifts from night to day, the movement of the wind and rising of the sun are regarded as miracles

aligns with holistic teachings and offers us a chance to reposition ourselves and approaches to curriculum and pedagogy. Perhaps such a repositioning can encourage an ethic that helps us to live, connect, treat each other, listen and speak in ways (Safi, 2018a) that do not take for granted and honour the luminous state that we have been gifted with; *"our lives are wrapped up around each other*"(Safi, 2018a).

**Dedication**

*Bismillah ir-Rahman-ir-Raheem*[11]

For Aydin and Iliyan who remind me of the gift of play.

[11] This Qur'anic invocation, translated from Arabic, means "in the name of God, the most beneficent, the most merciful". This phrase is invoked by many Muslims prior to prayer, eating, beginning a new task and in other circumstances such as commencing a difficult undertaking.

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**Introduction: Who are you?**

I have spent much of my life responding to limited representations of Islam and Muslims as a Muslimah who was born and raised in Edmonton. This desire commenced when I was in elementary school where Islam was historically represented on the terms of orientalism[12]. These villainized accounts depicted Islam and Muslims as barbaric, morally inferior, uncivilized, violent, worshippers of a violent God and contrary to the teachings of other Abrahamic traditions. Such accounts continued at various trajectories during my kindergarten to grade 12 schooling experiences and were accentuated following the events of September 11, 2001. These unquestioned renderings of Islam and Muslims set the stage for seemingly justifiable anti-Islamic sentiment on schooling landscapes. Such representations were embedded within Social Studies lessons that did not speak to the multiplex nature of Islam, suggested that all Muslims resided in "Middle Eastern" countries and cemented the notion that Qur'anic proclamations of faith were removed from peace and mercy. The narrative that was continually weaved in these Social Studies contexts focused on grand narrative[13] accounts of Western nations as fighting for the values of freedom, tolerance and equity that Muslim nations were supposedly incapable of. These historical representations failed to extrapolate continued colonial campaigns in numerous Islamic Republics and completely removed Islam from its historical and spiritual connections with Judaism and

[12] Orientalism refers to the canonized depiction of the 'East', its peoples, philosophies and ways of living in the world on the terms of the 'West's' interpretations. These representations served to fix identities of those residing in the 'East' as inferior peoples espousing contrary values on the basis of racial characteristics and religious allegiance. Orientalism strives to maintain separation in order to justify imperialism and the continued dehumanization of others on the basis of pejorative renderings of difference (Said, 1978).

[13] This dissertation draws upon Stanely's (2006) readings of grand narratives. Stanley (2006) explains that grand narratives are taken for granted assumptions, historical and physical representations that have become etched in public and collective memory as frameworks for understanding the world around us (p. 34).

Christianity. As I experienced it, the Social Studies curriculum at the time, did not address traumatic historical events in ways that connected "historical happenings and memory" (Eppert & Simon, 1997, pp. 2-3) nor did it open up the genesis of colonial campaigns meant to safeguard Western imperialism and market capitalism. Systemic racism and the racialization of particular peoples in local, international and global contexts were silenced through the presentation of "lovely knowledge"[14] that positioned the Canadian nation-state as a benevolent ally and multicultural success story (Simpson et al., 2011). Most damaging, however, was the utter avoidance of Islam's holism that could perhaps meaningfully engage these fallacious representations and dehumanizing rhetoric. This was particularly difficult for me given my connections to Shi'a Ismaili Islam as the deepest source of inspiration and guidance in my life. Islam's holistic message taught me that my faith was not to be separate from my thinking, action and the ways in which I relate with others. This message was supported through the guidance of my immediate and extended family and learnings from experiences in *Jamatkhana*[15]. These philosophies undeniably shaped how I saw myself as a social being at the time. Hobson (2004) shares that "the way we think of, or imagine ourselves and our place in the world to a very important extent informs the way we act in it" (p. 24). The ways in which I socially located myself as a Pakistani- Canadian woman were not separate from the wisdom that flows from Islam. This disconnect between who I knew I was and the human being I was expected to be on schooling landscapes worsened as I entered my final year of high school in a post September, 11, 2001 context. I did not feel safe openly sharing who I was and the beauty that I experienced learning

[14] Lovely knowledge refers to palatable epistemological representations of life, living and historical accounts that serve to reinscribe the status-quo (Pitt & Britzman,2003).
[15] *Jamatkhana* means "house of prayer" in Farsi. It denotes the place of worship for Shi'a Ismaili Muslims residing in different geographical and cultural contexts.

from Islam's traditions. I worried that my connections to Islam would be regarded as a betrayal of the phantasmagoric Canadian "we" (den heyer& Abbott, 2015, p. 617) that my peers more strongly identified with following 9/11. Who I was and what I carried within was not welcome if I sought to survive the remainder of high school and complete the requirements that I needed to further my access into the labour market. While mitigating these tensions of survival, I also found myself thinking about relationships differently. I was deeply hurt by those who knew me well and had often shared that I was a person of integrity, but yet easily forgot our relationship following 9/11. Although these experiences continued and were the most painful of all, I was convoked to address these misconceptions that were directly related to my being. These critical incidents beckoned me to become an 'ambassador for Islam'[16] at the time.

**Identity Politics and Obscuring Difference**

The complexities of trying to reconcile survival on educational landscapes with my inner being was heightened by another layer of identity politics. My Shi'a Ismaili faith[17] was quite often theologically rejected as a part of Islam through various commentaries and discourse of the *Ulama*[18] and by other Muslim brothers and sisters that I had come into relationship with. Ismailism's emphasis on the esoteric (that which is hidden and spiritual) was misunderstood as heretical and unorthodox by other Muslims. In addition to feelings of exclusions in the Canadian imaginary, I also felt at odds with the *Ummah*[19] in Edmonton. I recognize that I started to feel

[16] I intentionally use the phrase 'ambassador of Islam' to locate my initial approach to alleviating misconceptions of Islam and Muslims. These approaches were universalizing in nature as I initially spoke for Islam rather than from my own place. I also relied upon the insertion of knowledge and representations to support my well-intended efforts.
[17] Islam will be situated in the literature review section of this dissertation.
[18] *Ulama* refers to Muslim scholars who have special training in Islamic theology.
[19] *Ummah* refers to worldwide Muslim communities. The notion of *Ummah* as community is not limited to human communities of representation but addresses all beings.

"placeless"[20] in a sense and as a result defensively responded to these feelings of exclusion. These layers of difference, tensionality and complexity were not generative for me at the time. I was out of balance and unfortunately did not call upon my faith for guidance. This is because my approaches to healing were based on knowledge as the arbiter of most worth and the currency by which I could best address identity politics within the parameters of Canadian-ness and Muslim-ness. I did not feel it was possible to address these matters that were close to my heart without the endorsement of 'academic approaches' in seemingly secular contexts. I did not realize at the time that separating the wisdom that flows from Islam from these pursuits would have deleterious consequences for my inner being and connectivity with others.

My experiences with identity politics[21] in schools, macro Canadian contexts and friendships alongside non-Shi'a Muslims echoed the sentiment that difference was a problem that

[20] I draw upon Keith H. Basso's (1996) conceptions of place to convey these experiences. At the time, I did not feel connected with the places surrounding Edmonton, nor with Karachi, Pakistan. I was unable to "dwell within myself" because I was disconnected from place (Basso, 1996, p. 4)

[21] I conceptualize identity politics as arising from attempts to address difference and validate the belongingness of others who have been systemically socio-historically excluded. Identity politics, as a response to feelings of exclusion, can also invite the desire to re-centre one's identity as a way to validate the worthiness of individual and group identity (Dash, 1995, Dei, 1996; Donald, 2009, Weston, 2004). Unfortunately, the re-centering of identity assimilates difference and dehumanizes in the process. The centering of multiple identities, as I have experienced, perpetuates further discord. This is because difference is only addressed on the terms of acceptable representation within the parameters of unnamed statist values and norms. In the Canadian nation-state, for example, liberal philosophies manage how identity is represented and interpreted. This management determines the acceptability of particular groups in the Canadian nation-state. The nexus between identity politics and liberal philosophies have manifested in my lived experiences. For example, my location as a Shi'a Ismaili Muslim and the holistic guidance that flows from my traditions, have often been undermined in day-to-day interactions and in Canadian media representations. This is because Shi'a Ismaili Muslims have been storied as more acceptable Muslims since many Ismaili Muslims do not 'outwardly' appear as Muslims, nor are they associated with the orthopraxy of seemingly other Muslims. These readings, in themselves, are problematic and limit the multiplex nature of Islam and Muslims. My experiences of being supposedly granted greater acceptance in the Canadian imaginary as an Ismaili Muslim were dependent on external assumptions and perceptions that Ismailis are not 'that Muslim to begin

needed to be resolved. I internalized these happenings as indicators that if I wanted to belong and receive validation as a 'Canadian' and Muslim, I would have to give up who I was to attain these desires. I was incredibly uncomfortable with the thought of undermining my own integrity and that which inspires me the most in my life but was unsure how I ought to proceed. I felt that "integrating" my faith and spirituality into public spheres was impossible because of the secular institutional makeup of schools and university contexts and due to multicultural policy's proclamations of cultural neutrality. I did my best to address these complexities during my undergraduate education. My commitments to Religious Studies and Political Science as disciplines alongside completing a BEd introduced me to numerous approaches to addressing difference. I found myself particularly drawn to critical multicultural approaches that sought to infuse identity categories that were typically marginalized within North American political and media outlets. I became dissatisfied with these approaches because I felt they did not significantly address the Islamophobia that I was witnessing in various contexts as a young Muslimah residing in Edmonton.

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with' and thus, more 'like us'. These limited interpretations of Islam on the terms of liberal representation dehumanize Ismailis and other Muslims in the process. These deliberate assumptions also result in further distancing Ismaili Muslims from the *Ummah* and re-impose an already dominant singular reading of Muslims. Such are the perils of identity politics and their enmeshment with the universalizing philosophies of liberalism. It is important to clarify, however, that identity politics is not exclusively a problem of liberalism. As noted in this dissertation, I have experienced much exclusion from the *Ummah* because of my Shi'a roots. The point to address in this brief discussion is how notions of belonging and identification that are guided by representation breeds further insecurity and disconnect from self and other. This disconnect results in imbalance and interferes with our capacity to relate in more ethically relational ways.

**Validity via Critical Theory and Anti-Racist Discourse**

I was exposed to compelling educational scholarship and activism surrounding critical theory and anti-racism during the final year of my undergraduate degree. Anti-racism is a manifestation of social justice discourse and uncovers how power structures inherent in various social institutions reinscribe the racialization of particular peoples (Dei, 1996; Dubois, 1989; Goldberg, 1993; Goldberg & Solomos, 2002; Hall; 1980; Kumashiro, 2004; St. Denis & Shick, 2005; West, 1993). These theories explain how race intersects with socio-economic status, access to employment, housing, gendered experiences, and sexual orientation. Marginalization on the basis of race requires exposure and attention to promote the agency of others who are legally granted the right to social agency. Learning from anti-racist discourse and theories surrounding identity categories and difference offered me a language to address and expose numerous happenings in my life that I previously had not given voice to. I had not realized the extent to which I had assimilated myself on schooling landscapes to safeguard my educational survival and access to future labour markets. I felt that such discourse could validate my experiences of Islamophobia and best speak to the historical exclusion of Islam and Muslims following the Crusades (Hamdon, 2010; Joshi, 2009; Niyozov, 2010; 2006; Said, 1979; Sensoy, 2009; Zine, 2001; Zine, 2006; Zine 2007). These learnings gave voice to my experiences of racialized exclusions and commenced my journey to the pain that I had been carrying for many years as a result of mounting experiences of exclusion. My need for external validation, however, was dangerous and I did not reflect deeply enough at the time to realize that gaining deeper clarity within myself was also absolutely necessary for my own wellness and for my future relationships with others. While I could confidently speak to my experiences of racial and religious exclusion in numerous social contexts, I noticed myself accumulating anger and further resentment over

time. The very presence of news stories and media representations of Islam and Muslims as non-humans who were terrorists unworthy of love, compassion and connectivity triggered me significantly. As an avid reader of countless news sources and obsessed reader of comments on social media sites including Facebook and Twitter, I found myself further enmeshed in pain. I knew something was not quite right and was concerned about my well-being but was not yet ready to address my emotional responses to these feelings. I had been trying to intellectually manage these responses and could do so for periods at a time but would inevitably find myself located in the same mental and emotional states that I was avoiding. My recommitments to anti-racist theory and situating myself in these ways could not save me from myself and how my "body had kept the score" (van der Kolk, 2015) of my traumatic experiences. At the time, I had an inconsistent commitment to reflective practice. This is because I found it incredibly difficult to face my pain and be honest with myself in the ways that are needed to engage in self work. I continued to avoid these feelings for much of the completion of my Master of Education which focused on the contemporary racialization of Islam and Muslims in secondary school contexts.

I regarded my MEd thesis, "Post 9/11 Challenges: A Study into Conceptions of Controversy and Islam" as a guiding force in how I would honour my future teaching experiences and doctoral studies in education. I was thrilled with the opportunity to teach in a high school context, shortly after the completion of my MEd, that had a prominent Muslim population from contrasting linguistic, geographical and Qur'anic interpretive contexts. Centre High Campus offered me opportunities to engage in the complexities of racial exclusion, representation and privilege. I regarded this teaching opportunity as a way to draw upon my passions and research. However, I found myself confused and troubled with my students' responses to anti-racist pedagogy. I was puzzled as I assumed anti-racism would validate their experiences of exclusion

given what they had shared with me regarding their recent immigration to Canada. Something was missing from our conversations and I was unable to decipher what that something was in 2012. In hindsight, I recognize that our shared humanity and what connects us all was overlooked in such conversations. Over time, I recognized that I unknowingly undermined the humanity of my students by solely speaking from the place of anti-racist discourse that inadvertently was telling students how they ought to interpret and speak to their experiences of exclusion. My students suffered because I had not committed myself to the emotional work of addressing my own traumas. These realizations gradually surfaced during the completion of my first year of doctoral studies at the University of Alberta's Department of Secondary Education.

**Graduate School Ruptures**

My first year of doctoral studies was quite powerful as I found myself unpacking my recent teaching experiences in connection to Badioun philosophies, global wisdom traditions, Sufism and Cree sensibilities[22]. Alain Badiou's (2001) work surrounding ontological positions of sameness and difference seeks to problematize and respond to the limits of post-modern and post-colonial discourse particularly related to matters of identity, categorization and the conditions required to promote and support equity long-term. I understand Badiou's work as calling for an ethic that problematizes how unity is often conceived in relation to a dominant onto-epistemological construct that determines for others how they ought to position themselves. Badiou underscores that "ontologically" there is no "one" or "One" (den Heyer, 2015, p. 14) and thus educational situations cannot be premised on a singular guiding philosophy. Badiou expresses that we are all united in the ability to experience truth processes that call us to question what we once thought to be absolute truth; in this regard all individuals are equidistant to the void (K. den Heyer, Personal

[22] Please note that these insights will be unpacked further in the literature review.

Communication, September 10, 2012). Further, we are guided by that which is universal and have the potential to be subject to truth processes (Badiou, 2001; den Heyer, 2009; den Heyer, 2015). I found these teachings incredibly powerful as they offered me ways in which I could escape the limits of expression that I had encountered as an advocate of critical theory and anti-racism. At the time, I was also taking a globalization and wisdom traditions course. This course was also insightful but for different reasons; the course was my first experience within a formal education context that I had learning from wisdom traditions organically and on their own terms. Although I initially commenced my MEd as an MA in Religious Studies student, I did not experience connections to holism in the ways that were expressed in this course. Holism was not treated as an object of intellectual scrutiny. Rather, my peers and I were guided to learn from wisdom traditions as generative sources of inspiration and grounding. I had not experienced such feelings as a Religious Studies student and took note of these distinct experiences. I gradually noticed that I started to pay greater attention to what I had been taking for granted; my embodied understandings and connections to emotional insights and responses to daily life were matters that I addressed but often avoided. Our in-class meditative practice and commitments to daily encounter writing[23] gradually guided me to open myself up in ways I did not think were permissible on institutional landscapes. Learning from these ways helped me to gradually reconnect with my own traditions through "encountering" insights from other traditions of holism. I noticed the differences in how I felt while writing papers that solely focused on theorizing my being on the basis of intellectualized

[23] As a student of the Globalization and Wisdom Traditions graduate seminar, Dr. David Smith invited my peers and I to learn from the ways in which "life is deeply pedagogical" (Smith, 2012) by learning to pay attention to all that is around as sources of meaning making in our lives. Students were asked to keep a notebook of reflective 'encounters'. These encounters refer to moments when something 'happens' to call your attention. We were encouraged to write out our thoughts on what the encounters taught us about ourselves, life and living.

understandings and the generative energy I experienced after writing papers that were not limited to objective portrayals of Islam. I wondered what these insights would mean for me long-term as I became further disconnected from anti-racist discourse and experienced tenuous feelings in response to Badioun insights that do not recognize a Transcendental nor address what is carried within. Although I felt unsettled in light of my shifting feelings and experiences, I remembered Aoki's (1991) words that "to be alive is to live in tension" (p.162) and proceeded.

Following the completion of these courses, I had the opportunity to learn from Cree holistic philosophies and also completed a seminar related to race and racialization. I found myself further at odds with racialization theory and desperately trying to interweave wisdom insights particularly related to my Shi'a Ismaili Muslim sensibilities and connections to Sufism. Learning from Cree sensibilities at this time, particularly from the available literature, brought me back to my undergraduate experiences of learning from the historical contributions of Indigenous peoples in a Canadian context and also the traumatic histories of Indian Residential Schools[24]. Historical learnings about Indian Residential Schools ruptured stories about Canada's peaceful nature that I had held close to my heart for much of my life. I could not fathom these histories and experienced

[24] The Indian Residential School system was created by the Canadian government and administered by different Christian churches (Anglican, Presbyterian, United and Roman Catholic churches) (First Nations and Indigenous Studies Program, 2009). The objective of these schools was to assimilate Indigenous children into mainstream Canadian society through forcibly imposing Euro-Canadian and Christian ways of knowing and being. The federal government commenced the opening of Indian Residential Schools in the 1880s during the process of putting into practice other assimilationist policies. These schools were introduced because it was assumed that Eurowestern philosophies were superior to Indigenous ways of knowing and being. The idea was that Indigenous peoples were in need of guidance to become 'civilized'. Prime Minister John A. Macdonald followed the United States' 'aggressive civilization policy'. Subsequently, the first Indian Residential School was opened in 1831 and the final Indian Residential School closed in 1996 (Louis, 2018). The forced removal of children from their families, communities, spiritualities, cultures and languages has created much imbalance for many Indian Residential Survivors and their families.

much anger subsequently. I also felt betrayed as a former secondary Social Studies student who was never exposed to these histories. While learning about and from these historical accounts, particularly of Indian Residential Schools, and the historical naming of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples in Canadian contexts, was eye-opening from me, I later realized something was missing. These portrayals primarily focused on evidenced based historical accounts and the application of critical thinking to assess the validity of historical claims (Case & Wright, 1998; Sandwell, 2003; Seixas, 2006). While learning in these ways is important, I realized through connecting with Cree sensibilities that a certain kind of depth remained absent. Learning from Cree holistic teachings guided me to engage with the historical perspectives surrounding Indigenous histories in deeper ways. For example, I previously understood the colonial underpinnings related to Treaty and working towards Indigenous self-government. I also spent time following the completion of my undergraduate education courses researching the history of Indian Residential Schools. These understandings, however, were divorced from place and ways of living that promoted connectivity amongst all life forms. Exposure to Cree Medicine Wheel teachings at this time compelled me to rethink and reexamine the historical insights that I deeply held on to. Gradually learning from sacred ecological insights that flow from place helped me to reinterpret what I previously learned and examine life and living with an emerging embodied attentiveness. I recognized that learning from holistic insights helped me to remember differently and more deeply. I was unsure of the implications of these insights at the time and continued.

My unfolding curiosity called me to consider mindfulness practice and its connections to Buddhist traditions. I attended two conferences in North America that I felt were an excellent fit for what I was seeking to learn from. One conference had specific groups that spoke to the role of mindfulness in American schooling contexts, Canadian schools and as useful tools in the fields of

psychotherapy and psychiatry. The other conference was specifically geared towards holistic educational practices. My initial excitement with these conferences reduced when I realized that the sessions taking place approached mindfulness practice in ways that were divorced from its holistic origins. These practices were explored as tools that would help to manage student behavior, improve test scores and help students achieve their highest potential in an academic sense. I was disappointed these philosophies were approached in ways to meet a particular end and were presented as having no purpose other than helping to improve intellectual and behavioral functionality. I was saddened that Buddhism, in its various interpretations, was not spoken of in any of these contexts. I assumed that these were perhaps a few isolated experiences and turned to study mindfulness scholarship that could be applied to educational contexts (Miller, 2000; Miller, 2005; Miller, 2015, Kabat-Zinn, 2006; Siegel, 2007). As I experienced them, these pieces of scholarship, while impressive in their research and contributions, still did not deeply connect with tradition and reflected a predominantly cerebral approach to these practices. I also explored scholarship dedicated to emotional literacy (Eppert,2010) as a means to invite greater compassion in educational spaces but also found myself experiencing similar tensions and feeling dissatisfied.

**Gradually Re-connecting**

A renewed commitment to learning from holism as a way to address individuals that was not rooted in validation from dominant society, nor guided by assimilative approaches, emerged following the unfolding of these new insights. I had the opportunity to design and teach a spring course during this time period. The course brought me back to Centre High Campus. Course learnings were premised on attending to particularities and inclusive practice and drew upon anti-racist insights, critical multicultural theory, and wisdom pedagogical approaches rooted in contemplative practice. A week of the course took place at Centre High Campus as a way to

introduce students to the realities of educational landscapes and also offer them opportunities to 'practice teaching' and share time with youth. During this period, I was reacquainted with Aboriginal Studies 30 and spent much time as an eager observer and participant in the class. I recalled former Centre High Students' sharing about their learnings from Aboriginal Studies 30 while I was a teacher at Centre High. I remembered their connections to colonial histories, feeling personally invested in these histories and the ways in which Muslim students at the school connected with Cree traditional teachings. These sentiments also manifested during my re-acquaintance with Aboriginal Studies 30 during the spring course. However, I noticed that many students were highlighting that they felt Social Studies curricula was not addressing particularly related to continued manifestations of colonialism and an overreliance on Eurocentric accounts of Canadian history. I was most fascinated by the manner in which students spoke of learning from Elders and traditional teachings and how many students felt this addressed a "void" in their lives or re-opened practices and ways of being that they had become distanced from for various reasons. I also witnessed Social Studies students who were simultaneously enrolled in Aboriginal Studies 30 calling into question renderings of Canadian history that served to exclude the sensibilities and lived experiences of Indigenous peoples. The juxtapositioning of these curricular insights beckoned me to share more time in Aboriginal Studies 30 classes. My final Aboriginal Studies observation during the spring course had a profound impact regarding how I was thinking about the significance of holism in curricular and pedagogical contexts. Naim Cardinal, a former Aboriginal Studies 30 teacher, was sharing insights from Elders surrounding Treaty sensibility[25]

[25] I understand Treaty sensibility as learning from and enacting the holistic insights that undergird Treaty. The holism that underpins Treaty encourages renewal and harmony through living in ways that bring into balance the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual parts of ourselves. The idea is that bringing into balance the four parts of ourselves and cultivating a more grounded inner state

that I was not previously familiar with. I had grown accustomed to learning from legalistic renderings of Treaty and the role of the federal government in this regard (Tupper & Capello, 2008). Such narratives were my sole accounts of Treaty. At this time, I was unaware of oral accounts of Treaty and the sacred ecological roots of Treaty. It is important to note that I was unaware that I was a Treaty person during this time period as well. Naim spoke to Treaty as a promise to Creator that required upholding Creator's laws, ensuring that Mother Earth would continue to be honoured for her gifts of survival and that the land would be taken care of in reciprocal ways. Sacred ecological explanations of Treaty in relation to the wisdom that flows from place, in this regard, also addressed relationships differently. The notions of relationship expressed here were not limited to human beings but also included our more than human relatives. I found these teachings incredibly generative and wondered why this was the first time I had ever heard such accounts. I recognized that these teachings made sense to me in visceral ways. I promised myself that I would learn more.

The unpacking of Treaty sensibility in ways that were connected to sacred ecological wisdoms continued while taking a Holistics Approaches to Learning course from September 2014 to December 2014. I was blessed with an opportunity to learn alongside Dwayne Donald, Elder Bob Cardinal, and other friends in the place of Enoch Cree Nation. We learned from Cree sensibilities[26], participated in ceremony, and were guided through activities that helped us to

informs external actions and guides the quality of relationships with others. Treaty sensibility in this regard teaches sustainable ways to honour all of our relations.

[26] It is important to note that my conceptualizations and experiences of connecting with the wisdom that flows from Cree traditional teachings are from a specific context and were shared with me in a highly subjective manner. Further, it is not my intention to essentialize Cree sensibilities and present a singular interpretation of traditional teachings. For these reasons, I will open up how I have come to interpret and embody Cree sensibilities in my own life and living. I experienced Elder Cardinal's teaching as truly honouring the subjective needs of all individuals he came

reconnect with ourselves and nature. I noticed that what we were doing together in the class was intimately connected to expressions of connectivity that were not geared towards inserting difference, centering marginalized knowledges or speaking to the terms of unity on the basis of multiculturalism, market capitalism and purely epistemological claims; something very different was unfolding in this beautiful place. Terms including diversity, inclusion and pluralism also were not drawn upon during this class in the ways I had become accustomed to. While we spent much time unpacking holistic literature from different place-based contexts and their curricular and pedagogical implications, the course was guided by the ethics that flow from *wahkohtowin* or sacred ecological insights. *Wahkohtowin* is based on the understanding of Cree natural law that all

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alongside; he was able to understand what a person perhaps needed to cultivate greater balance in their lives. I experienced partaking in ceremony as integral to regaining balance because ceremony helped me to remember in a particular way. As mentioned, in response to the ebb and flow of life and the unpredictable rhythms of daily living, I often forsook my connection with myself and forgot my relations in the process. Elder Cardinal shared three key concepts that were central to the teachings that he expounded. The teachings of *miyo-wahkohtowin* (laws that govern good relationships)*, miyo-wîcêhtowin (relationships of harmony) and sakhitowin* (self-love) were not expressed as objectified concepts but were offered in ways that my peers and I could directly experience. The idea is that these concepts are in motion and a part of ourselves. I realized over time that these concepts needed to be experienced as a part of my being if I wanted to enact them through thought, speech and action. The combination of receiving oral teachings, narratives that spoke to the integrity of these teachings and what they could help me to remember about myself and my relations, reconnecting with the mental, emotional, physical and spiritual parts of myself and partaking in activities outdoors, inspired a clarity that I had not had in quite some time. I started to remember my shared ecological roots with others and that I was not separate from nature. Elder Cardinal re-awakened something that perhaps already existed inside of me. He taught in a way that offered much love, security and discipline to support this recovery. The manner in which Elder Cardinal taught was not to offer a prescriptive way to live but rather to help guide how I could regain balance within myself so that I could live in greater harmony with other beings. I also noticed that Elder Cardinal did not impose his teachings, nor did he rush me to work through what I was 'lifting'. This is why I felt truly seen for the first time while learning from him. For these reasons, I understand Cree sensibilities as inspiring harmonious ways of living that honour the laws of Creation in daily life, remembering that we are connected by life giving energy that binds us all, living in ways that attend to our shared ecological roots and enacting what is in our embodiment and memories to live an ethical life that is beholden to all life forms.

things are related. These teachings are passed down orally and through ceremony and song. The language of the people is the vehicle to express these laws (Bear Paw Legal, 2016). These teachings were also informed by the ethic of *miyo wîcêhtowin* or "living in harmony together" (Online Cree Dictionary, 2019. Partaking in sharing circle[27], activities outdoors that directly connected us with nature and the wisdom that flows from it, turning inward to address what we need to heal and what we are "lifting"[28] in our own ways was one of the most challenging but generative commitments I have ever undertaken in my life. The work of individually and collectively addressing our burdens, re-connecting with ourselves and nature brought forth generativity for me in ways that I had not previously felt. I interpret these experiences and feelings as a direct result of the ways in which Elder Cardinal guided us. Elder Cardinal's teachings were grounded in humility, love, compassion and unyielding patience. This was the first pedagogical experience in which I felt truly seen and honoured. My friends and I were instructed on the basis of where we were located spiritually, emotionally, physically and mentally at the time. There was no imposition or feelings of compulsion while learning from Elder Cardinal; we were never told that we were belligerent, racist or exclusionary or that we had to modify our actions in order to be socially just.

These teachings and experiences also reminded me of aspects that I felt that I had not honoured well enough. I was reminded of Ismailism's emphasis on the need to balance *zahir* (the

[27] The ethic of the sharing circle will be explored during the presentation of the métissage and its interpretations.

[28] Elder Cardinal teaches that "we are all lifting something [and] have been trained to lift different things" (B. Cardinal, Personal Communication, October 25, 2014). We need to have a sense of what we are individually and collectively working out as a way to grow respectful relationships. An absence of such understandings makes it difficult to lift our burdens and keeps us beholden to egoic assumptions that "one person is more right than another" (D. Donald, Personal Communication, October 25, 2014). Remaining trapped by such futile comparisons and losing sight of paying attention to all parts of the whole can be rather dangerous because signs of guidance can be missed in the process (B. Cardinal, Personal Communication, October 25, 2014).

material) and *batin* (the spiritual). Learning in this way exposed me to what I had been "missing" and "leaving out"[29]. Giving thanks to the sun, wind, and water for giving us life was incredibly powerful, particularly in a university class setting where students typically demonstrate a disconnect from nature. Engaging with practices different from my own was also insightful and continues to guide how I learn from the enmeshment of our relations. Offering tobacco to trees while reciting prayers has encouraged me to read and contemplate the Qur'an in new ways. Learning from Cree sensibilities has helped me to recover my relationship with nature and re-interpret Qur'anic expressions of sacred ecology in manners that I had overlooked in the past. Learning from Elder Cardinal's teachings in connection to my Shi'a Ismaili Muslim faith has reminded me that it is up to the individual to make the commitment to engage in self-study and remain steadfast in "lifting" that which bolsters separation from self and other Creation. Our inner and embodied understanding can be uncovered, not in a single moment, but as a continued process of bringing into balance the four parts of ourselves. If we exclude the emotional, for example, we may unknowingly cause harm to ourselves and others because we have not addressed particular facets of our being that inform our thinking, thoughts and actions. The four directions teachings helped me realize the extent to which my emotional baggage with regards to feelings of exclusion on the basis of my faith and spirituality, were impacting my inner state and ability to build relationships of trust with others. The disappointment, sadness and anger that I was carrying in my body often invited defensive responses regarding how I spoke about the significance of Islam in my life. These feelings, coupled with initial approaches that were substantially rooted in

[29] During our time at Enoch Cree Nation, Elder Bob Cardinal often asked us *"kîkway ehpatahahkik ôma?"* This humble question invited us to reflect upon that which we were overlooking and not attending to. I started to understand this question as a reminder of the Great Mystery and what gives us life.

intellectualized understandings of my experiences with exclusions, along with my desire for external validation, unfortunately inflamed the burdens I was already carrying. It is not my intent to villainize 'theoretical approaches' to understanding belonging and connectivity as being absent of contribution. These epistemological offerings are important and need to be attended to; they were integral to my own journey. It is relying upon them as the only source of guidance and alleviation that causes unforeseen difficulties. My reliance on theoretical expressions of what I was experiencing in a socio-historical sense did not get to the root of my need to express my connection with Islam in deeper ways. I needed that connection to heal. The four directions teachings guided me to realize this. This healing process, through attending to the inner work, was simultaneously guided by re-connecting with 'natural intelligence'. I had forgotten how invisible forces, as manifested through nature, make life possible. Creation story had become dormant in my life for far too long (Sheridan & Rorohiakewen, 2010, p. 378). Re-connecting with these wisdoms in an active manner supported my healing process because I was directly experiencing connectivity. Remembering how the sun and water give me life, and where those gifts come from, invited a different ethic in the ways in which I was approaching my relationship with myself and others. This brought me back to reinterpret Qur'anic sacred ecological teachings that I had not initially recognized as such. The Qur'an shares "[a]ssuredly, the creation of the Heavens and the Earth is a greater [matter] than the creation of men; yet most people understand not" (40:57). There is much to learn from the wisdom that flows from this striking *ayah*. While the Qur'an designates humankind as *Ashraf al-Makhluqat* or the most Noble of Creation, the Qur'an does not name human beings as the best of Creation nor does it encourage humankind to harm, manipulate and dismiss the attributes of other entities. Rather, humankind is bestowed with this title because it has been blessed with the gift of reason. With this gift comes the weighty responsibility of living in

ways that honour how all matter and life forms are connected. As mentioned earlier, the Qur'an repeatedly shares *ayat* or signs indicating the existence of a unifying energy that flows through all of Creation. The Qur'an frequently reminds its readers to remember that Spirit[30] exists in every direction. This is conveyed through ecological narrations of the providence it gifts all of Creation, that nature was created with different knowledge systems and languages to learn from and to view the shifts in nature, such as the blowing wind, bowing trees and transitions from night to day as a miracle. The insights that arise from these eternal philosophies teach that each life form has a particular law and way of life to follow (5:48). Understanding *Ashraf al-Makhluqat i*n this regard, was integral in reducing my tendency to respond to my experiences of exclusion in egoic ways. I remembered I was not alone and that I did belong as a facet of our interwebbed relationships. I did not require validation on the basis of identity politics in a material sense. Learnings from these wisdoms also continues to teach me that we are connected through our different law systems and ways of life. This reduced many conflictual feelings I had experienced in the past with regards to validating the interpretations of my Shi'a Ismaili Muslim faith. It is the dialogue between the four directions teachings and my direct experiences with sacred ecological insights that welcomes a generative ethic for me in my life and informs how I seek to continue to honour my relationships.

As I reflect on these experiences, it is important to highlight that the opportunity to learn from holistic teachings in ways that were not limited to academic papers, traditional classroom structures and that did not once seek to present Cree sensibilities in a manner that would be more consistent with secular ideals, was most insightful. Simultaneously re-connecting with nature and myself, while learning from these beautiful teachings within a university course taught me that I

[30] I conceptualize Spirit as the energy that is constantly in motion that gives life and connects all life forms. My understanding of Spirit is informed by Qur'anic teachings. I have capitalized Spirit because of the deep significance it has as a source of grounding and inspiration in my life.

did not have to reduce the significance of my own sensibilities in different institutional contexts and in my work (Shahjahan, 2005). At this time, I realized that it was absolutely essential to attend to my sensibilities in holistic ways without shame or apology. Learning from Cree traditional teachings has changed my life and sparked a deepened commitment to retheorizing difference and exploring how sacred notions of difference can open up deepened expressions and experiences of connectivity.

As I reflect upon the above understandings, I am reminded of the ways in which many of my undergraduate students feel that difference is unmanageable in an epistemic sense because a perceived base that unites us all becomes invisibilized. The focus on learning about and inserting more cultural differences appears contrived and is met with feelings of hostility and resentment at times. Some may feel that difference is metaphorically being shoved down their throats and that the complexities of differences and sameness ought to be resolved immediately. While purely epistemic approaches to honouring difference and sameness and unpacking systemic racisms are well intentioned, they do not allow for us to be fully human. This is because a particular prescription to follow is imposed by such approaches and the time that each individual needs to take to 'lift' their burdens are not addressed in ways that can promote healing. Learning from the wisdom that flows from all of our relations reminds us, perhaps in a deeper sense, that lasting connectivity requires bringing into balance, self, nature and other life forms. When we see ourselves as deeply enmeshed in other relationships and dependent on each other for our mutual survival, rather than separate from it, we will take greater measures to ensure our care and safeguarding for all life forms. In this regard, difference is not regarded as chaotic and unmanageable because it is not approached solely as epistemic matter. Experiencing and feeling a deeper sense of investment that becomes embodied offers generative potential and long-term

commitments to honouring difference and sameness that purely epistemic approaches are unable to inspire on their own.

The understandings articulated above convey how I have been seeking deepened expressions of difference and sameness that do not override complexity. I have also been looking for an ethic that does not secularize nor interpret holistic sensibilities on the basis of capitalistic logics. These undertakings and the wonders that have emerged from them have significantly evolved over the years. Multicultural educational theory, critical theory, anti-racism, Badiouian philosophies and secularized renderings of holistic philosophies, on their own, have not addressed what I have been striving to honour (Badiou, 2001; Banks, 1993; Miller, 2007; Pitt & Britzman, 2003). While I appreciate the spirit and intent of these approaches and their own commitments to addressing matters of belonging, difference and working out the complexities of existence, I am specifically concerned with how these approaches do not sufficiently address our inner being; turning inwards to address our inheritances, embodied knowledges and experiences are integral to truly learning from difference and working through individual and collective trauma[31]. Learning, living and relating in such ways can perhaps help us to restore our shared humanity and relations with our more than human relatives. Reconnecting with our inner selves and sacred ecological wisdoms can offer much guidance as we proceed together.

**Chapter One:**
**Arriving at the Research Question: Curricular and Pedagogical Commitments:**
**What kind of human being do we have in mind in our curricular and pedagogical contexts?**

[31] I conceptualize individual and collective trauma as the embodied accumulation of pain over time. Continuously carrying trauma in the body results in mental, emotional, physical and spiritual imbalance. Delayed and interrupted healing impedes relationships with self, other and nature. This dissertation will open up the curricular and pedagogical importance of healing on educational landscapes as guided by holistic insights.

Alberta Education's Guiding Framework for the Design and Development of Kindergarten to Grade 12 Curricula[32] (2016) positions Alberta youth as "lifelong learners" who will be given the values to "explore and achieve (p.1). The document proceeds to state that "curriculum has a role in creating a positive future for Alberta, by preparing students for a more diversified economy" (Alberta Education, 2016, p. 2). Focus on preparing for achievement of a particular kind and economic complexity is also reflected in the document's overarching student vision. Alberta Education (2016) states that "students are lifelong learners inspired to pursue their aspirations and interests; achieve fulfillment and success; and contribute to communities and the world" (p. 3). It is noteworthy that matters of success, achievement and the ability to succeed on economic terms are frontloaded as having the greatest significance within Alberta Education's visions for student success. While Alberta Education speaks to the importance of preparing students to respond to climate change, health matters and Canada's growing diversity, these matters are not situated as living in successful ways. It is evident that "statist interests" are privileged in the creation of the ideal human being that Alberta Education has in mind.

Mcafee (2000) and Bartlett (2011) can help to address what is meant by "statist interests" and its connections to economic pursuits. McAfee (2000) underscores that the connections between objectivity and solidarity originated in Athens in the fifth century (p. 166). Sophistry emerged out of attempts to receive monetary rewards in return for teaching students how to become successful citizens in the city (McAfee, 2000, p. 166). Central to Sophistry was its privileging of that which is tangible, immanent and most visible. Further, Sophists emphasized that truth could

[32] It is important to note that this document refers to Alberta Education's proposed revised document for curriculum design and architecture. The revised document for curriculum design and architecture was written during Alberta's New Democratic Party's tenure. The extent to which the United Conservative Party will honour these commitments is unclear at this time.

be found in what was visible, known in an immediate manner and transparent. McAfee (2000) underscores:

> The sophists believed that young men could learn the virtues of excellences (arête) needed for citizenship by learning how to persuade and speak publicly, by learning as much as possible about their own culture and history- the literature and grammar of Greece past and present. (p. 166)

In this way, the pursuit of education is sought in accordance with the rule of the state (Bartlett, 2011, p. 52). Bartlett (2011) poignantly emphasizes that "to know, in short is to be properly instructed in an interest in interest [whereby] one's knowledge will translate into better wealth and one's wealth into better knowledge" (p. 51). Subsequently, that which is worth knowing is that which serves self-interest and applicability to the state (den Heyer, 2013, pp. 7-8). Consequently, such values are reflected in Alberta Education curricular documents particularly in reference to preparing our youth "to meet the opportunities and challenges of the future" (p.1).

Also significant to Sophistry, was its declaration and dismissal of religion as a human invention (McAfee, 2000, p. 166). Sophistry privileged that which could be seen as representing eternal, objective and universal truth. It is imperative to note Sophist's dismissal of religion as it may explain reasons underlying why religion and spirituality are associated with irrationality because faith cannot alone be expressed and understood through the intellect. The relationship between Sophistry and the subordination of religion may also help explain why secularism is regarded as a protector of the interests of all.

It is not overly assumptive to suggest that sophistic logics are embedded in the very makeup of formal education in Canada and can be understood as having deep resonance in Alberta Programmes of Study. Donald (2009) explores the connections between "universal human insights

and market logics following the rise of technological advancement in Europe and North America in the 19th century" (p. 316). Desired economic growth was represented as a universal value, which had intimate connections to 'codified presentations of knowledge' or programs of study that would help educators give students 'the knowledge deemed most valuable' (Donald, 2009, p. 316). Donald (2009) underscores that "in accordance with market logics, education became associated with social Darwinism and curriculum as an expression of cultural capital and something of a gatekeeper to employability" (p. 316). In applying Donald's illustration of the connection between curriculum and cultural capital, we can see a connection to understanding Alberta Education's curricular documents and Programmes of Studies[33] as a "corporate and legal document" rooted in the interests of 'expert groups' that represent corporate bodies (den Heyer, 2013, p.12).

Sophistry in connection to the promotion of 'statist interests' helps to explicate the inextricable connections between epistemic worthiness and perceived economic accumulation inherent in Alberta Education's guiding philosophies, student visions, value systems and curricular scaffolding. These approaches represent the continued philosophical currency of liberalism[34]. The

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[33] Alberta Education (2016) defines the Programme of Studies or provincial curricula as "what students are expected to know, understand and be able to do in each subject and grade. Teachers have the flexibility to determine "how students achieve the expected learning outcomes to bring the provincial curriculum to life in the classroom through meaningful learning activities" (p. 1)

[34] My use of the terms liberal and liberalism specifically reflects the enactment of these philosophies in a Canadian context. I am specifically referring to the ways in which rational thinking is positioned as superior to embodied insights, Spirit and spirituality; Canadian manifestations of liberalism undermine the integrity of sensibilities that cannot be measured and are formless. These philosophies describe "progress" on the terms of material accumulation that is made possible through promoting self-interest and the commodification of the land. I also understand Canadian liberalism as deeply committed to managing difference particularly in response to the colonial policy of multiculturalism. I conceptualize Canadian liberalism as contributing to the erasure of deeper sources of connectivity that can guide the ways in which we

false universalism of liberal philosophy determines what is worthwhile for students to know. Alberta Education's policy and curricular documents reveal a grooming of a human being that lives in ways that privilege 'material recognition'[35]. Material recognition's focus on individualism and gratification ensures that the "acquisition of materials, feeling, and a sense of achievement becomes the common standards for individual pursuits" (Purpel, 2004, p. 53). Focusing our efforts to attain what is external to ourselves reinforces autonomous notions of being that override addressing life and living in ways that honour all life forms, making decisions that carefully take into consideration all beings and connecting with what makes life possible. Rearing in ways that promote individualistic material interests encourages a disconnect with one's inner state in connection to others. While individualism in a liberal sense cautions against 'self-interest' such notions ought not be conflated with deeper notions of connectivity that necessitate a direct connection with oneself for life to go on. Purpel (2004) shares:

> We have bought into a psychology that urges us to consider that we are responsible individually for our feelings and behavior and that we are responsible only for ourselves. While this may at one level enhance (properly) our own sense of personal responsibility, this attitude can and does serve to reduce the sense of our interdependence and our opportunities to help and support others (53).

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relate to each other and are not dependent on Canadian citizenship (Kymlicka, 1989; Paine, 1999; Smith, 2009; Taylor, 1989). These notions will be unpacked at length in the literature review.

[35] My use of the term 'material recognition' refers to specific realities that I have consistently encountered. Firstly, material recognition denotes how the majority of my schooling and educational experiences have been guided by ideologies, cultural assumptions and practices that promote employability and success in the labour market alone. Secondly, material recognition reflects a totalizing philosophy for life that suggests that 'becoming someone' in a worldly sense will leave individuals feeling satisfied with themselves, life and living and provide the necessary resources to attend to that which we cannot predict and control. The philosophies that undergird 'material recognition' do not offer ways in which we can more ethically engage each other.

Self-containment in this regard also promotes the fallacious notion that intellectual certainty and a predictable life-course is guaranteed through abiding by prescriptive ways. Education that is anchored by self-containment promotes the cultivation of a human being that may devalue the "complex and elusive nature of truth and the vital importance of openness to and awareness of emerging consciousness" (Purpel, 2004, p. 63). Missing these insights contributes to the erasure of sensibilities, ways of living and relating that connect with the ineffable. Conceptions of life, living and survival that are primarily premised on the terms of 'statist interests' and 'material recognition' paradoxically contribute to disharmony with self, others and nature in far reaching ways.

**What I have Inherited: Spirit, Liberal Ethos and 'Material Recognition'**

What is meant by survival and in what ways do we proceed with life and living? I carry these questions while I re-examine what I have inherited from my parents. My parents moved to Canada from Karachi, Pakistan in the late 1970s. Their immigration was significantly prompted by physical and material needs to escape escalating political tensions, unanticipated family friction and financial uncertainties. My father had recently lost both of his parents in a car accident, was in the midst of completing graduate school in the United States and was mitigating matters of property inheritance and the nationalization of his family's businesses in Pakistan. The infiltration of *Wahhabi* ideologies[36] in Karachi also jeopardized the ways in which my parents sought to honour their faith and live their lives. Karachi in a sense became an abode that my parents no longer desired to dwell in although their extended families would remain there. My parents also

[36] *Wahhabi* ideologies refer to "sternly puritanical" ideologies of the Wahhabiya movement founded in Arabia in the eighteenth century by Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (Denny, 1994, p. 396). These ideologies are not to be conflated with Sunni or Shi'i interpretations of Islam. *Wahhabi* ideologies have co-opted Qur'anic teachings in rigid ways to promote the political and economic expansion of Saudi Arabia.

did not wish to bring children into the world in the midst of political strife and in a context where access to formal education that could be applied across geographical contexts was unavailable. Drawing upon guidance from family, trusted friends and their faith, my parents carefully decided to immigrate to Canada. Their 'acceptance' in the Canadian nation-state was by no means a linear event. My parents initially lived in London, England and Paris before they were able to move to Toronto. Their struggles continued. When they eventually were granted entry into Toronto, my father was unable to find work and was told that he was 'overqualified' with his Engineering undergraduate degree and MBA. Disgruntled with the absence of employment, my parents moved to Edmonton. They commenced the process of establishing themselves in a new country and readjusting to an entirely different socio-cultural landscape. They sought to make Canada their home long-term and to proceed in ways that promoted the financial stability they needed to support their families in Pakistan and ensure that my sister and I would have a stable upbringing.

The providence of these gifts was made possible through Canadian liberalism. I cannot deny this reality, nor can I suggest that "liberalism is entirely malevolent" (Donald, 2009, p. 291). Their survival, however, was not limited to material prosperity but was also directly dependent on the extent to which they remained connected to their faith and honouring Islam as a way of life. Although my parents were beginning to materially establish themselves in Edmonton, they did not yet have access to a place of worship in Edmonton. This absence of place was incredibly difficult for my parents as they attended *Jamatkhana* everyday while living in Karachi. *Jamatkhana* was their centre, source of inspiration, hope and grounding place. This absence of place, however, did not deter their faith. They participated in prayer with Ismailis who recently immigrated to Canada in local gymnasiums until spaces were made available. They remained steadfast to their traditions and Islam's ethics with the resources they had at the time. I strongly believe that if it was not for

my parents' perseverance to remain connected to their traditions and spirituality that they would have been unable to survive separation from their families, from their way of life and their worldly tribulations. Their 'material progress' alone would not have sustained their life and living.

I share what I have inherited because it has significantly inspired this work and opens up the complexities and paradoxes of living and being. The liberal ethos that has helped to sustain my parents financially has also simultaneously evoked challenges in their abilities to live their faith. In a sense, they have had to fight for maintaining a deepened sense of connectivity and belonging that is not defined by citizenship and notions of civil society. This sense of grounding and belonging is not dependent on the gaze of 'material recognition', nor is it reliant upon 'becoming somebody' in the context of capitalistic pursuits alone. Rather, belonging is realized through connecting not only with the material, but also with ourselves and the universe in a multitude of ways. Life and living involves much more than our material survival.

In this dissertation, I posit that notions of survival, belonging and identification ought not rely on the platitudes of our nation-state's rendition of multicultural discourse and policy and its genesis in provincial curricula, teaching documents and practices. Conceptions of living can be revisited by thinking through the extent to which we have abandoned the practice of being human as actors in the universe (Ermine, 2007, p. 198). In order to remember and live as human actors, we need to reignite notions of living that more pointedly reflect our morality and integrity (Ermine, 2007, p. 195). The perpetuation of knowledge systems and values that uphold 'material recognition' as our primary source of comfort and inspiration interfere with our ability to collectively engage our needs as beings who share this land

**Guidance from Cree and Sufic Sensibilities: A Holistic Curricular and Pedagogical Inquiry**

**Unpacking how the Social Studies Programme of Studies Addresses Difference**

Alberta Education's Social Studies Programme of Studies[37] (POS) (2005) attends to difference and unity through guiding students to learn from "multiple perspectives". Attending to multiple perspectives is regarded as a commitment to learning about and from Canada's diverse histories, peoples, ethno-cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The Social POS states its explicit commitment to recognizing

> the diversity of experiences and perspectives and the pluralistic nature of Canadian society. Pluralism builds upon Canada's historical and constitutional foundations, which reflect the country's Aboriginal heritage, bilingual nature and multicultural realties. A pluralistic view recognizes that citizenship and identity are shaped by multiple factors such as culture, language, environment, gender, ideology, religion, spirituality and philosophy.(Alberta Education, 2005, p.1 )

One can infer that manifestations of difference and diversity, within the Canadian nation-state, are best honoured through perspectival representations of difference in this context. This means that teachers are expected to ensure that issues including historical events, are presented through various lenses of interpretation in balanced ways. Multiple perspectives "endeavor to showcase Canada's 'pluralistic society' and help students to take into consideration the presence of Canada's diversity in historical and contemporary contexts" (B. Howe, Personal Communication, September 28, 2017). For example, attending to First Nations, Métis and Inuit and Francophone perspectives are approached in ways that reflect key historical experiences and the contributions of the peoples

[37] This dissertation intentionally frontloads Alberta Education curriculum, philosophical curricular underpinnings and curriculum architecture because my experiences as an educator and researcher are located within this context. Student and teacher participant insights illuminated in this dissertation are situated in an Albertan schooling context. Most significantly, opening up these matters addresses the extent to which ideological formulations in Alberta Education's current and proposed forthcoming curricula resembles a curriculum of common sense that is undergirded by liberal philosophies.

in question. It is important to note that a clear exploration and definition of how Alberta Education conceptualizes 'perspective' and 'multiple perspective' is absent from the Social POS (Ottman & Pritchard, 2010, pp. 22-23). While this absence permeates the entire Social POS, Alberta Education (2005) underscores the need for students to connect with these insights activating the "affective domain"[38] and drawing upon the particular "values and attitudes" and "skills and processes" (Ottman & Pritchard, 2010, p. 30).

The application of the affective domain to the interpretation of multiple perspectives is regarded as sufficiently addressing "humanistic outcomes" (Ottoman & Pritchard, 2010, p. 30). Critical thinking, historical thinking and geographic thinking are frontloaded as integral to meeting these ends. Critical thinking is described as a "process of inquiry, analysis and evaluation resulting in a reasoned judgment. Critical thinking promotes the development of democratic citizenship" (Alberta Education, 2005, p. 8). The skills of critical thinking are meant to help students "distinguish fact from fiction, opinion; considering the reliability and accuracy of information; determining diverse points of view, perspective and bias; and considering the ethics of decisions and actions" (Alberta Education, 2005, p. 8). Historical thinking draws upon the skills of critical thinking. Historical thinking is a process designed to encourage students to "rethink assumptions about the past and to reimagine both the present and the future." (Alberta Education, 2005, p. 9). Historical thinking involves the application of primary sources, such as letters, diary entries, oral traditions and other original accounts of historical experiences to assist the sequencing of events and analyzing patterns and the locating of events as a way to create meaning and understanding (Alberta Education, 2005, p.9). Geographic thinking also draws upon the skills inherent in critical

[38] "The affective learning domain "describes learning objectives that emphasize a feeling, tone, an emotion, or a degree of acceptance or rejection" (Krathwohl et al., as cited in Ottman & Pritchard, 2010, p. 5)

thinking and historical thinking. These skills require that students use "spatial orders, patterns and associations" to explore "environmental and societal issues" (Alberta Education, 2005, p. 9). Geographic thinking skills are understood as integral to guiding students to "understand relationships among people, events and the contexts of their physical environment, which will assist them to make choices and act wisely" (Alberta Education, 2005, p. 9) in the face of environmental concerns. Drawing upon "geographic information" is essential to understanding relationships amongst peoples, physical descriptors of the land, matters related to climate change and how and why particular places receive greater media currency and representation (Bahbahani & Huynh, 2008).

It is important to address the philosophies that undergird critical thinking, historical thinking and geographical thinking. Case and Wright (1998) suggest that critical thinking ought to be approached as putting into practice intellectual and thinking strategies that reflect having an open mind and inquiring with an intellectual work ethic (p. 43). Such skills are understood as necessary to overcome reliance on rote application and the retrieval of information. These "habits of mind" or skills help to enact critical judgment which involves applying the standards of "accuracy, reliability, logical coherence, weight of evidence, clarity, precision and relevancy" (p. 43). Engaging in critical judgment undeniably reflects evidenced-based practices and empirical approaches to meaning making. The significance of evidence-based practices within the context of history education is to help students to "engage in a dialogical process of enquiry" that complicates students' notions of absolute truth and uncertainty (Sandwell, 2003, p. 172). As mentioned earlier, complicating these thoughts and guiding youth to understand the deep interconnections between the past, present and future is made possible through providing students with opportunities to learn from primary sources. Learning from these tangible textual

representations is regarded as essential in promoting "historical consciousness" or "the awareness of as well as the need to understand profound change in human affairs over time" (Seixas, 2010, p. 127). In other words, historical thinking and building clearer meaning about the world we inhabit "only becomes meaningful with substantive content" (Seixas, 2006, p. 173). Geographic thinking and its applications are similarly rooted in knowledge-based approaches that promote increased intellectual activity through methods of assessment, interpretation and construction[39] (Bahbahani & Huynh, 2008, p. 3).

While the philosophies undergirding historical consciousness and critical thinking promote the importance of critical engagement and intellectual rigor, they are unable to honour the integrity of lived experiences and ways of knowing and being that do not seek validation from tangible expressions of life and living alone. Historical consciousness'[40] focus on rational forms of expression that safeguard the need for "Western logic, Western epistemic rule, to organize and make sense of the past" (Cutrara, 2018, p. 257) deny spaces for onto-epistemological sensibilities that do not depend on rationality as most significant to connecting with the past. Samantha Cutrara (2018) applies Dwayne Donald's (2009) logics of the fort[41] to how Peter Seixas's (2006)

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[39] Bahbhani & Huyn (2008) extrapolate six portals of geographic thinking that are based on Peter Seixas' notions of historical thinking. Their approaches are designed to transform factual geographical explorations into matters of analysis (Bahbhani & Huyn, 2008, p. 3). The critical engagement inherent in these renditions of geographic thinking also underscore the importance of examining the "accuracy, precision, and reliability of various data sources" (p.4).

[40] Please note that not all interpretations and enactments of historical thinking and historical consciousness address matters of 'rigour', lived experiences and epistemological difference in the same way. For example den Heyer (2011) and den Heyer's (2019) pieces offer alternative interpretations of historical thinking.

[41] Dwayne Donald (2009) shares that "the fort, as a colonial artifact, represents a particular four-cornered version of imperial geography that has been transplanted on lands perceived as empty and unused. If we consider the curricular and pedagogical consequences of adhering to the myth that forts facilitated the civilization of the land and brought civilization to the Indians, we can see that the histories and experiences of Aboriginal peoples are necessarily positioned as outside the

Benchmarks of Historical Thinking positions approaches to understanding the past in universalized ways. This view posits that an epistemic "common ground" is required to make connections between the past and present. Cutrara (2018) shares,

> Historical thinking plays with this dialectic by denying the presence of Indigenous epistemologies as legitimate ways for understanding the past, while also demonstrating the need for Western logic, Western epistemic rule, to organize and make sense of the past. Seixas uses disciplinary benchmarks to create a fort around "appropriate" history and leaves outside the fort understandings of the past that may direct one's gaze elsewhere. By denying the space for Indigenous epistemologies in the study of the Canadian past, Seixas perpetuates the belief that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people "inhabit separate realities" and have no common ground for speaking the past to the present (Donald, 2012, p. 4).

These notions reveal compulsions for a unified epistemic approach to address our shared histories. Such ways, however, ironically override consciousness in a deeper sense.

This dissertation addresses how the false universalism of liberalism reaffirms self-enclosed and intellectualized curricular and pedagogical approaches that miss notions of consciousness that promote connectivity with self, others and nature (Morris, 2002; Shahjahan, 2005). The etymology of consciousness explicates the term as "internal awareness" and the "state of being aware of what passes in one's own mind" (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2019). The absence of cultivating "inner awareness" as integral to honouring historical consciousness is concerning because it closes

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concern of Canadians" (Donald, 2009). This reductive Canadian national narrative weighs heavily on the consciousness of Aboriginal peoples and Canadians, and continues to influence the ways in which we speak to each other about history, identity, citizenship and the future (Francis, 1997; Saul, 2008) (p. 3).

off the generative potential of learning from embodied knowledges, our kinship with human beings and our more than human relatives, varied lived experiences and different ways of knowing and being. The genesis of an anthropocentric curriculum distances ourselves from transformative sources of meaning making and renewal. What is at stake in curricular and pedagogical practices that forget these relationships is the removal of a deepened connectivity that is needed to open up non-assimilatory expressions of difference that can guide living with greater integrity and balance. I venture to say that the absence of consciousness in deeper ways promotes imbalance on curricular and pedagogical landscapes because the erasure of generative experiences of difference makes people unwell (Some, 1994).

However, connecting more deeply is continuously challenged because ontologies that are not enshrined in Western Enlightenment logics are treated as "alternatives" and troubling objects of insertion within a curricular imagination that espouses liberal ethics and value systems. In order to safeguard a universal episteme, seemingly non-Western sensibilities are viewed as hindrances to a universal epistemic interpretative order and subsequently undermine the depth and what can be learned from "alternative" onto-epistemologies. Maintaining the utility of an overarching interpretive approach also suggests that traumatic historical happenings, must and can be resolved in an immediate sense. Peter Seixas (2010) speaks to the complexities of addressing different histories and perspectives in curricular and pedagogical ways. Seixas (2010) shares,

> Once Indigenous ways of knowing are actually a part of the textbook's way of knowing, then who will be able to object to histories based on Islamic cosmology, Biblical fundamentalism and Haitain voodoo? What does it mean, then, to teach students to think historically, in a way that is appropriate for a multicultural society, pedagogically sound, and true to the most current practices in the discipline?" p. 136)

Seixas' (2010) word choices of what is "appropriate for multicultural society" and "most current practices in the discipline" indicate a particular rendering of how difference ought to be represented and what is considered suitable difference in a Liberal Canadian context. His words also suggest an uncompromising tone with regards to honouring other sensibilities and practices that are needed to more deeply address difference. In an epistemic sense, the "insertion" or centering of difference appears overwhelming, exhausting and impossible to achieve. A nuanced holistic approach to addressing differences and similarities within Aboriginal Studies 30 and other curricular and pedagogical contexts is what this dissertation seeks to address. The ethical implications of the underlying philosophies that inform historical thinking, historical consciousness and multiple perspectives are deeply concerning and require much attention within the purview of Alberta Education's proposed concept-based Social Studies curriculum re-design efforts.

## Chapter Two:
## Research Question and Explanation

This dissertation explores the question: **What is the curricular and pedagogical significance of holism[42] in deepening understandings of difference?** *Significance* in this

[42] It is important to note that holism does not have a singular definition and is guided by different philosophies and practices. Holistic philosophies can be understood in connection to the plethora of global wisdom traditions that offer, in their own ways, contrasting ways to live wisely and well (Donald, 2009; Smith, 2006; Smith 2014). Global wisdom traditions, while sharing certain common principles, espouse contrasting interpretations and are honoured and enacted in unique

research question reflects the hermeneutic intent and nature of this holistic-guided inquiry. David Jardine (1992) explains that interpretive inquiry reveals that there is "truth to be had" (p. 55) and understanding to be acquired within the "unmethodical incidents of our lives" (p. 55). I do not approach this question with a sense of clarity or finality, but formed it from my already established connections with Sufic and Cree sensibilities. These threads of familiarity are significant; this is the place where interpretation, reinterpretation, and new understandings emerge (pp. 55-56). In other words, significance in an interpretive sense is not to be understood in an enclosed way, limited to isolated and univocal renderings of an initiation of an event; rather, it invites a "re-opening to new, generative instances" (p. 56).

The second part of this research question invites an attentiveness to how holistic insights can open up generative interpretations and enactments of difference that most current curricular and pedagogical approaches overlook. Holistic teachings do not regard the simultaneous presence of difference and similarities as a problem to be resolved; rather, these sensibilities regard difference and similarities as necessary for life to go on. The most salient point to address here is that balance is lost when sameness is emphasized, and difference is continuously narrativized as problematic. These generative notions of difference are not limited to the co-existence of human

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ways. It is also necessary to locate holistic sensibilities within the purview of religion and spirituality because many individuals conceptualize holism in this regard. Experiences and conceptualizations of religion and spirituality are also highly subjective and cannot be defined in monolitihic ways (Zinnbauer et al., 1997, pp. 549-550). Zinnbauer et al., 1997 share that "[d]espite the great volume of work that has been done, little consensus has been reached about what the terms actually mean." (p. 549). It is not the intent of this dissertation to locate specific meanings of religiosity or spirituality. This dissertation is not seeking a cogent way to define holism or specific principles of holism; to do so would reduce the meaning of how individuals connect with these insights from their own sensibilities. I will however, riff off the holistic insights of former Aboriginal Studies 30 student participants and my subjective experiences with holism to assist with opening up these understandings and their utility in curricular and pedagogical contexts.

beings but also honour our more-than-human relatives. This dissertation draws upon the Cree teachings of *miyo-wahkohtowin*, *miyo- wîcêhtowin* and the four directions teachings as sources of inspiration for life and living. Sufic philosophies, as espoused in Qur'anic teachings and Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi's poetry, explicate the concepts of *Tawhid*[43], *Ayat*[44], *Zahir*[45], *Batin*[46] and *Ashraf al-Makhluqat*[47]. These teachings inspire the recovery of self and deepened expressions of connectivity that Canadian Liberal Multiculturalism cannot address. Liberal philosophies that guide multicultural policy and discourse are commonly regarded as the best approach to life and accounting for difference in modern societies such as Canada. Subsequently, this inquiry directs new approaches to difference that do not rely on Canadian Liberal Multiculturalism. For these reasons, this study is also necessary for the decentering of the liberal monopoly on what it means to be human (D. Donald, Personal Communication, December, 2018).

Holism, as expressed in this dissertation, is directly tied to promoting ethical forms of relationality[48] with self, nature and others. Learning from the insights that flow from sacred

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[43] *Tawhid* refers to the unity and numerical oneness of Creation as connected through a Creator.
[44] *Ayat* literally refers to Qur'anic "verses" but also refers to the ways in which human beings and other life forms are reminded of their connectivity and mutual survival. In this regard, *Ayat* translates as the "signs" that remind us that our existence is in fact not-self enclosed. Shifts from night to day, the movement of the wind and rising of the sun are regarded as miracles.
[45] *Zahir* is one of the 99 Qur'anic names of Allah (God). Zahir refers to that which is manifest. *Zahir* also refers to material existence in connection to *Batin* (that which is hidden and spiritual).
[46] *Batin* is one of the 99 Qur'anic names of *Allah* (God). *Batin* refers to that which is hidden and spiritual. The name beckons all life forms to address that which is formless as sources of meaning and inspiration. Qur'anic holistic philosophies, express the importance of maintaining a balance between *Zahir* and *Batin*.
[47] *Ashraf al-Makhluqat* refers to the Qur'anic concept in which human beings are bestowed with the lofty responsibility of ensuring that Mother Earth and all life forms are honoured and taken care of in reciprocal and restorative ways. The idea is that since human beings are gifted with a deepened rational faculty that they are most responsible for ensuring the continuity of balance and harmony on earth.
[48] This dissertation draws upon and is guided by Dwayne Donald's (2010; 2012; 2015) conceptions and practices of ethical relationality as espoused by Cree and Blackfoot philosophies. Donald

ecological teachings, as this dissertation posits, can guide a recovery of self and help us to remember that we are not separate from the life ecologies that sustain us but rather a part of it. Guidance from these embodied approaches offers ways to restore balance with ourselves, nature and other life forms and resultingly, live and remember differently. Current curricular and pedagogical approaches that uphold historical thinking and historical consciousness as the best ways to honour difference, unfortunately do not address a deepened relationality that is needed. It is essential to understand the "colonial epistemological tradition of individuality" (Cutrara, 2018, p. 266). This approach to history and human experience does not address oral traditions, embodied understandings, holistic traditions and sacred ecological teachings in ways that connect the recipients of these insights in more interconnected ways. Such approaches highlight "the singular human actor" as the sole arbiter in navigating life and living in a complex cosmopolitan world (Cutrara, 2018, p. 266). The promotion of a singular human actor undeniably informs the ways in which students engage with different onto-epistemological traditions, multiple perspectives, and shared traumatic histories. The absence of other life forms and our dependence on them for our

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(2015) shares: "Ethical relationality is an ecological understanding of organic connectivity that becomes readily apparent to us as human beings when we honour the sacred ecology that supports all life and living. Thus, ethical relationality describes an enactment of ecological imagination wherein our thoughts and actions are guided by the wisdom of sacred ecological insights. Ethical relationality does not deny difference nor does it promote assimilation of it. Rather, ethical relationality supports the conceptualization of difference in ecological terms as necessary for life and living to continue on. It guides us to seek [a] deeper understanding of how our different histories, memories, and experiences position us in relation to each other" (p. 1). Donald (2010) emphasizes that it is necessary to place these differences at the forefront if we seek to act on the basis of these relationships. These teachings emphasize that we have a responsibility to each other in Creation and that our existence would not be possible without the natural environment. Elder Bob Cardinal (2014) explains this through a "teaching about the four kinds of water: salt, fresh, rain, and the water inside our bodies. When we are born, we are blessed with the water from our mothers. Our lives start with a blessing from water". This teaching reminds us that we would not be alive if it were not for the blessing of water.

mutual survival informs how we think, live together and what we remember. Dwayne Donald (2010) emphasizes that how we think about a relationship has a direct bearing upon the ways in which we honour the relationship in question. If our worldviews do not address what gives us life and connects us all, how might we then do the work to more deeply address our shared historical traumas and honouring the Truth and Reconciliation's Calls to Action[49] in more meaningful ways? How might we also promote the enactment of meaningful engagements of difference that do not merely villainize those who are seemingly racist and dishonouring of social justice sensibilities? The over reliance on ideologies and philosophies that reinscribe individualism and rely on purely epistemic approaches to resolve our tensionalities in the places we inhabit unfortunately perpetuates imbalance. This dissertation posits that we desperately require guidance from more deeply ethically relational ways that can inspire creativity, healing and the continuity of life. Cree and Sufic sensibilities, while not the only approaches to life and living, have much to offer in curricular and pedagogical contexts that advocate for and promise a deepened commitment to non-pejorative renderings of difference.

**Guidance from métissage and Maulana Rumi: Approaches to understanding and learning from difference**

I have often struggled to articulate the many facets of my being. These tensions, although not limited to educational institutions, were most prevalent in formal educational contexts. Growing up, I found it rather difficult to comprehend the constructions of myself as a woman, Canadian, Pakistani, or Muslim. Why was it difficult for my peers, friends, and teachers to relate to me in ways that honoured the different parts of my being? Why was I often constructed as

[49] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was established in 2008. The intention of the commission was to reflect the experiences of Indian Residential School survivors. The TRC's "Calls to Action" (TRC, 2015) express the ways in which reconciliation can be enacted on various Canadian institutional landscapes.

'conservative' because of my Muslim upbringing? This puzzled me, especially when friends who had known me for years and with whom I had close relationships expressed these sentiments. I often found myself thinking that I needed to justify my existence to others on the premise of being thoroughly acquainted with dominant epistemology and speaking to Islam's guidance on solely 'academic' terms. In other words, I felt that I had to be doubly equipped to survive and have a chance to defend Islam. I truthfully found such an approach exhausting and unjust. I later realized that speaking about my being on the terms of dominant epistemology contributed to the problems that I wanted to resolve. In a sense, I was invalidating myself and others in the process. I was undermining what guides me the most: Islam's message of holism. I was not attending to my parents' and grandparents' teachings of balancing *Zahir* and *Batin*, which was largely in response to the feeling that there was no space for holism in school. I responded to these circumstances by not fully embracing Ismailism within the context of my formal educational experiences. I simply did not know how to proceed with striking a balance in settings where connections to Spirit were frowned upon. Again, these experiences made me feel that I could only be one thing if I wanted to materially survive, complete my education, and belong on my schooling landscapes. This thinking was contrary to the Aga Khan' s advice that I had heard while growing up. How was I living ethically if I disconnected myself from my faith in particular contexts? How was my own imbalance negatively impacting the ways in which I came into relationships with others?

In the land of Karachi, Pakistan, a place for which I have deep love and affection because it connects me to my grandparents and their experiences of living *Zahir* and *Batin* and has largely shaped how my parents raised my sister and I, I also (not so ironically) faced claims of who I ought to be. In this setting my construction as 'Canadian' and 'Western' led others to assume that I was obviously divorced from Islam's roots. In fact, many Pakistani friends and

peers who were born in Pakistan have questioned my abilities in drawing upon Sufic teachings as philosophical underpinnings for this dissertation. They have asked , "how can you possibly know anything about Sufic *tariqahs*? You were born in Canada." Although I found such questions disappointing, their assumptions encouraged me to further ponder what was missing from these responses. Contemplating these thoughts has been an ongoing process that likely began when I was in kindergarten and in the midst of feeling excluded for not partaking in ham with my friends in class. My reflections were heightened in numerous contexts when the beings of other-than-Canadian, other-than-Western and Christian, and other-than-Sunni Muslim echoed throughout historical conversations on secondary school and university landscapes. I grew mentally and emotionally tired of being storied as not enough of something or perhaps lacking. As previously mentioned, I approached these frustrations within the parameters of what I understood as acceptable in secular societal contexts. I spoke to identity politics through its historical manifestations, power structures, and the relationship between identity management and economic expansion. Although these approaches helped to address the historical roots of the racialization of Islam and Muslims, for example, they remained framed by a liberal ethic that could not interpret the holistic sensibilities that guide the lives of many. Very significantly, these approaches were unable to speak to the ways in which connections to Spirit "lifts up"[50] many individuals in their daily lives. I had been longing to explore ways in which I could articulate what guides me without undermining and managing for others their own sensibilities and lived

[50] Elder Bob Cardinal has often offered guidance in various contexts that speaks to connecting with that which "lifts us up" in our lives. I recall him sharing these profound words during a community event with Muslim youth and non-Muslim community members. The gathering took place during the aftermath of the Quebec mosque shooting in January 2017. I interpreted his words as a loving reminder of the importance of inner strength and engaging in practices that strengthen our connection with our kinship relational networks.

experiences.

It is interesting that I was able to connect with traditions that I felt had been missing from the majority of my formal educational experiences at the University of Alberta beginning with the completion of my Master of Education degree. Through caring guidance and trust, I began to realize that I could in fact speak, write and research from the place of Ismailism and the teachings of other wisdom traditions. I began to feel freer once I could speak from my embodied sensibilities. I witnessed layers of separation gradually being stripped away from myself and others during this time period. I started to realize that committing myself to the most challenging work of all, turning inward and working on a daily basis to remain as grounded as possible, was absolutely essential in improving my relationships with self and others. This work was also necessary if I wanted to remain committed to a life of connectivity that would anchor survival beyond the material.

As I stumbled and continued to make my way through these learnings, I struggled to identify a *tariqah*, or pathway, upon which I could apply these learnings in curricular and pedagogical contexts. I repeatedly told myself that I could not carry out this research in a framework that was fundamentally disconnected and did not fully address and honour what makes life possible in deeper ways. I was searching for an ethic that would give voice to the deep meaning that is housed within and quite often overlooked as a source of guidance and truth seeking. I was seeking an ethic that had the courage not to surrender difference for the sake of phantasmagoric ideas of unified sameness. I pondered conceptions of Interpretative Inquiry and Narrative Inquiry but did not feel satisfied. Although I did not realize it at the time, I was searching for more nuanced ways to explore embodied understandings and relationality. Again, I did not want holism to become an add-on to the work that I wanted to do. Holism needed to

undergird my inquiry. I did not know how to proceed and turned towards Ismailism for guidance.

As I revisit these experiences, I am reminded of an excerpt from a speech by Aga Khan IV: "[i]n acknowledging the immensity of the Divine, we will also come to acknowledge our human limitations, the incomplete nature of human understanding. In that light, the amazing diversity of Creation itself can be seen as a great gift to us" (Aga Khan Development Network, 2010, The Public Mindset section, para. 17 -18). These poignant words remind me that the ways we think, live and act ought not be confined to anthropocentric notions of existence. Living in such self-enclosed ways is dangerous because it renders invisible the gifts that we have been bestowed with that promote generativity. There is much to learn from other life forms and the laws they follow. Such insights guided me to remember that Spirit is everywhere and that difference is necessary to experience and enact deepened expressions of connectivity.

In the midst of these experiences, with a sense of fleeting awareness, confusion, and joy, I returned to métissage. I do not believe that it was a coincidence that I was reintroduced to métissage while I was sitting with these tensions. At the end of Fall 2013, I helped to edit a video that explained the research sensibility of métissage while I worked at the Education Learning Commons. This was a blessing in many ways. I was reminded that I could speak about difference in its various manifestations, through sensibilities from different places, while also showing connectivity. The ethic of métissage reminded me of Ismailism's caution about refraining from separating *Zahir* and *Batin* and forsaking a balance between the mental, emotional, spiritual and physical. In particular, métissage helped me to revisit Ismaili teachings and Ismailism's conceptions of interpretation as interweaving different elements to better relate to myself and other life forms. I also recognized that métissage embodies the principles of continuous movement and change in very similar ways to Islam: Creation is always changing and becoming.

This holistic inquiry initially sought to draw upon métissage as a research sensibility and practice that could best problematize Canadian Liberal Multiculturalism's positioning as the default approach to interpreting and enacting difference. This commitment shifted as I became more deeply enmeshed in this work particularly through learning from my research participants and circling back to shared experiences and new wonderings. The reinterpretation of former experiences and engagement with sacred ecological practices alongside my research participants summoned a shift towards honouring what sustains us and is responsible for our survival beyond the scope of material security. Our insights brought forth the understanding that the energy that flows from connecting with the enmeshment of our relations links us all whether we recognize it or not. Learning from and experiencing sacred ecological insights was instrumental in also bringing forth this dissertation's unexpected focus on shared healing as an entry point to nurture deepened experiences of connectivity.

Similary, Jalaluddin Rumi's poetry expresses connecting with difference as an ethical act that makes individual and collective transformation possible. Rumi was born in 1201 in Balkh, Afghanistan, during the Persian Empire. Rumi and his family moved to Konya in Turkey when he was a child in order to escape the invasion of Mongol Armies. Rumi received his religious education from his father, Bahauddin Walad, and later on, from his father's friend, Sayyid Burhaneddin of Balkh. Burhaneddin had prophesized that Rumi's union with a Divine friend (Shams Tabriz) would deepen Rumi's spirituality and strengthen his relationship with Allah (Dunn et al., 2000, p. 10). This friendship guided Rumi to further turn inwards as a way to experience Divine union. Rumi's expounding of Qur'anic concepts and teachings, through poetry and stories, is a profound source of inspiration that informs this dissertation. I draw upon Rumi's poetry as way to help bring forth deepened understandings of connectivity.

I was first exposed to Rumi's poetry as a child while in *Jamatkhana*. His poetry was shared to help us deepen our understanding of Allah and all our relations. My parents also drew upon Rumi's poetry and other mystical Muslim poets including, Rumi's beloved companion, Shams Tabriz and Rabia al-Basri. Rumi's teachings had renewed importance for me following the commencement of my doctoral work in 2012. He serves as a guide and a reminder of what we can be if we commit ourselves to the acceptance of change and the possibility of transformation in our lives. He is an example of an individual who continuously strived to better himself and trust in his inner voice in the ways that Prophet Muhamad (PBUH[51]) did (Ali; 2017; Barks, 2003; Safi, 2018c, Virani, 2002). His interpretations of Qur'anic verses, teachings and his relationship with nature in connection to Qur'anic teachings express the manifestation of differences as gifts of Divine providence from Creator. The Qur'anic connections that I evidence during the subsequent literature review and métissage stanzas as undergirding Rumi's poetry is intentional to help us acquire a deeper understanding of the words and the context that Rumi emerges from (Safi, 2018c). Sharing in this manner also opens up the ways in which Qur'anic teachings can guide curricular and pedagogical practices that summon a renewed attentiveness to self and other.

[51] PBUH refers to the Arabic phrase 'alayhi as-salam' and literally translates as "may peace be upon him". This phrase is used out of respect for the prophets of Islam.

## Chapter Three:
## Review of the Literature

The proceeding literature review explores how liberal philosophies are situated and drawn upon within a Canadian context. The literature review commences with an examination of the genesis of liberal logics, as enshrined in Western ways of knowing and being, and their representation as the best way to live. These explorations will be developed in connection to how liberal philosophies position themselves as arbiters of equity and champions of difference and diversity through examining Canadian multiculturalism. The spirit and intent of this segment of the literature review is to address the false universalism of liberalism. Liberal philosophies' paradoxical proclamation for encouraging unity through diversity limits expressions of the complexity that naturally arises from difference. These insights will be further elaborated through a discourse analysis of Social Studies and Aboriginal Studies Programmes of Studies; each POS will be

examined on the basis of the extent which their undergirding philosophies align with or reject liberal notions of difference. The purpose of this discourse analysis is to evidence the possibility to learn from deeper manifestations of difference that promote lasting connectivity and more ethical expressions of relationality that encourage the conditions necessary for survival. Cree and Sufic holistic teachings will also be explored for how they can guide curricula development and pedagogical practices in ways that are not reliant on the 'self-enclosed' nature of perspectival renderings of difference and historical consciousness. This segment of the literature review also seeks to open up contrasting interpretations of holism and its manifestation on curricular landscapes. The implications of these insights will be later bolstered by discussions surrounding teaching quality standards 3 and 6 (Alberta Education, 2016), responding to the TRC's "Calls to Action" (TRC, 2015) and increasing distrust and fear of that which is different in local, national, international and global contexts.

**Concealing Interconnectivity: The roots of separation and its manifestation in our schools**

Selling the myth that the West[52] has been the ultimate producer and possessor of history was necessary to Europe's project of modernity via colonization (Willinsky,1998,p.115).

[52] Eric R. Wolf (1982) explicated the concept of the West in his book *Europe and the People Without History.* Wolf shares that:

> We have been taught, both inside the classroom and outside of it, that there exists an entity called the West, and that one can think of this West as a society and civilization independent of and in opposition to other societies and civilizations. Many of us even grew up believing that this West has a genealogy, according to which ancient Greece begat Rome, Rome begat Christian Europe, Christian Europe begat the Renaissance, the Renaissance the Enlightenment, the Enlightenment political democracy and the industrial revolution. Industry, crossed with democracy, in turn yielded the United States, embodying the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness (Cited in Hobson, 2004, p. 1).

Positioning the West as the arbiter of history has materialized as a "common-sense historical understanding" (p. 116). Such positioning alongside notions of progress as deeply connected to a "self-conscious idea of Human Freedom" created a structure that excluded those who did not identify themselves with the Spirit of Freedom from history (p. 116). Willinsky's readings of Hegel indicated that those who did not obtain the knowledge of that Spirit were essentially not free (p. 118). Living without the Spirit meant living without freedom. This designation associated particular nations with the failure to participate in progress (p. 118). The construction of freedom in a singular way differentiated particular nations and peoples as either belonging to progress or lagging behind Europe. Creating division in a way that allotted Europe "positional superiority" enabled "European identity to locate itself as the arbiters of history" (Said, 1978, pp. 6-7). For these reasons, anything that happened prior to Europe's hegemonic rise was storied as void. Said emphasized that Europe's "positional superiority" gave Europe the "cultural hegemony" that it needed to maintain division (p. 7). Such a construction of history produced a linear perspective of time and historical representation that reinforced the universalization of Western epistemologies (p. 7). Although the names of these logics have changed over time and place, they function in similar ways today. They ensure that inclusion and tolerance become possible only when the cultured other is regarded as a good cultured other or obediently follows statist interests. Alain Badiou (2001) explains:

> Our suspicions are first aroused when we see that the self-declared apostles of ethics and of the 'right to difference' are clearly horrified by any vigorously sustained difference. For them, African customs are barbaric, Muslims are dreadful, the Chinese are totalitarian, and so on. As a matter of fact, this celebrated 'other' is acceptable only if he is a good other- which is to say what, exactly, if not the same as us? Respect for differences, of course!

> But on the condition that the different be parliamentary-democratic, pro free-market economics, in favour of freedom of opinion, feminism, the environment. . . . That is to say: I respect differences, but only, of course, in so far as that which differs also respects, just as I do, the said differences. (p. 24)

Although Badiou considers difference unethical and indicates that ethics begins with sameness, his assertion succinctly captures the paradox inherent in liberal celebrations of difference. Canadian multiculturalism presents itself as inclusive, but it assimilates particular differences so that those regarded as illiberal can conform to acceptable expressions of difference. Thus, the construction of categories such as visible minorities or ethnic groups, for example, conceals multiculturalism's assimilationist pretense and maliciously obscures the management of onto-epistemological particularities.

**Liberalism and the False Promise of Equality via Canadian Citizenship**

Central to the recognition that multicultural policy and discourse do not account for difference in deeper ways is the examination of the notion of equal opportunity as a foundational tenet of contemporary liberalism. For all Canadian citizens to be equal, the premise is that they ought to "have access to the same goods, services, and institutions" (Turner, 2006, p. 23). Liberalism, however, is rather selective regarding whom it gifts its benefits (K. D. Smith, 2009, p. 12). In this scenario, freedom and equality are accessible only if they support Euro-Canadian conceptions of nationhood and progress (p. 22). This is particularly troubling when individuals who subscribe to non-Western epistemological and ontological orientations desire recognition on their own terms, but at times feel coerced by multicultural policy to define themselves in relation to the Canadian nation-state (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005, p. 598). Recognition of Indigenous people's nationhood, for example, within Canadian liberalism obscures Canada's colonial legacy

because liberalism does not account for pre-settler histories. This is because national citizenship models based on sameness do not attend to Canada's colonial histories or to sensibilities that regard holism as a way of life. As a result, Canadian liberalism cannot comprehend Indigenousness because liberalism is premised on axioms of individualism and promotes progress as economic growth, whereas Indigenous epistemologies place greater emphasis on collectivism and following circular notions of time (D. Donald, Personal Communication, February 2013).

Canadian nationhood is rooted in economic progress. Those who do not espouse liberal values are distanced from the material privileges that are associated with adopting liberal ways. Belongingness is intimately connected with furthering Canada's economic interests. Individuals who challenge these frameworks are often threatened with suffering and destruction (Alfred, 2009; Alfred & Corntassel, 2005; Dussel, 1993; Dussel, 1995; Lawrence & Dua, 2011; Saul, 2008; K. D. Smith, 2009). The presentation of suffering and destruction becomes a reality for many who refuse to define themselves in relation to the Canadian nation-state. Canadian liberalism disguises itself as ensuring freedom and equality through the provision of benefits to those who comply.

**Canadian Identity Construction via Historical Erasure**

Unraveling liberalism helps us to understand that multicultural policy entered Canada as a means both to cope with difference and to ensure that Canadians would work together and help Canada to become a competing and thriving global economic power (Bannerji, 2000; Coulthard, 2001; Egan, 2011). Our "incapacity to accept who we are" (Saul, 2008, p. xii) ensures that the Canadian nation-state will maintain its guise of racial harmony and national unity. Saul emphasizes that the absence of such acceptance depends on persuading Indigenous peoples and, I would add, many others to identify with the dominating Canadian colonial structure (p. 32): "The reproduction of a colonial structure of dominance like Canada's rests on its ability to entice Indigenous peoples

to come to identify, either implicitly or explicitly, with the profoundly asymmetrical and non-reciprocal forms of recognition either imposed or granted" (p. 32). One can infer that Saul's assertion speaks to the prevalence of the politics of recognition inherent in liberal identity constructions. I suggest that the erasure of Indigenous lived experiences and sensibilities in Canadian history and the presentation of Canadian history as beginning with settlement on an empty land is intimately connected to Charles's Taylor's (1994) dialogical presentation of identity construction (p. 34). Youth are continually indoctrinated into adopting the Grand Narrative of Canadian history, which blatantly denies the fact that settlers infiltrated occupied territory and acquired these lands unethically for the purposes of economic growth and financial accumulation via natural-resource allocation and selling (St. Denis, 2007; James, & Mack, 2011). The construction of identity through multicultural policy forces many youths to define themselves in relation to the Canadian nation-state, which is dangerous because it often produces distorted images of individuals and self-loathing when those in question are led to believe that their different ways of knowing and being are wrong.

**Conceptions of Liberal Multiculturalism in Canada**

Contemporary readings of Canadian perceptions of liberal multiculturalism indicate favorable perceptions of the utility of multiculturalism and its success in creating a united Canada (Bannerji, 2001; Hussain, 2013; St. Denis, 2007; Simpson et al., 2011). Many Canadians view multicultural policy as friendly and benevolent and find it strange to discover critical readings of multicultural policy. Multicultural approaches to difference are considered favorable because they are framed as universally beneficial. The liberal logics that undergird multicultural policy are obscured and present a position of cultural neutrality, which is interpreted as a promising option for those who favor freedom and equality. For these reasons, multicultural policy is typically

understood by Canadians as aligned with liberal values of freedom and equality. It is on these terms that multicultural policy is not considered problematic because the teaching is that anyone against multiculturalism as a fundamental Canadian value must also be against freedom and equality. According to this view, multiculturalism ensures that "people will set aside their differences and come together as one" (Lundgren, 1995, p. 76). Such positionalities assume that multiculturalism has attained "racial and ethnic harmony" (Simpson et al., 2011, p. 287). In relation to multiculturalism as presenting the simulacrum of Canadian unity, Simpson et al. share:

> This highly accessible myth is subscribed to by a range of people living in Canada-not only by whites or settlers-and is so normalized that it is invisible (Mackey 2002; Henry and Tator 2006; Thobani 2007). It is a systematically taught and rigorously built set of beliefs, and so consistently and thoroughly asserted that most of those who take its investment are unable to see its construction or even its existence. (p. 287)

People with such perceptions do not understand themselves as living in a racist society, and as a result consider difference as a cultural problem (Simpson et al., 2011). Utilizing "ascribed differences, including race, culture, ethnicity, religion, and immigration status" (p. 288) facilitates the production and survival of the politics of recognition, which encourages the production of categories that perpetuate fixed representations of individuals. These categories suggest that we are already aware of who that person or group is in relation to the Canadian nation-state (Bannerji, 2001,p. 546). Contrariwise, some contemporary debaters on multiculturalism insist that we are perhaps too multicultural and that we cannot compromise on certain values as Canadians (Gagnon, 2013). Other views are that the celebration and tolerance of the difference that multiculturalism breeds extremism in Canada (Hergesheimer, 2006) and that we ought to reflect on how we have

not attained tolerance and should focus on the notions of what we hold in common while promoting difference (Hrushetska, 2013).

Central to an understanding of contrasting receptions of Canadian multiculturalism is the examination of how it is thoroughly informed by liberal philosophy with a special emphasis on secular values. As I explained previously, historical interpretations of liberalism indicate that "the state was necessary to and had a duty to promote individual autonomy but also the flourishing of a specific people with their own culture, a nation" (Kymlicka, 1995; as cited in Modood, 2013, p. 21), alongside the desire to bring into being a singular people to promote religious freedom and tolerance via the separation of church and state (p. 23). Such a desire is rooted in the premise that coming together is possible only by engineering a strong bond of identification via an imagined nation and nationality (Taylor, 2007, p. 90). In this scenario "the state expresses no ethical or religious view but is scrupulously neutral between all possible views" (Modood, 2013, p. 59). However, proclaiming religious neutrality within the Canadian nation-state is fundamentally flawed because it denies Canada's legal and political citizenship roots in Christianity. Smith (2005) emphasizes that "it must be believed that the colonial power asserted and expressed through the take-over of the land is deeply connected to a teleological vision of the world as expressed by a Christian God" (p.175). The idea here is that other ways of knowing and being, that view the land as sacred, were displaced by colonial 'civilizing' efforts. Liberalism is thus rooted in colonial experience and the need for Europeans to rework themselves in light of all the new information on distant lands and peoples that they were encountering. The building and conceptualizing of the Canadian nation and nationality is intimately informed by this reworking. The erasure of other ways of life and living was needed to affirm the liberal ethos. The forsaking of difference to uphold a liberal ethic is deeply troubling when addressing holistic sensibilities. In order to enshrine liberal

ideologies, the state thus had the power to manage holistic ways of knowing and being and the extent to which individuals prescribing to these traditions could connect with them. This management perpetuated and continues to promote imbalance.

**Curricular Cases: Social Studies 30: The Simulacrum of Accounting for Difference**

The liberal values implicated in the building of the Canadian nation and nationality thoroughly inform curriculum documents in Alberta. These documents promote a certain kind of belonginness and acceptance that is liberal in form and function. The point is that while some individuals in Canada feel intensely connected to the nation and nationality, others do not experience connectivity in this regard. I wonder about the ways in which a liberal default positioning silences other forms of being that are not rooted in nationality. As I stated earlier, the Social Studies POS's framing of difference is concerning because Alberta Education approaches difference in a singular way. Although it does not name liberal logics as the primary operating logic in its conceptualization of identity, inclusion, and diversity in the POS, the values that it espouses as Canadian and the prevalence of equity, dignity and respect and the "management of and acquisition of resources" all indicate liberalism (pp. 1-13). In this inquiry I will expose the limitations of and the ways in which liberal philosophy promotes problematic understandings of difference in school settings.

**Challenges to Liberalism: Accounting for Aboriginal Perspectives**

I recall my frustrations with using the texts *Understanding of Ideologies* (Colless et al., 2010) and Perspectives on Ideology (Fielding, 2009) when I taught Social Studies 30-2[53].

[53] Social Studies 30-2 is a senior high provincially mandated course in Alberta. The course explores conceptions of identity, belonging and inclusion through an interdisciplinary lens. While the philosophical foundations of Social 30-2 are identical to Social 30-1, the Social 30-2 curriculum has linguistic differences that are meant to promote greater accessibility to students, for example, who require language supports.

Although the text accounts for histories that are often denied and includes vignettes and powerful stories that might call into question the ways in which Canada is typically storied, the text often inaccurately reflects the ways of being of the individuals it seeks to represent. These inaccurate representations are reinforced by the textbook's setup and beginning of each chapter with a specific learning outcome from the Social Studies POS. Thus the textbook strictly adheres to Alberta Education's outlines. Most strikingly, Colless et al. (2010) discuss for example, many Indigenous people's challenges of liberalism, but do not explore why many Indigenous peoples question the viability and equity that liberalism purports to offer. The authors also emphasize that Aboriginal collective social and cultural knowledge and practices are often invalidated in relation to European-based liberalism and that such realities are "part of the collective memory of many Aboriginal peoples" (p. 246). However, they did not discuss in relation to the ethic of liberalism the lived experiences and realities of the living conditions of many Indigenous peoples or the poor infrastructure and health conditions on particular reserves in Canada and the anxiety over Indigenous self-government (pp. 72-352). For this reason, it is unclear why many Indigenous peoples have contended that liberalism does not represent their ways of knowing and being in the world. Although Colless et al. describe the shared conceptions of Indigenous spirituality as espousing collectivism rather than individualistic orientations, they do not specifically speak to what it means to be a human being and live a good life. I suggest that the absence of such explanations hinders learning from many Indigenous peoples' ontologies and obscures the issue that land and identity for many Indigenous peoples are intimately connected to their spiritual relationship with the land. The failure to meaningfully account for why many Indigenous peoples challenge liberal orientations is not explicit in the *Understanding of Ideologies.* This is because liberal philosophy, which is the textbook's unnamed guiding framework, has been given the

prominence, power and influence as the only way to be and the end goal of human development. Anyone who wishes to live differently from this is considered a threat and in need of fixing.

**Challenges to Liberalism: The Case of Islam**

Religion, Sharia, and Human and Individual Rights

Sometimes human or individual rights and freedoms can be challenged by religious practices. For example, some religious beliefs include the idea that men are superior to women, and that women should therefore be subservient. This is one example of how freedom of religion could conflict with other rights and freedoms guaranteed under a constitution. In such a case, a careful balance between religious laws and laws of the state would have to occur in order to respect both religious freedoms and other rights and freedoms, such as equality.

[In Canada] we not only celebrate differences but we also value the human rights that define the quality of our democratic norms and practice…one obvious fault line, one that we have tended to tip-toe around, is the rights of women in different religious and cultural traditions…

-Janice gross Stein et al. Uneasy partners: Multiculturalism and Rights in Canada

Question to Students: To what extent should the Canadian government accommodate cultural practices, such as that of sharia law, that seem to discriminate against women? Can a balance be struck so that all individual rights and freedoms can be respected? Explain your answer (Colless, et al; 2010, p. 259).

The passage above exemplifies the framing of particular faith traditions as a threat or a problem for liberalism (Colless et al., 2010, pp. 242-246). This segment on religion and liberalism emphasizes the misrepresentation and subsequent invalidation of Islam while simultaneously including Islam via liberal orientations.

This description is troubling because of its presumptuousness and the irony of its ill-informed claims that apparently suggests that liberalism and Islam are incommensurable. The suggestions that some religions regard women as subservient and that 'sharia law' discriminates against women are rather ridiculous. First, the authors of this section express a very limited understanding of Islam, the Qur'an, and Shari'a. Although Shari'a can be problematic for women who live in particular Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia and Iran, this is not to be conflated

with how Shari'a manifests in different places (Aslan, 2014). Shari'a is represented as a codified monolithic law, which it is not. Rather, Shari'a emphasizes ethical conduct and the need to stand behind what is right (Denny, 1994). Although Shari'a can be interpreted in ways that limit the rights of women, particularly in nations where patriarchy reigns and obscures the egalitarian message of the Qur'an, it is inaccurate and dangerous to represent Shari'a only in this way. Secondly, wisdom traditions do not maintain that women are subservient to men. Of course, human interpretation and opportunism can produce such images and ensuing practices. Thirdly, I am unsure about how this vignette conveys Shari'a's limitations of women's rights. No specific reference has been made to the stripping of Muslim women's rights. I consider it subtly malicious that the authors of this section did not refer specifically to Islam and Muslims although the section is clearly about Islam and Muslims. I am also troubled by the nature of the questioning in this section. Clearly, the supposed threat that Islam and Muslims pose to liberalism is based on misconceptions of Islam and extremely narrow perceptions of Shari'a. Such a reading of Islam and Muslims within the context of challenges to liberalism excludes difference and specifically misrepresents the foundational tenets of Islam, which can further exclude Islam and young Muslim students from the Canadian imaginary.

**Aboriginal Studies 30 and Accounting for Difference**

The purpose of this section is to compare Social Studies 30 with Aboriginal Studies 30 to differentiate their conceptualizations as an exemplar of the problem that I am investigating. When I examined the Aboriginal Studies 30 POS (Alberta Education, 2002), I was struck by the extent to which what I believed was lacking in the Social Studies POS was included in both the Aboriginal Studies POS and its accompanying provincially mandated textbook (Kainai Board of Education et al., 2005). My understanding is that Aboriginal Studies 30 addresses the ways in which many

peoples separate the material from the spiritual. The first theme in the Aboriginal Studies POS (Alberta Education, 2002) states:

> Students will examine how Aboriginal peoples are striving toward maintaining and promoting cultures and identities that reflect values based on respect for the laws of nature and a continual pursuit of balance among individuals, the family unit, the larger community and global community. (p. 1)

The theme of balance that is apparent in the outcome resonates throughout the Aboriginal Studies POS and is related to respect for nature, Aboriginal land claims, oral communication, Indigenous cultural identity, and self-determination (pp. 1-28). The Aboriginal Studies 30 POS and the *Contemporary Issues* (Kainai Board of Education et al., 2005) textbook do not directly claim that liberal philosophies are destructive to caring for the land and override respect for the laws of nature. However, the POS and textbook explicate the trauma and destruction that arises when natural laws are violated (pp. 113-161). These explanations reveal the distinction between stewardship of the land and Indigenous interpretations of the relationship with the land. The following excerpt on Indigenous spiritualities and the land perhaps conveys why the question of land in relation to citizenship is both a politically and spiritually contentious matter for many Indigenous peoples.

> *Spirituality and the Land*
>
> *Aboriginal cultures are deeply connected to land. Aboriginal peoples' stories, histories, and traditions are tied to the land of their ancestors. By maintaining a link to that land and its resources, Aboriginal people can retain a connection to their culture. For example, in the Métis culture, land means freedom and autonomy- it is a means to an end. It is what their people have demanded as their right throughout their history as a nation. Land is associated with an independent way of life that is inextricable from other cultural values. In addition, land strengthens culture and provides for their future. A common land base encourages people to live near one another and maintain elements of their culture, such as ceremonies, kinship ties, and language. (Kainai Board of Education et al., 2005, p. 113)*

The passage above indicates that Indigenous spiritualities are a way of life and shows deep connections with the land rather than a relationship of ownership. This is a key distinction not only in relation to Indigenous sacred ecological principles and the interconnectedness of life forms, but also with regard to its contrast with the Social Studies POS's emphasis on "managing the environment and natural resources" (Alberta Education, 2007, pp. 2, 7, 8)

**Multiculturalism as a Canadian Value?**

The contrasting presentation of multiculturalism in *Understanding of Ideologies* (Colless et al., 2010) and *Contemporary Issues* (Kainai Board of Education et al., 2005) is another example that speaks to my question. Whereas *Understanding of Ideologies* conceptualizes multiculturalism as a "Canadian value" and a "government policy" (Colless et al., 2010, p. 352), *Contemporary Issues* questions multiculturalism as the arbiter of difference. The Kainai Board of Education et al. explains that:

> Despite the official policy of multiculturalism, Euro-Canadian values and beliefs dominate the institutions, values, and priorities of Canadian politics, economics, and society. These Euro-Canadian values are believed to reflect those of the majority of the population. Within a Euro-Canadian worldview, the views of the majority take priority over those of minority groups. (p. 150)

The contrast in these perspectives subtly indicates that perhaps Colless et al.'s intent was to account for difference in ways that would not jeopardize "the project of Canadian nation-building" and cause discomfort to those "defined as 'real' and 'true' Canadians" (Mackey, 2002, p. 148). The representation of multiculturalism as an inclusive policy and the hallmark of Canadian identity might indicate, as Donald (2009) suggests, "a certain comfort level with multiculturalism that [many educators] wish to maintain" (p. 341). My readings of the Aboriginal Studies POS in

relation to the Social Studies POS and the accompanying textbooks reveal that if a particular conception of Canadian identity is at stake, it necessitates the false representation of ethical constructions of difference. The idea expressed here is that safeguarding the simulacrum of Canadian identity requires the erasure of other manifestations of difference. Managing difference, as holistic insights convey, is questionable as it takes for granted our kinship relational networks and resultingly interrupts the nurturing of deepened connectivity and balance.

As I have exemplified, the universalized use of liberal multiculturalism as the primary lens through which to focus on difference, in Albertan curricular and pedagogical contexts, curtails our ability to live in ways that honour our enmeshment with kinship relational networks. This is because liberal philosophies regard difference as a problem that requires resolution and reflects self-enclosed notions of life and living that undercut how other life-forms promote the continuation of life. René Descartes' (1641) can help to frame conceptions of self-enclosed ways of living and their manifestations in liberal discourse. Descartes shared that "natural reason" and "absolute certainty" is possible through the human mind (Descartes, 1641, pp. 1-1-1-2). He emphasized that "natural reason" is only possible through separating the mind and body; the mind is associated with that which is provable, effable and tangible. In order words, form is emphasized. Descartes (1641) shares that errors are the realm of the senses and that senses produce doubt (p. 1-6). His focus on doubt is perhaps informed by a desire to identify a certain and fixed understanding of his own nature (p. 1-12). Further, Descartes (1641) regards himself as a "finite substance" (p. 1-16). In his desire for a tangible understanding of being, Descartes (1641) indicates that this longing is rooted in a convenient mode of explaining (p. 1-26). These purist notions of reasoning and living posit that the human mind and self alone can anchor living in reliable and finite ways. Descartes'(1641) positionings of "self-containment is directed by notions of what constitutes a substance (Jardine,

2012, p. 100). Gadamer (1989) noted that "the concept of substance [and its formal logical consort, the principle of pure, uncontaminated identity A = A] is inadequate for historical being and knowledge" (as cited in Jardine, 2012, p. 100). This suggests that a substance needs only itself to exist and brings forth "threat-induced, subjective [and] self-conscious" (p. 100) renderings of experience. The currency of "modern science and its understanding of knowledge of truth" (p. 100) then occludes aesthetic interpretations of experience. The interpretation of being in disconnected ways may encourage an unconscious desire to impose a universal way regarding how individuals ought to live and relate with other life forms (Bourgeault, 2003; D. Donald, personal communication, 2015). This helps us to understand how liberalism promotes and imposes a false universalism.

A failure to connect with self, nature and other life forms in more meaningful ways that inspire a renewed commitment to nurturing the conditions necessary for life to continue is what is at stake if dominant ways of living continue to receive currency in micro and macro contexts. The forgetting of meaning in this regard promotes imbalance. While the efforts of multiple perspectives and historical consciousness are well-intended, they are informed by liberal philosophies which silence and undermine the importance of lived experiences, embodied knowing and living in ways that attend to our kinship relational networks. It is dangerous to ignore these deep sources of connectivity as they guide the ways in which many individuals live their lives. Remembering these relationships and living and acting and ways that are not divorced from the wisdom that flows from sacred-ecological insights can help to safeguard our individual and collective well-being as we navigate greater uncertainty with regards to increasing xenophobia and fear of deeper sources of difference. Sacred ecological notions of difference can remind us that difference is not merely an epistemological category that requires management and strategic incorporation, but rather can

meaningfully inform our thoughts and actions; learning and enacting difference can thus be understood as an ethical act.

**Difference as an Ethical Act: Treaty Relationship and learning from Cree and Sufic Philosophies**

My conceptions of difference are not limited to secular notions of accounting for difference on the terms of social justice, as anchored by human rights and agency, nor are they governed by statist expectations of unity that are couched in furthering Canada's economic and political goals. My commitments to difference are also not informed by liberal notions of pluralism, diversity and inclusion. The holistic message of Islam and its emphasis that life is brought into being because of the different attributes that flow through a unifying Creator deeply guide how I relate with and honour difference. As mentioned earlier, these understandings have transformed particularly from learning from Elder Bob Cardinal's guidance and coming into relationship with Cree traditional teachings. Guidance in these ways and access to learning opportunities that were not framed by self-enclosed philosophies have significantly shaped this nuanced understanding of difference. These teachings live within me and inform my thoughts and actions. A failure to honour these insights on a daily basis would result in great harm towards myself and others. It is the knowledges that flow through my being and the recognition that my existence is intertwined with other life forms, that have brought forth the understanding that I am in fact a Treaty person. I regard the juxtapositioning of Sufic and Cree sensibilities as an ethical act that is encouraged by Treaty sensibility. I conceptualize the threading of these traditions as a way to embody and model a Treaty-informed connection with my Shi'a Ismaili Muslim teachings. My notion of a Treaty-

informed connection is guided by the spirit and intent of signing treaties[54] in Alberta. I understand that Treaty-informed connections and relationships respect the rights, values, and pathways that we take in life. Mutuality and reciprocity undergird Treaty relationship. The authors of the Aboriginal Studies 30 textbook (Kainai Board of Education, Métis Nation of Alberta, Northland School Division, & Tribal Chiefs Institute of Treaty 6, 2005) explained that:

> First Nations recognized and respected other's right to exist, make decisions, and pursue ways of life according to different spiritual and cultural beliefs. Most First Nations have traditional practices of non-interference in the affairs of other nations. In return, they expected the same respect from others. For example, most groups respected one another's traditional territories. Where conflicts occurred, treaties were a traditional method of solving problems. Treaties are agreements between sovereign nations. (p. 13)

This passage exemplifies the principle of living in harmony and balance with differences and refraining from regulating the affairs of others. Troubles arise, however, when a particular group of people view themselves as superior to others. Such a scenario makes it impossible for people of differing sensibilities to co-exist in the spirit of good relations (Kainai Board of Education et al., 2005, p. 20). Maintaining balance is the responsibility of all individuals. Too often Treaties are misrepresented as the sole responsibilities of Indigenous peoples. Such impoverished views of

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[54] The territory that later became Alberta was largely covered by Treaties 6, 7 and 8. Treaty 6, which stretched through southern Saskatchewan and Alberta, was signed with the Plains Cree in 1876. The Cree had suffered a devastating smallpox epidemic in the early 1870s and continued to suffer because of the decline of the buffalo. As a result, negotiators fought for and won two major concessions in Treaty 6. First, the government promised to assist the Cree if they were struck "by any pestilence, or by a general famine" (Kainai Board of Education et al., 2005, p. 30). The government also promised that "a medicine chest shall be kept at the house of each Indian Agent for the use and benefit of the Indians at the direction of such agent" (p. 30). The medicine-chest clause later led to the provision of universal health coverage for all First Nations with treaty rights (p. 30).

Treaty are dangerous and interfere with our ability to take care of each other in Creation; as a Treaty person it is my responsibility to honour the wisdom that flows from the sacred ecological teachings that undergird the spirit and intent of Treaties. Learning from kinship relational networks offer guidance in this manner. For example, enacting the Cree concept of *miyo-wîcêhtowin* or "living in harmony together" (Online Cree Dictionary, 2019) reminds me of the necessity to live in ways that do not transgress Creator's laws. I understand enacting *miyo-wîcêhtowin* as integral to living in accordance with my Treaty commitments (Asch, 2014, p. 162). These are fundamental principles that are far too often ignored (Asch, 2014, p. 163). Asch (2014) shares:

> All peoples have principles so fundamental that to violate them is virtually unthinkable. For Settlers, one of the most basic of these, the origins of the rule of law, is embodied in the Magna Carta. At least for us, it is, as Lord Denning of the Privy Council said, 'the greatest constitution document of all times- the foundation of the freedom of the individual against the arbitrary authority of the despot (qtd, in Pallister 1971:1). To respect the rule of law is a core principle of our government system. It is assumed that governments will adhere to it, regardless of cost (p. 163).

Asch (2014) wisely addresses the continued violation of sacred laws and how they ought to be upheld if we are truly committed to living in Treaty-informed ways. Further, as illustrated with the example of the "rule of law", it is unfathomable to proclaim that Treaty relationship is being honoured if the sacred ecological wisdoms that inform Treaty itself are disregarded. For these reasons, I conceptualize learning from Cree sensibilities as absolutely essential to honouring my Treaty relationship. In learning over time that I am a Treaty person, I desire to honour the traditions of the people in whose traditional territory my family and I reside. Because of the Treaty

relationship, my parents were able to live on this land. I believe that a failure to live my Treaty relationship is irresponsible because I will be complicit in dishonouring Creator's law, which will negate my responsibility to care for Creation and strengthen balance (Cardinal, 2001; Stonehouse, 2015).

The writing that follows illuminates the ways in which Sufic and Cree sacred ecological teachings can promote ethical forms of relationality and offer more generative approaches to addressing the simultaneous presence of similarities and differences on educational landscapes. These writings will briefly situate Ismaili-guided Sufic philosophies within Islam and highlight how particular Qur'anic concepts are explained via Rumi's poetry and can inform curricular and pedagogical contexts. Cree teachings will then be explored in connection to broader Indigenous spiritualities and interpretations that are held in common to provide a rich context for understanding. Specific Cree teachings will be later unpacked and re-examined in connection with Sufic insights in ways that maintain the integrity of both traditions.

Learning from these traditions and the holistic insights that arise from them can help guide Alberta Education's current curricula redesign efforts. The K-12 curricula redesign architecture is meant to reflect a concept-based approach in which linkages between subject areas are evident[55]. Of significance, is honouring the integrity of Alberta Education's (2016) standards 3 and 6 throughout curricula redesign and in its implementation stages. Standard 3 states that "curriculum includes ways of knowing and diverse perspectives, in historical and contemporary contexts, of First Nations, Métis and Inuit" (p. 14) and standard 6 emphasizes that "curriculum is written to facilitate holistic student development" (p. 14). Consequently, a deepened understanding of

[55] As mentioned earlier, it is unclear at this time the extent to which the United Conservative Party will uphold these commitments.

holistic insights that are not separated from sacred ecological teachings is absolutely essential to more ethically honour Indigenous histories and sensibilities in curricular and pedagogical contexts. Holistic approaches that are not separated from Spirit in this regard can also help address deeper sources of belonging that are not only applicable to youth and teachers who regard themselves as connected to Spirit, but other individuals as well.

**How I Conceptualize Difference**

As mentioned in earlier passages of this dissertation, my propensity to define and address epistemological, cosmological, ontological and axiological manifestations of difference on the terms of multiculturalism has shifted to inspiration from that which grounds me the most in my life. I do not understand difference on the terms of 'diversity' nor do I regard myself as a 'diverse' person whose presence and histories require an objectified inclusion in historical accounts of Canadian history, for example. I also refrain from the language of 'pluralism' as such approaches also remain mired in objectification and identity politics. It is not the terms diverse and pluralism that are problematic per se, but rather their underlying philosophies that are worrisome. Notions of diverse and plural selves and identities, as exemplified by racial signifiers, gender, sexuality and socio-economic status, undeniably frame contemporary Canadian Liberal manifestations of multiculturalism. Ghosh and Abdi (2004) share that difference, in relationship to multiculturalism, ought to "analyze the meaning of race and ethnicity, gender, and class as social and historical constructs that involve all citizens of a democracy, both dominant and subordinate" (p. 35). They further share that this meaning making ought to "encompass the creation of spaces within which different communities defined by race/ethnicity, gender, and or/class" feel encouraged and are able to grow. The "creation of public spaces enables interaction" (p. 35). While these sentiments encourage coming together through difference, they are limited to relationships between human

beings alone, reflect notions of unity that are entirely dependent on economic access to material resources and do not address deeper sources of connection. The key idea in this discussion is that difference is often quickly translated into sameness. This results in losing the balance of difference and sameness. Diversity discourse fulfils the need for a politics of recognition and thereby avoids dwelling with difference. Unity is then facilitated by the nation and nationality and thus anyone who promotes difference is deemed to be against unity and is storied as a traitor or ungrateful citizen. For these reasons I understand difference as Creator's providence that makes life possible. Sacred ecological notions of difference, as expressed by Sufic and Cree philosophies most significantly inform these understandings. Sacred ecology teaches us about the balance of unity and difference. Healthy unified ecosystems are full of difference which makes life possible (Morris, 2002). It is dangerous for human beings to separate themselves from this.

**Situating Islam**

As previously mentioned, this work is deeply subjective, and as such, it is not possible for me to remove my faith and proceed in a secular manner. It would be unhealthy for me to attempt to remove my traditions from this work and perpetuate the very problems that I am critiquing. The intention of this section is not to define or promote a particular rendering of Islam and its adherents or to speak for Islam or Muslims, but rather, to share on the basis of my experiences. I briefly examine the teachings that undergird Islam in general and the history of Islam's revelation, discuss the philosophical connections between Ismaili and Sufic sensibilities, and explain that approaching this work from Islam's holism was not an arbitrary decision for me. Islam's teachings in general are often not associated with holism. There is a large disparity between how Islam and Muslims are represented, its Qur'anic teachings, and multiplex practices to engage with Spirit in the North American context. Consequently, I share the teachings from Islam that media renderings of the

faith often obscure. I open up Islam by discussing many of its key teachings and its connections with and differences from Cree philosophies. I also speak from the place of Islam, because I was born into Shi'a Ismaili Islam. My intention is not to suggest that Shi'a Ismailism is the only pathway to holism, nor to position Ismailism as the sole interpretation in Islam. Ismailism represents for me the ways in which I am most comfortable expressing my relationship with Creation. Ismailism's particular emphasis on maintaining a balance between *Zahir* (material) and *Batin* (spiritual) has drawn me closer to Sufic philosophies, especially over the last eight years. Ismailism is also often regarded as a Sufic *tariqah* (pathway) given its strong emphasis on seeking Creator outside the realms of orthopraxy.

In 611 CE, the first *surah* (chapter of the Qur'an) was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH[56]) via inspiration from the angel Jabreel (Gabriel) on Mount Hira in Mecca. The Prophet would often spend days in meditation on Mount Hira. On different occasions, the angel Jabreel appeared to the Prophet and proclaimed Muhammad as the Messenger of Islam. Prophet Muhammad initially resisted these messages because he was afraid. It is important to note that Prophet Muhammad is often referred to as *Nabi Ummi*, which means the unlettered Prophet. This designation speaks to the Prophet's inability to read or write and Islam's Divine revelation via Arabic. The Qur'an's first revelation exemplifies Prophet Muhammad's unlettered nature:

> The angel that appeared was Jabreel. He came to Muhammad while he was sleeping. Covering him with a brocaded coverlet on which there was some writing, he commanded Muhammad: "Recite!" "I am unable to recite!" responded Muhammad. Jabreel pressed down the cover very hard on Muhammad, so that he thought he was about to die. Again, Jabreel ordered him "Recite!" Once again confessing his inability, Jabreel pressed down even harder, bringing Muhammad near death. A third time he commanded him to recite, whereupon Muhammad cried out, "What shall I recite?" in order to save himself from the pressure. Jabreel replied: Recite in the Name of thy Lord

[56] PBUH refers to the Arabic phrase 'alayhi as-salam' and literally translates as "may peace be upon him". This phrase is used out of respect for the prophets of Islam.

> who created, created man of a blood clot. Recite: And thy Lord is most generous, who taught by the pen, taught man what he knew not (Qur'an 96:1-5, Denny, 1994, pp. 60-61).[57]

The Qur'an's revelation occurred gradually between 610 CE and 632 CE. Qur'an literally means 'recitation,' because Prophet Muhammad received it as an oral recitation. The Qur'an is also called *al-dhikr*, or the book of remembrance of Islam. Underlying all Qur'anic teachings is the emphasis on *Tawhid*, or the Oneness of Creation through Creator, living an ethical life, paying attention to Creator's *Ayat* or signs in Creation to witness the Spirit in all forms, and deeply understanding that all is due to Creator's will. This message was revealed to remind the people of Creator's presence in the context of pre-Islamic Arabia. Pre-Islamic Arabia is referred to as *al-Jahiliyaa*, or the age of ignorance, during which, prior to Islam's arrival, actions and ways of being were not in line with Creator's wisdom. In particular was the disassociation between identifying oneself with a sole Creator and seeking the wisdom that flows from Creator. At this time gender relations were imbalanced, and relations with nature as a gift from Creator were missed. In other words, people considered Creation for its utility alone (Ozdemir, 2003, p. 18). Islam's revelation was a way to help Creation remember its origin in Creator and to recall previous teachings of prophets such as Moses (PBUH) and Jesus (PBUH). Therefore, the Qur'an is understood as both a historical text and a book of spiritual guidance for all times and places. The message is eternal and can be interpreted in any historical context. The deepest aspect of Islam in general and Qur'anic teachings in particular is its holistic framework. Khalid (2010) explains:

[57] Verses of the Qur'an are taught and learned orally. The oral telling of the Qur'an is meant to guide the embodiment of Qur'anic teachings.

> When Muslim sages referred to the cosmic or ontological Qur'an, . . . they saw upon the face words from the cosmic Qur'an. . . . They remained fully aware of the fact that the Qur'an refers to the phenomena of nature and events within the soul of man as ayat. (p. 5)

This assertion speaks to *Tawhid*, or the unity of all Creation. *Surah al-Ikhlas* states, "Say, He is Allah who is One, Allah, the eternal refuge" (112:1-2). This *Surah* emphasizes that all is from Allah and belongs to Him: "What is in the heavens and the earth belongs to Allah. He encompasses everything" (Q4:123). These verses and many others make clear the Qur'an's affirmation of the interconnectedness of the natural order (Khalid, 2010). The Qur'an emphasizes that this natural order can only be sustained through the practice of *Mizan*, or balance. *Mizan* teaches that living in ways that do not attend to the manifestations of Creator's divine attributes leads to instability. To maintain balance, the Qur'an designates human beings as *Ashraf al-Makhluqat*, or the most noble of Creation. This designation is not intended to foster a hierarchical relationship between human beings and other Creation, but was made on the basis of the human capacity to reason and to make ethical choices. Khalid explains:

> Allah has singled out human-kind and taught it clear expression that is the capacity to reason. All creation has an order and a purpose and is in a state of dynamic balance. If the sun, the moon, the stars did not bow themselves that is serve the purpose of their design, it would be impossible for life to function on earth. This is another way of saying that the natural order works because it is in submission to Creator. It is Muslim in the original, primordial sense. (p. 5)

Creator's bringing life to fruition with purpose explains why the Qur'an repeatedly teaches that we all ought to be just with our relations (p. 6). According to the Qur'an, "We did not create the heavens and the earth and everything between them except with truth" (Q15:85). Truth in this way is

associated with being just and honouring the purpose of all of Creation. Thus Islam is a way of life, and everything has come from Creator's fullness. Each facet of reality has a function as a part of the whole (p. 7). This fullness explains Islam's meaning of submitting and surrendering to Creator's will as Creator is the cause of everything. While 'Muslim' can be literally understood as one who prescribes to Islam as an organized religion, the Qur'anic meaning refers to anyone in Creation who submits to Creator's will.

Qur'anic teachings also emphasize the importance of turning to the self to make ethical decisions. They emphasize that the failure to address one's inner state has implications for relating and living together in Creation. Islam in general teaches the importance of turning within to contemplate truth. The inability to be clear in oneself and come from a grounded place leads to imbalanced relations (Tetteh, 2012). Turning to the self, however, is understood in a way that is connected to all relations. The idea of turning inward is to help Creation recall its connectivity with other entities. Rumi's poem "Lover and Love Are Only One" beautifully expresses this relationship:

*What Fear should a real lover have of the Path*
*Since the Eternal Himself is his companion?*
*What grief could he feel at the soul's departure*
*When the God of his soul is his closest friend?*
*He's a traveler; yet, like the moon,*
*He stays immovable in his own beauty.*
*How could he wait for the coming of the breeze*
*Who is himself lighter than any breeze?*
*Lover and Love, my soul, are only one:*
*Never think they're two halves.*
*When love and lover have become one,*
*Both are not at once the Giver and the Gift.*
*The lover is in search of this fullness;*
*He is like leather laid out in the maturing sun.*
*When he goes to the sea in search of the pearl,*
*He is himself, a unique, priceless pearl. (Harvey, 1999, p. 84)*

As Rumi says, there is no separation with Creation and the Creator.

Like other traditions of holism, Islam is enmeshed in differences of interpretation and devotional practices. The *Ummah* (worldwide Muslim community and refers to 'community' in relation to other life forms) represents different "communities of interpretation" of Islam's message (Daftary & Nanji, 2006, p. 1). All Muslims, regardless of interpretation, affirm the *Shahada* (there is no God but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God). The *Shahada* exemplifies Creator's unity and Divine guidance through Creator's messenger, Prophet Muhammad (Daftary & Nanji, 2006). Prior to Prophet Muhammad's death in 632 CE, he shared guidance in Ghadir Khumm. He said that he was leaving behind two weighty things. Sunni Muslims interpret this as the Qur'an and *Sunnah (*sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad*)*, whereas Shi'a Muslims interpret this as the Qur'an and the *Ahl al-Bayt* (family of the Prophet). From a Shi'a understanding, Prophet Muhammad emphasized that following the Qur'an and *Ahl al-Bayt* would prevent individuals from going astray. Although all Muslims regard this as an authentic event, they interpret leadership and succession differently. It is important to note that the genesis of *Sunni* and *Shi'a* was largely guided by the social and political factors that influenced the spread of the Islamic empire and guidance in following the faith after Prophet Muhammad's death (Denny, 1994, p. 92). Shi'ite Muslims believe that Prophet Muhammad appointed his cousin and son-in-law, Ali, as his successor during this event. Imam Ali is the first Imam of all Shi'ite Muslims.

The Ahl al-Sunna wal Jama'a, which is the full name for Sunni Muslims and means 'the people of the Prophet's *Sunnah* and the community,' were positioned as the majority group of Muslims after the creation of major law schools and "the rejection of certain forms of rational,

speculative theology in the third century after the Hijra"[58] (Denny, 1994, p. 92). Muslims then approached politics and rule in two different ways. The majority preferred a representative system with leaders who were appointed; this approach established the Khalifa, who responded to the material needs of the people. Those who were later known as Sunni Muslims adopted Prophet Muhammad's[59] memory and traditions as part of their sensibilities. This process was not established until the ruling of the four rightly guided Khalifs ended. Shi'a Muslims believe that individuals from the direct lineage of Prophet Muhammad's family were gifted with wisdom to guide Muslims materially and spiritually. According to their worldviews, because Creator sent another messenger to Earth and propagated newer teachings, it follows that a spiritual successor (Imam)[60] should guide the people in holistic ways in every era just as Prophet Muhammad did. I caution against using *Sunni* and *Shi'a* in totalizing ways, because these traditions designate multiple law schools of interpretations and differences in practice depending on where Muslims are geographically situated. It is not within the scope of this section to describe the Sunni and Shi'a split at length and outline the philosophical differences inherent in Qur'anic exegesis. Such a task would be impossible even if I addressed it in the entire dissertation. I will, however, explain Shi'a Ismailism to situate its connections to my affinity with Sufism.

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[58] Hijra refers to the immigration of the Prophet (PBUH) and his companions from Mecca to Medina in 622 CE.

[59] It is important to note that Prophet Muhammad was not only a Messenger of God, but also a father, husband, politician, and businessman . These parts of his being were not separated from how he guided the people. The modeling of such behavior, along with Islam's emphasis on living in balanced ways, explains why monasticism in Islam is discouraged. This aspect speaks to the Prophet's emphasis on always proceeding with moderation in life and adopting 'the middle way.'

[60] Note that *Imam* has two meanings. It often refers to a prayer leader of a mosque in a local community, but for Shi'ites, Imam also refers to a spiritual leader who has been bestowed with Creator's *Hikmah* (wisdom) to guide all parts of people's lives.

## Situating Shi'a Imami Ismailism

Shi'a Imami Ismaili Muslims[61] (also known as *Seveners*), like other Shi'ites emphasize hereditary descent from the lineage of Prophet Muhammad and his cousin and son-in-law, Imam Ali. Denny expresses that:

> Ismailis, like Imami Shi'ites (Ithna'Asharis) have a very strong doctrine of the Imam as a divinely appointed and sustained leader with perfect wisdom and judgment to guide the Muslims. The Imams, according to these two main Shi'i branches, are a sort of continuation of the work of Muhammad (p. 214).

Ismailis believe that Imams are vested with esoteric knowledge of *din* (religion), which was first passed on by Imam Ali (Denny, 1994). Imams are understood as spiritually infallible beings who are more realized than others. This distinguishes them from other individuals who might be regarded as blinded by worldly ideals. Central to the Ismaili *tariqah* (pathway) is striving to maintain a balance between *Zahir* and *Batin*. Interpreting the Qur'an in the current historical context is integral to living this balance in Ismailism. Imams have a special role in Qur'anic exegesis. They are vested with divine light, or *nur Muhammadi* (the Muhammadan light), and serve as guides "during this historical phase of the cosmos' existence" (p. 214). Guidance from the Imam of the time stresses the importance of living Islam's holistic message and contemplating the inner meaning of all Creation. Ismaili devotional practices include daily prayer, the commemoration of Ramadan, personal prayers, and practices that are often associated with Sufic ways. These practices include meditation on the Creator's attributes and the performance of *dhikr* (verbally reciting Creator's attributes internally, as a group and at times accompanied by bodily movement).

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[61] Please note that within Ismailism, devotional practices differ based upon one's geographical location. My Ismaili devotional practices are informed largely by traditions from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, and to a lesser extent, Afghanistan, Iran and Syria. It is not my intention to represent Ismailism in a monolithic way or promote 'South Asian' practices of Ismailism.

## History of Sufism

The origins of ancient mysticism might not be traceable in historic times, but Islamic mysticism and Sufic sensibilities have known beginnings (Moyne, 2007, p. 21). Conceptions of Islamic mysticism predate Sufism and are as old as Islam. Prophet Muhammad is believed to have had certain mystical attributes, including *me'raj* (his assent through the coaxial spheres, the seven stages of heaven) to receive the divine revelation. The Arabic word *Tasawwuf* (Sufic way of life) was introduced to Muslims beginning in the 9th century. Sufic teachings were also introduced to Christians in the 19th century. Sufi movements were partly a reaction to the lavish and excessive worldliness of rulers during the first Islamic Empire. These movements were also a response to the rigidity of particular laws following the Prophet's death. As in all traditions, Sufism is not to be understood as a monolithic movement. Numerous Sufi *tariqahs* (pathways) are heavily shaped by the lands in and from which they emerged.

Many scholars of Islam underscore that the very naming of Sufism and its designation as *Islamic mysticism* is rather essentializing (Denny, 1994; Heck; 2007; Holland; 1976; Nasr, 1980; Ohtsuka, 2012; Schimmel, 1975). *Sufi*, which is an Arabic word, has been applied to an array of contexts over thousands of years (Voll & Ohtsuka, 2015, p. 1). The initial orientation of Sufi referred to one who wears wool or something that is coarse. Another theory suggests that the original root of Sufi ,which is *safa*, means purity (Denny, 1994, p. 220). Sufi pathways can be regarded as living in ways that fuse esoteric and exoteric teachings.

According to Denny (1994), because Sufism is heavily linked to the Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad, it is plausible to understand Sufism as an underlying force of Islam. Denny explains that "Sufism was the inner power of Islam from the beginning, but in another sense it has been a renewing and reforming response to developments and trends that have from time to time sapped

Islam of its vitality and spontaneity" (p. 219). *Ihsan* (refers to doing what is beautiful and is related to an awareness of Creator's presence in the world and in oneself and the need to act appropriately) is an integral guiding force in Sufic *tariqahs* (Voll & Ohtsuka, 2015, p. 3). In doing what is beautiful, Sufis yearn to emancipate themselves from the confines of the ego. It is important to note that Sufism has nothing to do with subscribing to Sunni or Shi'i interpretations of Islam, although many scholars tend to discuss the relationship between Sufism and Shi'ism. Sufism is not a sect of Islam.

As I noted earlier, Sufism traces its origins to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Notions of a spiritual chain exist in Sufic sensibilities. Schimmel (1975) commented:

> Muhammad is the first link in the spiritual chain of Sufism, and his ascension through the heavens into the divine presence, to which the first lines of Surah [chapter] 17 allude, became a prototype of the mystics' spiritual ascension into the intimate presence of God. According to the tradition, esoteric wisdom was transmitted from Muhammad to his cousin and son-in-law Ali ibn Abi Talib (Imam Ali), the fourth of the righteous Caliphs [and the first Imam of Shi'ites]. (p. 27)

For this reason, many Sufi teachings tend to draw upon Imam Ali's wisdom and inner truths of his words. This relates to the Ismaili *tariqah* in deep ways. As I previously stated, Ismaili Imams are regarded as direct descendants of the Prophet Muhammad through Imam Ali. The *nur* (light) of Imam Ali is considered the same in all Ismaili Imams. This is a key reason for the strong connections amongst Sufic and Ismaili sensibilities. As mentioned, I have grown up hearing Sufic wisdom stories and teachings and their relationship with Ismailism. I especially relate to these teachings because they are not limited by orthopraxy, nor do they suggest that Creator's wisdom is time bound. Ismaili-guided Sufic teachings inform my understanding that "wisdom will never

manage experience" (D.G Smith, Personal Communication, February 2013). In other words, Ismaili-guided Sufic teachings offer me guidance on a daily basis regarding how to live a life of balance.

**Qur'anic teachings and their Expression in Rumi's Poetry**

The above passages intentionally sought to situate Islam and thoughtfully unpack the connections between Shi'a Ismailism and Sufic philosophies. Addressing these connections are integral to the spirit and intent of this dissertation because they open up these philosophies directly in connection to the traditions they arise from and highlight their Qur'anic foundations. Resultingly, Ismaili-guided Sufic philosophies and the later exploration of Cree traditional teachings, are not obscured by the palatable rhetoric of Albertan curricular and pedagogical contexts that endeavor to address holism on the terms of liberal markers of "human development" (Alberta Education, 2017). The erasure of tradition from its roots that are grounded in that which promotes life contributes to a loss of meaning that is rather dangerous[62]. Imbalance is perpetuated when this deeper meaning is occluded. Such sources of meaning and life-giving energy are missed when a particular story of life and living is promoted at the exclusion of others. Protecting the integrity of liberal accounts of life and living, for example, promotes self-interest and relationships of commodification with our more than human relational networks. This also explains why it is so difficult to reconnect with our ecological roots (Morris, 2002, p. 581). The entrenchment of such logics impede our ability to access the cosmological and ontological guidance that we have been

[62] hooks (1999) and Noddings (1981) explore wisdom notions in connection to curriculum and pedagogy. hooks (1999) speaks to the calling of spirit in education but speaks to these notions in more neutral terms. Her connections to "the mystical dimension of the Christian faith" (p. 116) is absent from her discussions and instead uses the language and lens of intersectionality to address spirituality. Noddings (1981) speaks to caring in relation to ethics. Her exploration, however, is limited to human forms of relationality and it is unclear what her philosophical conceptions of caring are rooted in.

gifted. Re-connecting with Cree and Sufic holistic insights has helped me to remember my enmeshment. This ought not be regarded as a contrived affair that is advocating for proselytization. Contrariwise, this dissertation is advocating for the ways in which learning from holistic-guided sacred ecological teachings can inspire a return to greater balance and harmony that is needed to address difference creatively. As an educator, curriculum theorist and scholar, I directly witness the harm that arises when fears of Spirit and the utilization of "God-language" remains unaddressed and once again occluded by secularized conceptions of holistic philosophies. These fear -based resistance to learning from other ways is harmful to many youth and educators on our schooling landscapes. All individuals are deserving of opportunities to experience connection more deeply.

The following sections of this dissertation will specifically explore the Qur'anic teachings of *Tawhid, Zahir and Batin, Ayat* and *Ashraf al-Makhluqat.* In North American contexts, Qur'anic teachings are far too often represented as rigid codified laws that are of little value to life and living and removed from the deep reverence of Rumi's poetry. For these reasons, I will purposefully unpack the above teachings in relationship to Rumi's poetry[63] where applicable. These teachings will also be explicated to help address their utility in curricular and pedagogical contexts as sources of guidance that can help restore balance.

**Tawhid and Balance**

*Parable of the World*
*God has made existence magnificent,*
*He has made it through nonexistence.*
*He has concealed the sea and exposed the foam,*
*Concealed the wind and displayed the dust.*

[63] It is important to note that I have not acquired Farsi and thus have relied upon popular translations of Rumi's poetry to English. This naturally has altered my interpretative ability to engage with Rumi's insights.

*The whirling dust flies like a dancer,*
*How does it do this itself?*
*The wind is invisible, known only by trust,*
*The foam moves all about you,*
*But without the sea no whirling takes place.*
*Thought is hidden, speech is manifest.*
*So we believe, and believe,*
*That manifest only is true,*
*Yet nonexistence we have no eye for.*
*Yet which is real, and which is fake?*
*Why did God make reality shy?*
*Praise the Lord, O weaver of magic,*
*That makes the dregs seem like wine*
*To those who turn from the truth.*
*Life magic we measure the moonbeams,*
*And gather our gains from a sleight of hand.*
*This world is a sorcerer, and we are the buyers,*
*And yet there's but emptiness there.*
*And when the bell tools, and it tolls for thee,*
*The devil of wealth and palaces,*
*Stands only a while at the side of your grave,*
*And comes no further, no further than this. (Rumi; as cited in Dunn, Dunn Mascetti, & Nicholson, 2010, p. 132)*

Islam in general teaches the importance of living in balanced ways. The doctrine of *Tawhid*, or unity of all life forms, teaches that Allah created the universe in "perfect balance and measure" (Islamic Sciences and Research Academy Australia [ISRA], 2012, p. 11). The Qur'an and *Hadith* remind humankind that they ought not disrupt this balance (p. 11). The Qur'an states, "And the sky has raised high, and has devised (for all things) a balance, so that you might never transgress the balance: weigh, therefore, (your deeds), you with equity and do not upset the balance" (55:7-9). As I mentioned, the Qur'an designates human beings as *Ashraf al-Makhluqat*, or the most noble of Creation. It is understood that Allah granted human beings, in *Amanah* (trust), the responsibility to maintain and strengthen Creation (ISRA, 2012, p. 17). Thus, human

beings are entrusted to maintain the perfect balance that Allah created and to remember the practice of accountability. Central to the Qur'an's teaching of balance is its emphasis that "the creation of the heavens and the earth is indeed greater than the creation of mankind; yet most of mankind know not" (40:57). This verse can perhaps be understood in relation to the Qur'anic teaching that all life, including human life, is born out of the Earth and that forgetting such a connection violates the Qur'an's teachings of balance (Ferrari & Benzo, 2014, p. 101). The birth of all of Creation from the Earth is exemplified in the *Ayah* "God has made the earth like a carpet" (p. 101). This *Ayah* can be interpreted as illuminating the sacredness of all of Creation. Consequently, "coming into harmony with the sacred nature of the earth" (p. 102) is living in accordance with the Qur'anic teachings of balance. Failure to honour these teachings results in disorder and imbalance.

**Zahir and Batin**

The Qur'an emphasizes the inextricable relationship between *Zahir* and *Batin*, which sustains and strengthens this balance. *Zahir* is one of Allah's 99 names and represents the material, exoteric, and visible elements of life. In other words, *Zahir* is understood as form. *Batin* is also one of Allah's 99 names and corresponds to the spiritual, esoteric, and hidden. The teachings of balancing *Zahir* and *Batin* not only are a way to think about this balance, but also are intended to help individuals to live this balance. Such teachings are integral to reminding humankind that they are not above Creation. My experiences with Ismaili teachings emphasize that seeking this balance encourages greater attentiveness to circumstances that encourage the separation from that which bestows life. Sufism, in its multiplex nature, also emphasizes this balance. According to a *Hadith* of Prophet Muhammad, "There are seventy thousand veils of light and darkness that separate us from God" (Nasr, 2007, p. 49). My understanding of Sufic ways from my experiences with

Ismailism suggests that attentiveness to *Zahir* and *Batin* requires acting in ways that "enable us to see the outwardly invisible in the visible" (Chittick, 1983; Nasr, 2007; Schimmel,1975). Sufic sensibilities exemplify that cultivating an ongoing balance between *Zahir* and *Batin* is essential to symbolizing that "multiple states of being do not negate the Oneness of being of all for all levels there is but the radiance of the one Face of the Beloved" (Nasr, 2007, p. 49). Therefore, holism is expressed in the differences that are inherent in Creation (Kazemi, p. 174). The Qur'an states, "And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the differences of your languages and colours. Indeed, herein are signs for those who know" (30:22). My understanding of this verse is that connectivity is not possible without difference. Most significantly, I understand this verse as encouraging balance through accepting difference and its generative potential.

**Meaning and Form**

*The Tree of Life*

*It is that from which a thousand places*
*Life comes everlasting,*
*Even though its source is single,*
*It brings a thousand doubles,*
*Innumerable names befit its form,*
*Without design it has all virtue,*
*Whoever seeks it finds his own.*
*Why stick to another shape or another,*
*You'll fail to find the treat, and find ill fortune,*
*Disappointment only will be your bitterness.*
*Pass on from the name,*
*And look closer at the source.*
*The source will show you what you seek.*
*Leave the form behind. (Rumi; as cited in*
*Dunn et al., 2010, pp. 86-87)*

To learn from difference and live in balanced ways, it is integral to recognize the interconnectivity between meaning and form. Drawing upon Rumi's renderings of the relationship

between meaning and form, I understand form as that which manifests an outward appearance and meaning as an "inward and unseen reality" (Chittick, 1983, p. 20). Rumi's teachings underscore that the perceived dichotomy between meaning and form are but an illusion. Rather, meaning and form are inextricably connected. Chittick emphasized that "form derives from meaning, and meaning manifests itself as form. Since the two are the outward and inward aspects of a single reality, each is important in its own way" (p. 24). Imbalance arises when form is privileged over meaning and the extent to which form derives its existence from meaning is misunderstood. I also understand Rumi's teachings as a way to help address identity politics; if representation alone is solely promoted through the centring of different identity constructs, the meaning of what can be learned from difference and its creative potential to continue life becomes lost.

**Experiencing Connectivity through Difference, Contrast and Opposites**

Examining how difference, similarities, and contrasts exist simultaneously is integral to understanding the unifying principles of meaning and form. Rumi and other Sufi theosophists highlighted that Creation is manifested in the opposites inherent in Creator's attributes (Chittick, 1983, p. 56). Creation is then honoured and sustained by balancing tension, similarities, and differences. Such teachings can guide how we understand lived experiences, and how sacred ecology can inform the interpretation of our daily experiences (Chittick, 1983; Ullah, 1984). Rumi (cited in Chittick,1983) asserts that:

> Things become clear through their opposites. Everyday experience confirms this truth, for the existence of the myriad things of the world only become possible through differentiation and opposition. If two things were not different, and therefore "opposed" in some respect, they would be one and the same. Each individual of a pair of opposites makes the existence of the other individual possible; day and night, perfection and

> imperfection, wholeness and brokenness, happiness and sadness, newness and oldness, spirit and body. Each of these correlative terms can only exist and be known because of its opposite, but transcends all opposition. (p. 49)

I understand Rumi's assertions as exemplifying the need to uphold difference to help support balance (Ullah, 1984, p. 34). As a result, it is integral to remember that difference and sameness depend upon each other for balance to arise. These holistic insights help us to revisit what this dissertation is seeking to open up. The false universalism of liberalism prefers sameness. This preference results in relationships of imbalance. It goes against holistic-guided sacred ecological insights to reduce difference. The central insight to address here is the fluxic tension between sameness and difference. Rumi, through Qur'anic teachings, reminds us of this tension.

**Paying Attention to Nature and Opening up the Heart**

*Your First Eyes*

*A lover has four streams inside,*
*of water, wine, honey, and milk.*
*Find those in yourself and pay no attention*
*to what so-and-so says about such-and-such.*
*The rose does not care*
*if someone calls it a thorn, or a jasmine.*
*Ordinary eyes categorize human beings.*
*That one is a Zoroastrian. This one a Muslim.*
*Walk instead with the other vision given you,*
*your first eyes. Bow to the essence*
*in human being. Do not be content*
*with judging people good and bad.*
*Grow out of that.*
*The great blessing is that Shams*
*has poured a strength into the ground*
*that lets us wait and trust the waiting.*

*(Rumi in C. Bark's "A Year with Rumi, p. 174)*

Experiencing the inextricable connection between meaning and form is integral to see each other in Creation in fulsome ways. Rumi noted that true seeing does not happen with the eyes alone and that such vision recognizes only matter. Seeing through the heart reveals the truths of this matter. He emphasized that our first set of eyes is the heart and that "ordinary eyes categorize human beings" (Rumi, Your First Eyes; A King Inside Who Listens, pg. 174). Rumi cautioned that labeling and judging prevent meaning from breaking through and encouraged the building of trust to reject such managerial ways .

In what ways can the heart open up to see and act with fullness? As I mentioned, the Qur'an repeatedly accentuates the importance of learning from *Ayat* (signs). Restoration and renewal arises from connecting with *Ayat*. The Qur'an frequently calls upon humans to pay attention to Allah's *Ayat* or signs of Creator's existence. *Ayat* refers to the actual verses of the Qur'an and Creator's outward manifestations. In the *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an*, McAuliffe (2006) emphasizes that the Qur'an repeatedly insists that Creator is offering *Ayat* that "manifest all we need to know" (p. 1). *Ayat* is understood as a way to summon Creation back to Truth. *Ayat* can manifest as signs of nature[64] and the historical narration of Creator to come into relationship with Creation (McAuliffe,2006). Qur'an teaches that both conceptions of *Ayat* are required for Muslims to gain a deeper understanding and experience of Creator and Creation. A disconnect between meaning and form interferes with interpretation and undermines the notion that human beings have been bestowed with the responsibility of *Ashraf al-Makhluqat* to safeguard the life of all beings and ensure the collective survival of all. Rumi conceptualized ecological principles

[64] *Ayat* that exemplify natural phenomena showing the Creator's existence include Qur'an 2:164; 3:190-1; 6:95-9; 10:5-7; 13: 2-4; 16:10-6; 78-81; 23:21-2; 8; 27:86, 93; 29:44; 30:20-8, 4; 32-27; 34:9; 36:33-47; 39:21; 41:37, 39, 53; 42:29-34; 45:1-6 12-13; 50:6-11; 51:20 (McAuliffe, 2006, p. 1).

based on this ethic and explained that nature guides and instructs us to refrain from the compartmentalization that occurs when we intellectualize our being (Clarke, 2003, p.56). Rumi commented that minerals, plants, and animals "all naturally know and worship God—while Man, being most bound by consciousness and intellect, often fails to do so" (p. 60). Paying attention to nature in its difference and movement cultivates fuller ways of knowing and being. Nature teaches us that Creation is shifting through constant flux at every moment. To become aware of wholeness, it is important to see the process of nature and its continuous renewal and rebirth. Clarke asserts that the laws and action of nature have their own moral sense, even if it is hidden from us, for the most essential intuition of all is that, viewed as a Whole, the universe reveals itself as constantly evolving, always moving toward the necessarily dominant good (p. 62). According to Clarke's (2003) assertion, nature's differences and continuous movement have the potential to guide us to witness more clearly the connections between meaning and form and help us to see from the heart. Experiencing renewal guides us to live in ways that honour our ecological roots. Learning from holistic insights and sacred notions of difference on curricular and pedagogical sites may support approaches to life and living that communicate and seek meaning from our ontological and cosmological origins. Reconnecting in this manner evidences a shift from the Enlightenment's epistemological focus.

Qur'anic wisdoms, as espoused by the teachings of *Tawhid, Zahir and Batin, Ayat* and *Ashraf al-Makhluqat,* and highlighted in Rumi's poetry offer much guidance regarding the restoration of balance through turning inwards and contemplating the interplay between differences and similarities. It is important to understand that one does not have to be a Muslim to learn from these insights; as Rumi reminds us, connecting with that which gifts life is for all life forms. Dunn et al.'s (2010) assertion that Rumi is the most revered poet in North America

evidences that many individuals, in their own ways, are connecting with the Qur'anic holistic insights of this poetry even if they are not consciously aware of it. Such teachings can perhaps help to address what is overlooked through historical consciousness discourse and perspectival renderings of difference that elide the importance of embodied knowing as integral to promoting ethical relationality.

**Re-contextualizing my commitments to learning from Cree Philosophies: Ethical Roots**

I continue to learn everyday that I cannot access the energy that gives us life unless I honour difference. Growing up, I witnessed my father learning from traditions other than Ismailism. As a child, I often wondered about the books that we stored on our largest bookshelf at home. I remember wondering who the Yogi was on many of the book covers on the shelf and why my father was reading his teachings. I also saw my father listening to talks on spirituality, reading about other people's experiences with Creator, and teaching my sister and I that all traditions are pathways to Creator. My parents taught my sister and I that it was important for us to understand other ways of being and to learn from them. The process of living this work has helped me to recognize the extent to which I have internalized my father's teachings. As I continue to learn from my father, when I see him reflecting upon the teachings from the Mahabharata, when I hear him repeatedly sharing what it means to live a good life and to be an ethical person, I understand in all of my being why I am drawn to difference. I believe that it also helps me to live with greater integrity because it opens up that which I have left out and keeps me attuned to the Mystery[38].

[38] I understand the Mystery as the Life Force that brings into being and connects all life forms. In Indian Horse, Richard Wagamese beautifully describes the Mystery:

> The way I began was always the same. I would lean forward with my hands on my knees and stare at the ice, picking a spot on its surface. Then I would picture myself skating to that spot. I'd see myself making a wide circle that I'd bring in tighter and tighter before turning abruptly and skating out of the circle the other way. Then I would actually go and do it. My

Therefore, I regard attending to and learning from difference as absolutely integral to living an ethical life. I do not regard learning from other faiths as a threat to my own faith. Rather, I recognize that I feel drawn to difference because it is an ethical premise for Islam in general and is rooted in Ismaili teachings.

As expressed earlier, my commitments to learning from Cree philosophies are in no way arbitrary; they are guided by a deepened understanding of honouring my Treaty Relationship and Elder Bob Cardinal's guidance. Since Treaty is understood as a "historical continuum" that is made possible through direct connections with upholding Creator's laws, it is then necessary to honour these traditions with great care and attentiveness (H. Cardinal, 2000). It is because of these inviolable laws that I am able to practice my faith on this land.

The subsequent sections of this dissertation will explore shared philosophies of Indigenous and Native American spiritualities situated within a North American context. The intent of such discussions is not to collapse difference, but rather to provide a context that can more cogently address Cree teachings. Sharing these insights will be followed by explorations of the Cree laws of *miyo-wîcêhtowin, miyo-wahkohtowin*, *miyo- pimatsiwin*, and the holism of the four directions

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blades never made a sound. I couldn't let anyone discover what I was doing so I learned how to skate soundlessly without the chunk-chunk of steel on ice the other boys made when they played the game. I learned to envision myself making moves before I tried them. If I could see myself doing it, then I could do it. It worked for any move. There was no explanation for how I could do what I did. I knew it is a mystery and I honoured it that way. My grandmother had always referred to the universe as the Great Mystery.

"What does it mean?" I asked her once.

"It means all things."

"I don't understand."

She took my hand and sat me down on a rock at the water's edge. "We need mystery," she said. "Creator in her wisdom knew this. Mystery fills us with awe and wonder. They are the foundations of humility, and humility, grandson is the foundation of all learning. So we do not seek to unravel this. We honour it by letting it be that way forever." (p. 65)

teachings. The unpacking of these teachings is purposeful and intended to help support the restoration of balance and harmony.

**Shared Philosophies Amongst North American Indigenous Wisdom Traditions**

Indigenous spiritualities, as I have experienced over time, emphasize that all life forms are interconnected and related through Creator (Basso, 1999; H. Cardinal, 2000; B. Cardinal, 2014; Coates et al., 2006; Deer & Falkenberg, 2016; Hanohano, 1999; LaBoucane-Benson et al., 2012; McNally, 2004; Northwest Territories, Education, Culture and Employment, 1993; Simpson, 2014). All life forms have unique purpose and are equal in the eyes of Creator. For this reason, it is absolutely integral to ensure that the roles and gifts of all of Creation are safeguarded to ensure the genesis of life and living; harming one life form is understood as harming oneself. This is what is meant by the phrase "we are all related". Dene Kede Creation story can help to explicate these understandings:

> It is said that when the world first began, all things on earth were people. But the original people felt that they should know what their different roles and purposes were to be. A meeting was called and everyone attended. They set out to determine their future existence on earth. They began by creating a few essentials to which they tied up into bundles. And they decided that everyone should abide by certain universal laws. Finally they decided that each person should choose the family to which they would belong. Those people who wanted to be a part of the bird family declared their intentions. Those who did not want to be a part of the bird family made their intentions clear. (Northwest Territories, Education, Culture and Employment, 1993, p. xv)

Dene Creation story teaches that human beings were the last to be created and because of this, human beings relied on other life forms for survival and guidance (Northwest Territories,

Education, Culture and Employment, 1993, p. xv). In this regard, human beings are not the arbiters of life and living but rather, are beholden to other life forms. Dene Creation story also teaches that:

> As each of the animal people was being defined, a special spiritual relationship between these animal people and all others was defined. For example, as the spider was given its special identity, it was decided that this creature would be the most powerful of people. It would have powers that transcended the earth. Its webs would create beautiful rainbows and be able to capture rain in the heavens enabling the Dene to survive: hence, the Dene perspective that the small, the unseen and the seemingly most insignificant all possess power and thus deserve respect. As each of the animal people was being defined, a decision also had to be made as to the role it would play in life. Each animal person had to ensure its own survival without being in conflict with the survival of others, including the Dene. Although each was perfect in its own way, disagreements would arise among them about how they were to relate to each other. There were some that were greedy. Some wanted more power than others. (Northwest Territories, Education, Culture and Employment, 1993, p. xxiii)

These teachings express how difference is generative but also requires a commitment to learning how to co-operate and live in ways that ensures the survival of the collective.

Peter Hanohano (1999) also explicates similar sentiments regarding the importance of honouring Mother Earth as a living being. Hanohano (1999) draws upon McGaa (1990) to explicate this point:

> Our survival is dependent on the realization that Mother Earth is a truly holy being, that all things in this world are holy and must not be violated, and that we must share and be generous with one another. You may call this thought by whatever fancy words you wish-

> psychology, theology, sociology, or philosophy- but you must think of Mother Earth as a living being. Think of your fellow men and women as holy people who were put here by the Great Spirit. Think of being related to all things! With the philosophy in mind as we go on with our environmental ecology efforts, our search for spirituality, and our quest for peace, we will be far more successful when we truly understand the Indians' respect for Mother Earth. (pp. 208-209)

The insights expressed above indicate the ways in which connectivity is made possible through a Creator that unites all forms; this insight is integral to understand if we seek to come into deeper relationships with Indigenous worldviews and spiritualities. Forgetting the specific roles that all life forms play and their shared connection to spirit results in imbalance and disharmony.

Simpson (2014) also emphasizes that collective survival is directly dependent on the kinship of relationships that we are enmeshed in and our ability to live in humble, honest and reciprocal ways. These notions can help to explain how difference is generative. As explained above, all life forms have unique roles and have been gifted with different knowledge systems and ways of life. Survival then becomes possible through connecting with the wisdom and intelligence of these differences. The honouring of our relations then sets the conditions necessary for the love and compassion that is needed to sustain life. John Borrows (2014) emphasizes:

> For instance, my friend Kekek notes that zhawenjige is another derivation of zhawenim. It means to hunt. We hear the word used in hunting and harvesting songs. When we sing Zhawenim izhichige it means "you will be pitied, or have mercy placed upon you in your actions and what you are doing". The idea behind this word is that when we acknowledge our relations with the world, and our responsibilities to each other, then we will all be blessed or find love and compassion. We will be nourished, sustained and taken care of.

> The idea of zhawenjige is said to be part of an old treaty the Anishinaabe made with the animals. As long as we love them they will provide for us, and teach us about love and how to live well in the world . (p.11)

Drawing upon Simpson (2014) and Borrows (2014), we can conceptualize how living in ethical ways is informed by difference in connection to recognizing our kinship of relationships. Such teachings help us to remember that life and living is not "self-enclosed" and that self-responsibility is enacted when our relations are both protected and consulted for guidance.

Ethical relationality is manifested when we learn from sacred ecological wisdoms and enact those teachings both privately and publicly. Anishinaabe teachings, for example, emphasize the importance of learning from the patterns of the moon, sun and stars. Borrows (2014) explains:

> The Anishinaabe have long taken direction about how we should live through our interactions and observations with the environment. People regulate their behavior and resolve their disputes by drawing guidance from what they see in the behavior of the sun, moon, stars, winds, waves, trees, birds, animals, and other natural phenomenon. The Anishinaabe word for this concept is gikinawaabiwin. We can also use the word akinoomage, which is formed from two roots: aki noomaage. 'Aki' means earth and 'noomaage' means to point towards and take direction from. As we draw analogies from our surroundings, and appropriately apply or distinguish what we see, we learn about how to love, and how we should live in our lands" (p.10)

Borrow's (2014) beautifully express that life and living ought not be limited to human-beingness and that there is much to learn from all life forms.

Drawing inspiration from these holistic insights reminds that there are other ways to live a good life. Reconnecting with life-giving energy and recognizing what promotes survival as part of

our individual and shared consciousness can assist with the recovery of embodied knowing. Different Indigenous traditions emphasize the importance of connecting with the mental, emotional, physical and material aspects of self as a way to restore and maintain balance. Medicine Wheel[39] teachings share that we have four facets of our being, the mental, emotional, physical and spiritual, that must be attended to (Frederick,1991; Pewewardy,1999; Twigg & Hengen, 1988; Wenger-Nabigon, 2010). Pewewardy (1999) shares that "each of these aspects must be equally developed in a healthy well-balanced individual through the development and use of volition. All elements are contained within the Medicine Wheel, and all elements are equal within it" (p. 30). Pewewardy (1999) further expresses that the Medicine Wheel symbolizes the entire universe. This holistic worldview helps to remind individuals that all of life's components are interrelated. Living in fragmented ways ensures that different knowledges as sources of guidance in our lives remains left out and subsequently results in imbalance.

One representation of the Cree Medicine Wheel, for example, cautions against fragmentation and emphasizes the interrelatedness of the four parts of oneself through the symbolic representation of a circle that is divided into four quadrants. The "inside of the circle represents the positive (light), the outside represents the negative (dark), with the centre representing the core of the person" (Wenger-Nabigon, 2010, p. 143). Drawing upon these teachings is meant to facilitate balance, growth and minimize the presence of factors that impede

[39] It is important to note that not all Indigenous Peoples draw upon Medicine Wheel teachings. These teachings if practiced and drawn upon differ between groups and are referred to by different names including the four- part person and four directions teachings. Wenger-Nabigon (2010) shares that there are numerous representations of different Medicine Wheel concepts from Indigenous and non-Indigenous writers. These varied representations share in common a commitment to balance "which is embedded in the concepts of the Medicine Wheel across time, place and culture" (Wenger- Nabigon, 2010, p. 141).

balance (Wenger-Nabigon, 2010, p. 144). The teachings of the Cree Medicine Wheel are typically oriented to doors or the directions of east, west, south and north; each direction corresponds to specific teachings that encourage balance. The white, black, red and yellow colours of the Medicine Wheel represent the four races of humankind and the Cree teachings that "all four races lived together in peace on one body of land before it broke into separate continents" (Wenger-Nabigon, 2010, p. 144). Connecting with the insights that flow from these teachings can facilitate a greater coherence between one's inner and outer self that promotes deepened commitments to survival. This is especially important regarding addressing negative emotions that are often stigmatized as problems to be ignored. Ignoring pain and trauma ensures that hurt remains alive and carried in our bodies and subsequently over time and place. While curricular and pedagogical approaches typically address traumatic historical events solely through the purview of knowledge-based narrativizations of lived experience, they do not address emotions, Spirit or the body in meaningful ways that promote healing. Learning from these teachings in curricular and pedagogical contexts can perhaps illuminate the importance of addressing our emotions individually and collectively (Fellner, n.d,). Nabigon (2006) emphasizes that:

> If we do not honour the negative side of life we as humans either fall very ill, or worse, inflict our pain upon each other. Touching negative aspects of life can be beneficial. If we learn to honour and recognize all of our emotions, including the negative qualities, we can and will become the bearers of our own pearls of wisdom (pp. 53-54).

As holistic insights emphasize, addressing our emotions as sources of guidance and learning can inform living in ways that promote greater balance for self and others.

**Learning from Cree holistic insights through Elder Bob Cardinal's guidance**

As mentioned from the outset of this dissertation, I have learned from Cree philosophies through Elder Cardinal's patient guidance. It is important to note that I received these teachings in a highly subjective way. Coming into relationship with such guidance in a personal way allowed me to connect with myself in a manner that learning from academic papers on holism were unable to inspire. The insights that continue to arise from my subjective experiences and insights heavily influence my commitment to opening up the significance of holistic sensibilities in curricular and pedagogical contexts. Drawing upon Cree teachings as sources of inspiration is also purposeful in this regard and is not intended to overlook other Indigenous philosophies and represent Cree ways as superior. Because of the guidance from my own faith and the ways in which my parents have raised me, I regard teachings from Elder Cardinal as restorative and generative because these insights offer other ways to reconnect with self and other more deeply.

Of particular significance for me was learning from the four direction teachings, during my time with Elder Cardinal and other friends, nearly five years ago on Enoch Cree Nation. The four directions teachings convey the importance of balance in promoting harmonious ways of living with self and other life forms; these teachings uphold that living a good life is made possible through bringing into balance the physical, emotional, spiritual and mental parts of our being. The North, which corresponds with the physical teaches us to utilize all and not waste gifts. The East which corresponds with our emotions teaches us patience, compassion, and knowledge of the past, and an awareness of our emotions. The south, which corresponds with the spiritual teaches us about being nurturing and giving and an awareness of our growing identity, spirituality and respect for other wisdom traditions. The west corresponds with the mental and teaches us to communicate in respectful ways and honour the life journeys of others. "While "balance is elusive" (B. Cardinal, 2014) taking the time to reconnect with the four directions inspires a greater connectivity with self

that I have come to understand as incredibly important to enact *miyo-wîcêhtowin and miyo-wahkohtowin*. It is difficult to remember one's relationship and dependence on other life forms for survival if the measures that facilitate such connections are not undertaken with care. My experiences with learning from and practicing the four directions teachings in my own life and partaking in ceremony have taught me the importance and absolute necessity of re-grounding and re-connecting with that which bestows life. The insights that flow from these teachings help me to remember and recover that which I have forgotten in my enmeshment in approaches to life and living. These insights, under the guidance of Elder Cardinal, encourage "slowing down" and "treading carefully" as an ethical imperative that can be applied to curricular and pedagogical contexts (Weston, 2004). As Cree sensibilities also teach me, we must slow down if we want to carefully make choices that impact all life forms. Slowing down reminds us to pay attention to the parts of the whole. In other words, human beings are not the only arbiters of morality and being. We have much to learn from the movement and flow of nature and the dependence of our very living on our connection with Creation. Such perceptions bring me back to Willie Ermine's (2007) beautiful renderings of ethics. Ermine (2007) understands ethics on the basis of the relationship between action and responsibility:

> Ethics here is defined as the capacity to know what harms or enhances the well-being of sentient creatures—ethics entertains our personal capacity and our integrity to stand up for our cherished notions of good, responsibility, duty, obligations, etc. With our ethical standards in mind, we necessarily have to think about the transgression of those standards by others and how our actions may also infringe or violate the spaces of others. (p. 195)

Ermine's words speak to the importance of slowing down and reflecting upon our need to avoid taking our ability to choose lightly. Experiencing difference and taking the time to learn from it can guide more ethically relational ways of living.

**Cultivating *miyo-wîcêhtowin* and *miyo- pimatisiwin***

As shared throughout this dissertation**,** *miyo-wîcêhtowin* means "having or possessing good relations" (H. Cardinal, 2000, p. 14). This concept requires that individuals "create positive and good relationships in all relationships be it individually or collectively" (p. 14). As my experience above illustrates, it is difficult to honour our relationships with Creation if we do not remember our unity with Creation. Re-connecting in this way honours the sacred gifts that flow from *wahkohtowin*[65] (LaBoucane-Benson et al., 2012, p. 5). LaBoucane-Benson et al. suggest that:

> We are linked to how Creator makes life work: The people in our ceremonies express our gratitude to the Creator for the water. The rain that comes to replenish life, the sun that helps make life happen, the wind that makes life happen. All of these are in the natural order of law. The Creator, through his creation, put down the law- this is the way it will happen. He gave entities, grandfathers, the power to make life work. As a human being, we are part of that-we are linked into that. You can't be separate from it, otherwise you won't exist. We need that connection-that relationship with the natural. . . . There are laws that govern the world that do not belong to us, that we cannot overpower, we cannot manipulate or even attempt to have any say over. They have their own way. So what we try to do as a people is to fit into that, become part of it. And not to try to control it—if we ever try that, then we will bring demise to ourselves. (p. 5)

[65] LaBoucane-Beson et al. (2012) explicate enmeshment with kinship relational networks through the Cree concept of *miyo-wahkohtowin*.

Laboucane-Benson et al.'s reflection on traditional teachings reminds us that overriding sacred laws invites separation from our relations which encourages imbalance. To remember our oneness with Mother Earth, it is helpful to recall that we "[cannot] know reciprocity on its own terms" (Sheridan & Longboat, 2006, p. 367). This assertion emphasizes the urgency of acting in ways to reconnect with kinship relational networks and work through the ways in which the Enlightenment "robbed our natural intelligence" (p. 374). Living *miyo- pimatisiwin* or the good life is then made possible through restoring balance and refraining from taking for granted sacred gifts.

Elder Cardinal's (2014) guidance through ceremony and learning from holism have assisted in recovering my relationship with the sacred. The following is my experience with feeling these connections while I spoke with a tree.

> September 27, 2014
>
> I have never spoken to a tree before. I love trees though. I have hugged trees many times before. I did not feel uncomfortable doing so. It was beautiful to hear the wind blowing, the leaves rustling up against each other. Having my eyes shut; . . . speaking my truths. Offering tobacco in humility-in gratitude and respect. Speaking with the tree was embodied and involved. I was relating with the tree. Trees gift Creation with clean air. Have I been forgetting this? I feel shameful as I write this. How could I forget? *If I do not relate with the tree, then how will I remember to honour it?*

In revisiting these insights five years later, I more deeply understand how renewing relationships with that which gifts life is also integral to enacting reconciliation[66]. Connecting with sacred difference that is expressed through reconnecting with our relations may inform deepened relationships of trust and connectivity on curricular and pedagogical landscapes.

**Cree and Sufic Connections**

[66] Reconciliation here refers to The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and its commitment to addressing the experiences of Indian Residential School Survivors. Honouring these histories and lived experiences is understood as essential to repairing and improving relationships between Indigenous peoples and Canadians.

The insights shared in this section as inspired by different Indigenous holistic teachings and specifically, Cree wisdom philosophies, reminds us that all life forms are interconnected and that we are all related. As previously stated, my turning to Cree and Sufic traditions for guidance has been significantly informed by my experiences with Canadian Liberal Multiculturalism as storying me as a problem. Paradoxically, "the more open to difference liberal modernity declares itself, the more dismissive of difference it becomes" (Goldberg, 1993, p. 6). I regard this paradoxical dismissing of difference, under the guidance of liberal philosophies, as a result of living in ways that are disconnected from our shared ecological roots. As mentioned, these insights have inspired a reinterpretation of the Qur'anic teachings of *Ayat* and *Ashraf-al Makhluqat* in connection to Rumi's poetry. Paying attention to *Ayat*, through the sacred gifts of the water, trees and air we breathe, can inspire a renewal of relationship with other life forms that is also expressed by the teachings of *Ashraf- al Makhluqat*. Sacred notions of difference, as explicated through learning from the similarities and differences inherent in Cree and Sufic philosophies, can guide us to live with greater balance and integrity on curricular and pedagogical landscapes.

The juxtapositioning of Cree and Sufic wisdom insights brings forth a generative ethic that reminds me of Elder Cardinal's teachings of the eagle feather in connection to Qur'anic teachings of the purposes of opposites. Elder Cardinal shared that the center stem of the eagle feather signifies balance, and the right and left of center represent different instances that can impact balance. He explained that these contrasting instances exist alongside each other. Therefore, opposites depend upon each other rather than polarize (D. Donald, Personal Communication, February 2015). As a result, it is integral to remember that difference and sameness depend upon each other and to learn to honour both to maintain balance. Difference is not to be feared, managed and erased, as liberal philosophies suggest. Difference in balance with sameness is an ecological

sensibility which teaches that humans can learn from the life that surrounds them. Holistic teachings give guidance on how to attend to these insights and honour them in our daily living.

**How I Understand Holism**

**The 'Holistic' Conference and Missing the Mystery**

I am in Orillia, Ontario. I am walking amongst the trees along the lake. I walk on the beautiful path that is illuminated by fallen leaves. I pick up a few leaves and stare at them for a while. It is beginning to rain lightly, a gentle and refreshing mist. I walk some more and stop by a tree and sit under it. I meditate for some time while I sit under the tree. My meditation is halted by the fact that I know it is time to eat lunch soon, and the next session of presentations will begin at the Holistics Learnings Conference. I honestly feel drained and spent by these sessions. What is bothering me so much? I realize that I am responding in ways similar to my responses to the presentations on emotional literacy and mindfulness that I attended at AERA in April 2013. I feel a little sick to my stomach and know that a headache is coming on.

On my walk back to the dining hall in Geneva Park, I meet a skunk. I have never seen a skunk up close before. I stop and look at him. I wonder if I have summoned him with my emotions. I am unsure what this means and what he is perhaps trying to teach me.

Dragging my feet, I force myself to walk towards the Geneva Park dining hall entrance. I think to myself, how, will I converse with the new friends I have made when I am feeling out of sorts? Why am I feeling so unbalanced and unraveled?

Between eating dinner and chatting with friends, I become quiet. As I eat my crème brulé, I think about how ironic it is that this conference is situated in such a beautiful place, yet the ways in which the presenters speak about holism consistently seem incredibly distanced from Spirit. Similar to my experiences at AERA, conference attendees use wisdom ways of knowing as catchy

phrases to market research. They approach mindfulness as an all-encompassing phrase that is strictly related to "attaining" calmness, controlling mood and behaviors, and improving test scores. None of the sessions that I attend speak to wisdom in ways that connect to Spirit. When the presenters explore particular practices such as loving compassion meditation, they make no connection to particular traditions. Another 'swallowing' or 'incorporation'[67] occurs. Is holism also being colonized in this process?

The preceding explorations of Sufic and Cree wisdom traditions alongside the narrative shared above directly explicate how I conceptualize holism and enact its philosophies. Unlike approaches to holism that solely promote human relationality (Miller, 2000; Miller, 2006; Miller, 2007; Smith, 2006), I understand holism as not being limited to the domains of human encounter. I regard holism as enacting and renewing relationships with all of my relations and honouring the mandates of *Ashraf-al-Makhluqat*. I also regard holism as connected to a *Spirit* that unites all life forms. My contention with popular holistic approaches that have received much currency in curricular and pedagogical contexts is their advocating for the inclusion of holistic philosophies on secular terms. I understand the intention around such approaches and a desire to quell the fears that might arise in educational contexts when holism is invoked. I regard the curricular and pedagogical preference to uphold more secular holistic philosophies as another manifestation of the false universalism of liberalism. While such approaches to holism have a place, they unfortunately succumb to managing different expressions of holism to meet a particular end. This management approaches holistic teachings as a source of external gratification and undermines the wisdom that it expresses. Holism then becomes another tool to 'become somebody' in the

[67] I situate *swallowing* and *incorporation* in response to Dwayne Donald's (2013) explanation that incorporating multiple perspectives might indicate a swallowing of other ways of knowing and being.

liberal market economy context. The deeper significance of holistic insights that this dissertation is seeking to recover thus becomes lost in secular holistic positionings. I will draw upon John P. Miller's (2007) *The Holistic Curriculum* to further elaborate these concerns[68].

**Overview of Miller's (2007) *The Holistic Curriculum***

I must clarify my intentions before I commence my explorations of Miller's (2007) ambitious piece. I recognize that it is an incredibly challenging and emotionally charged process to explore various holistic traditions in ways that do not manage or misrepresent them via one piece of writing. I experience this difficulty not only when speaking about different holistic traditions together, but also while teaching about Islam. I struggle with deciding what to share about Islam and Muslims, the depth of this sharing and how I can best honor the faith's multiplex nature. I find this task incredibly difficult as I do not wish to compartmentalize Islam and Muslims. Such challenges are exacerbated by situations that dictate that I must speak about Islam and Muslims within sixty minutes. As Donald (2014) emphasizes, "we are all lifting different things" and this of course informs how we engage with each other and the notions that resonate with us. Consequently, my understandings of holism will differ from Miller's (2007) approaches in many ways. The differences in approaches are not indicative of one sensibility being 'superior' to another, but rather convey how there are multiple ways to come into relationship with deeper understandings of connectivity. My intention is not to convey that Miller's approach is lacking in its offerings but is rather to make evident the troubles that arise when holism and holistic practices are interpreted in rigid ways that do not attend to difference and resultingly 'miss' the Mystery.

[68] I have interweaved an in -depth review of Miller's (2007) *The Holistic Curriculum* because I feel it would be unethical to speak to my concern's with Miller's work without providing a clear context.

I appreciate the ways in which Miller conceptualizes holistic education as growing balance, inclusion and connection (p. 6). Throughout the book Miller is establishing that holistic education is an education of balance that requires commitment to relationships. He appears to situate these relationships within shared wisdoms inherent in perennial philosophy. I suggest that Miller's engagement with perennial philosophy is a way for him to establish that all of reality is connected via the 'mystery' or "a mysterious unity" (p. 18) and it is the mystery that makes possible traveling contrasting pathways. Miller endeavors to attend to such difference through his emphasis that his intention of exploring various holistic traditions is "not to gloss over difference" (p. 34). Miller explains:

> This review of how the major faiths articulate their connections of the soul is not an attempt to gloss over differences in conceptions. Even within the various faiths there are disputes about the nature of the person and his or her relationship to God. For example, in Christianity, the monastic and contemplative traditions have not been predominant (p.34)

I interpret his relation of difference with connections of the soul as residing in his designation of "a mysterious unity". Further, Miller emphasizes how difference can perhaps be understood as connected through explanations of polarities. He articulates how positioning a particular approach or way as 'less desirable' impedes the ability for individuals to shift to "higher levels of consciousness" (Miller, 2007. p. 62). Consequently, I understand Miller's (2007) words as a way to beckon readers to recognize and forgo the practice of divisive ways of knowing and being.

Integral to honoring difference in order to embody the Mystery is Miller's turning towards various traditions to convey how they may understand connectivity. Miller's explanation of the ways in which Inuit peoples of northern Canada understand the spirit as manifest in all entities is helpful in introducing the intimate connections between human relationships and sacred ecology

(Donald, 2014). Miller (2007) asserts "[a]s we face the large environmental challenges such as global warming and pollution of the oceans, the Indigenous worldview is now seen as one way to help heal the planet" (p. 34). While I find that Miller's integration of particular Indigenous perspectives and other traditions is rather fragmented and assumptive at times, I do value his striving to working towards illustrating connections amongst various facets of Creation.

Related to understanding, witnessing and living the interconnectivity of Creation is Miller's notion that knowing oneself is an initial premise of holistic education (p. 69). Miller's emphasis that Greek philosophers individually understood philosophy as a contemplative practice fusing the intellect and spirit is important because it highlights the absurdity of claims that 'Western' traditions were always distanced from contemplative elements (p. 68). This point is exemplified by Miller's elucidation of Hadot's (2002) notions of the genesis of Greek philosophy. I appreciate the manner in which Miller builds upon Greek philosophy's original contemplative nature and relates these understandings with Myles Horton's (1998) views of education that emphasize the importance of viewing education as a whole rather than separate pieces (Miller, 2007, p. 85). The exploration of various holistic education models, including those of Montessori and Steiner, help to rupture more fragmented conceptualizations of education.

Highlighting bifurcated educational frameworks and the origins of such separation is supported by Miller's accounts of mind and body disconnects. He shares the ways in which Descartes' writings contribute to the alienation between body and environment via Abram's (1996) works (Miller, 2007, p. 114). Through Abram (1996), Miller underscores the intimate connection between body and earth (p. 114). These thoughts compel me to contemplate why anthropocentric conceptions of life and living, which impedes connecting with all of our relations, is given preferential treatment in various institutional contexts.

Vital to recognizing the disconnect between body and environment is examining ways in which such a separation may be lifted. I appreciate Miller's inclusion of global education via Selby's (2001) sensibilities. Selby's (2001) approaches of embodied, spiritual and interactive learning speak to the potential for inner and outer worlds to combine through action (Miller, 2007, p. 160). These teachings are beautifully supported in connection with Ram Dass' understandings of compassion. Dass (2002) shares:

> Compassion in action is paradoxical and mysterious. It is absolute, yet continually changing. It accepts that everything is happening exactly as it should, and it works with a full-hearted commitment to change. It sets goals but knows that process is all there is. It is joyful in the midst of suffering and hopeful in the face of overwhelming odds. It is simple in a world of complexity and confusion. It is done for others but nurtures the self (as cited in Miller, 2007, p. 158).

I understand these words as speaking to how connections may be established and maintained amongst inner and outer worlds. While reading this quotation in relation to Selby's conceptions of global education, I am reminded of ethical relationality and the gift of choice and potential to help heal each other in Creation (Miller, 2007, p. 158). I find this segment of Miller's (2007) book particularly insightful as it speaks to the necessity of compassion and accepting the process of continuous change via ambiguity of the Mystery as we come into relationship with Creation.

Also powerful and related to global conceptions of education and ethical relationality is Miller's (2007) emphasis of education's role in the earth's demise. The earth's increasingly strained situation is reflected in Miller's (2007) explanation of our disconnection with earth via Orr's (1994) conceptualizations. Orr (1994) shares:

> These things are threads of a whole cloth. The fact that we see them as disconnected events or fail to see them at all is, I believe, evidence of a considerable failure that we have yet to acknowledge as an educational failure. It is failure to educate people to think broadly, to perceive systems and patterns and to live as whole persons (as cited in Miller, 2007, p. 163).

I understand this quotation as speaking to the gift of choice and the need to acknowledge that "education has played a major part in the destruction of the earth" (Miller, 2007, p. 162). My initial and re-readings of this assertion were accompanied by an undeniable bodily response. While reading Miller's (2007) strong words, I witnessed my heart beating faster and becoming uneasy in my stomach. I believe I responded in these ways because Miller's (2007) convoking is strengthened through emphasizing that "education should be truly inclusive by situating everything in the largest possible context, which is the cosmos" (p. 163). I comprehend this particular assertion as reflecting a needed connection with the Mystery as a way towards interconnectivity. These insights are further supported by Miller's explanation of place via Orr (1994). His explanation of what it means to learn about the place in which one is residing enlivens his conceptions of holism. As well, Miller's interweaving of the Yukari Kazama's 'Trees in The Home Forest and Rie Nagahashi's 'Big Red Buds' makes more evident the ways in which all of Creation is alive. I feel that this particular section of Miller's book perhaps resonated with me the most because his voice was made more apparent and as a result, I was able to feel a connection between his words and my own sensibilities. I also recognize that my connection with this chapter is likely because of the way in which his words embody Creation as living. I feel that I responded to Miller's words as a call to action in response to how he situated this beckoning not as a means to an end nor as a strategy for human beings to gain a tangible object.

In addition to relating with Miller's exploration of acting in ways that assume responsibility for Creation's mistreatment, was my affinity to his explanations of different levels of connection. His inclusion of a teacher's experiences with introducing meditation to her students reminded me of the importance of honoring the four- part person and the how these levels of interconnectedness largely inform our capacity for calmness (Miller, 2007, 183). I also appreciate Miller's inclusion of discussion topics related to world religions regarding these topics as ways to engage with difference to promote connectivity (Miller, 2007, p. 184). While I appreciate these topics, I feel that it is integral to actively live and practice philosophies from various holistic traditions rather than learning 'about' them in isolation.

Lastly, Miller's (2007) final chapter resonates with me because it investigates the importance of learning how to honor the moment and live in present ways by letting go. He relates the ability to learn how to let go through his previous discussions about various forms of meditation. While I find Miller's (2007) explanations of meditation rather disconnected and assumptive about the meditation practices of particular traditions, I appreciate how Miller's approach speaks to how meditation can help us to witness our connectedness with others through paying greater attention to the thoughts that arise in our being (Miller, 2007, p. 191).

**Responding to Miller's (2007) *The Holistic Curriculum***

As mentioned, I conceptualize holism as living in ways that honour my enmeshment with my kinship relational networks and the presence of Spirit as making life possible and connecting all life forms. Because of my relationship to holism in this regard, I interpret Miller's (2007) words as a response to how I feel that Creator's awe, mystery and ambiguity are separate from much of Miller's (2007) approaches to holism and holistic practices. I also experienced feelings of compartmentalization from our kinship relational networks when engaging with Miller's text.

Miller addresses the terms ‘holistic’ and ‘wholistic’ (p. 6) in disconnected ways. He shares that “holistic implies spirituality, or a sense of the sacred, while ‘wholistic’ is more material and biological with an emphasis on physical and social interconnections” (Miller, 2007, p. 6). My trepidation with Miller’s explanations of holism and wholism are not quite in response to his distinction but rather because a connection is not established between the two. While writing this, I am mindful of the fact that my readings of this separation are largely informed by my spirituality and how I continue to learn from and with other holistic traditions. I regard a balance between the material and spiritual as crucial to promoting balance.

Although Miller (2007) emphasizes that the interconnectedness of reality and a mysterious unity is a source of holistic sensibilities, I feel that this connection is hidden by practices that are in rooted in the three-part person. Throughout his book, Miller (2007) emphasizes the mind, body and heart (pp. 4, 27, 18, 45, 67, 113). However, the mention of Spirit or soul is not spoken about in deep association with these three parts. Miller’s writing also appears more epistemologically rooted and does not attend to onto-epistemological unity. I notice such compartmentalization in my response to Miller’s (2007) defining of wisdom. Miller (2007) shares:

> Wisdom is intelligence rooted in the soul. The ancients call this the ‘thinking heart’. Wisdom links intuition and intelligence in order to deal with the larger question: what is our role in the universe? How can we deal with human suffering (p. 26).

While facets of this definition do resonate with me, I am troubled by Miller’s (2007) singular definition of wisdom (Taggart, 2001, p. 325). I am not compelled to feel or believe that wisdom is only situated in the soul. I suggest that mind, body, heart and soul need to work together in order to become gifted with wisdom. Since I imagine Creation as multiple and continuously in motion,

I feel a singular definition of wisdom constructs boundaries amongst and around Creation subsequently reducing its form.

Integral to the relationship between limited notions of wisdom and the 'missing' of Mystery is the perpetuation of anthropocentric conceptions of Creation. Following Sheridan and Rorohiakewen (2012), I suggest that notions of interconnectivity become constrained when holism does not involve the process of recognizing our own anthropocentrism (p. 371). Reproducing anthropocentric notions of Creation and obscuring how "Creation is everything" (Sheridan & Rorohiakewen, 2012, p. 371) are perhaps reinforced by 'missing' how modernity represents the imaginal as anthropocentric (Sheridan & Rorohiakewen, 2012, p. 371). While Miller (2007) elucidates the mind and environment disconnect through his brief explorations of Descartes' work, these ideas are not related to how holism also involves recovering our connection with all of our senses. My contention is that naming the imaginal as purely intellectual entrenches linear notions of time. Understanding the imaginal in time bound ways is problematic because it curtails our ability to recover our relationship with the metaphysical worlds (Sheridan & Rorohiakewen, 2012, p. 374). Consequently, I regard Miller's (2007) approach to holism as concentric as I feel it is still largely guided by anthropocentric thinking (Weston, 2004, p. 27).

The invisibilization of the relationship between anthropocentric notions of Creation and the voiding of Mystery may subconsciously produce tendencies of control and management. Throughout Miller's (2007) book I have responded to his words as if he was trying to name and subsequently fix how holistic practice ought to look. I feel this way especially in response to how Miller (2007) distinguishes between 'Eastern' and 'Western' conceptions of meditation (p. 20). These words bring me back to the place of Orillia, and feeling 'imbalanced', 'unraveled' and managed. Though Miller (2007) is trying to convey the multiplicity of meditation practices in

various traditions, I feel his designation of 'Eastern' meditation as purely focused perpetuates the opposite of his intentions. As a person who may be categorized as practicing 'Eastern' meditation, I respectfully call into question conceptions of meditation as being either contemplative or focused. Speaking from the Shi'a Ismaili Muslim Tariqah, our practice of meditation is not guided by a particular 'methodology'. Further, how we sit in meditation and practice is up to us. This freedom in practice, however, must be guided by humility and God-centred thoughts, speech and actions. Most importantly, the practice of mediation in Ismailism stresses that we ought to leave spiritual growth in Allah's hands and that we are not entitled to anything.

Such control and management also manifest in Miller's explanations of Islam and Indigenous spiritualities and peoples (pp. 33- 34). While I recognize Miller's ambition in explicating his interpretations of the key philosophical underpinnings of particular traditions, I feel such an approach is rather problematic. Is it ethical to define traditions in abridged ways? Does such an approach perhaps lend itself to 'colonizing particular wisdom traditions?' Perhaps Miller has experienced similar tensions while endeavoring to represent particular traditions.

While Miller may have struggled with speaking 'about' these traditions, I am contemplating the extent to which missing the Mystery is perhaps a result of liberal philosophies that are guiding his interpretation and subsequently the representation of particular faiths. I find it interesting that Miller has defined Sufism as following two 'stations' to the Divine when in fact the process is infinite with numerous stages (p. 31/32). As well his emphasis that Sufis are the only Muslims who practice 'tawhid' or the Oneness of God is incredibly troubling. Miller's speaking about Indigenous spiritualities, by explaining how the 'Native Mind' (p. 34) views the Universe, comes across as managerial and assumptive. Is Miller's (2007) propensity to define Islam and Indigenous spiritualities in limited ways the result of the Enlightenment's separation of the

material and spiritual? To what extent do liberal philosophies inform Miller's (2007) engagement with his own spirituality? In what ways do liberal philosophies influence how he thinks about and with other traditions? I pose these questions because I am unaware of the ways in which Miller positions himself in relation to his spirituality. I do not feel that Miller has located himself in relation to and within his spiritual sensibilities with the exception of 'Chapter 10: Earth Connections'. This absence is powerful as it limits my ability to come into relationship with Miller's ways of knowing and being. While Miller (2007) does not locate himself, it is perhaps not overly assumptive to suggest that Miller's word choices and the ways in which he represents particular traditions is a promotion of liberal understandings of holism.

**Circling back to how I conceptualize Holism**

Once again, the purpose of sharing a review and response to Miller's (2007) *The Holistic Curriculum* was to open up what secular holistic accounts miss particularly regarding notions of Spirit, learning from the wisdom that arises from our kinship relational networks, and what can be recovered through learning from holistic traditions. The point to address carefully with this review is to revisit how the false universalism of liberalism has and continues to inform the interpretation and enactment of 'acceptable' forms of holism on curricular and pedagogical contexts. Drawing upon my subjective experiences with holism, and learnings from former Aboriginal Studies 30 students and teachers, I am addressing the harm that is caused when youths' experiences and connections with holism are managed. This management does not allow for students in curricular and pedagogical contexts to be fully human and separates them from sources of connectivity that promote balance and wellness. We desperately need deepened conceptions of holism, that are not limited to the "human development of the child" (Alberta Education, 2017, p. 25) and human relationality if we desire to learn from difference and live in

ways that safeguard the integrity of all beings. Other conceptions and enactments of holism may guide ways of living that inspire openness to self and others.

**Literature Review Afterthoughts**

The preceding literature review sought to address the troubles that arise when deeper understandings and expressions of difference, that can promote more sustainable connectivity, are silenced and proclaimed as unacceptable within secular institutional framings. Explorations of liberal philosophies, as they manifest in Canadian public and private spaces via multicultural discourse and curricular contexts, were intended to show the paradoxical proclamations of liberalism as promoting equity and safeguarding difference, while simultaneously limiting the expression of difference (Patrick et al., 2017). Canadian Liberal multiculturalism is unequipped to address difference in more meaningful ways that inspire creativity and survival. The survival that I am speaking to here is not limited to material understandings but rather addresses what gives meaning and purpose in one's life (Donald, 2019; Moriss, 2002; Shahjahan, 2005;). This is because Canadian Liberal multiculturalism seeks to manage and oversimplify the meaning that is embedded in difference in order to promote more universal ways of knowing and being. Difference, in a liberal sense, is utilized to meet the ends of 'becoming somebody' and furthering 'material recognition'. This why it is so difficult to accept and connect with deepened expressions of difference because the false universalism of liberalism has continuously generated the story that difference is only worthy if it can get us something. Other forms of difference thus become a 'problem' and contribute to our 'common-sense' understandings of difference. This singular take on the utility and purpose of difference reduces possibilities to connect more deeply and meaningfully with ourselves and our relations. These ideologies undeniably shape conceptions of citizenship education, multiple perspectives and framings of current events within K-12 Social

Studies contexts (Patrick et al., 2017, p. 620). The concern that this dissertation specifically addresses is how oversimplified interpretations of difference interfere with nurturing and growing deepened expressions of relationality; deepened forms of relationality refer to ways of knowing and being that are not self-enclosed and are committed to meaning-making alongside other life forms.

As alluded to throughout this dissertation, the need for individual and collective healing is integral to address the increased xenophobia, hatred and materialism that permeates our shared local, national and international realities. Liberal multiculturalism does not teach us how to reconnect with ourselves in the ways that are needed to address the social and cultural crises that is rapidly unfolding in the United States and its gradual infestation in Canada and elsewhere [69]. The Pittsburgh synagogue massacre in October, 2018 and New Zealand Christchurch massacre of March, 2019 evidence a deeper problem. These massacres are indicative of a continued deliberate institutionalized promotion of the fear of difference and avoiding that which connects us more deeply. The ideological and institutional avoidance of holism causes perpetual imbalance, makes people unwell and ensures that they remain unwell. This dissertation is a preliminary exploration of dwelling in the wisdoms that I have experienced as sources of strength and possibility, alongside others, as potential openings, not solutions, to the complexities that we collectively find ourselves enmeshed in. As the literature review explored, learning from the wisdom that flows from sacred ecological teachings, as expressed in Cree and Sufic sensibilities, may offer us ways to reawaken

[69] The Pittsburgh synagogue massacre resulted in the death of 11 congregants and wounding of approximately six others during worship (Robertson et al., 2018, para. 1-2). The New Zealand Christchurch massacre resulted in the death of 50 worshippers (The Economist, 2019, para. 1). These heinous acts, alongside recent church burnings in France and Louisiana, point to a deeper problem; the deliberate perpetutation of xenophobia in public spaces is another form of control that interrupts and impedes connectivity. Removing individuals from embodied knowledges has numerous implications for our shared lives and the ways in which we seek to live them.

to our enmeshment and connectivity. The holistic insights of enmeshment and connectivity are missing from our current curricular and pedagogical contexts. This work is situated within Cree holistic sensibilities as a way to honour my Treaty relationship and Islam's holism. Drawing upon my subjective experiences in connection to Cree and Sufic holistic insights is my contribution to the field. These learnings, while not the only ways to honour life and living, can help to guide deeper understandings of our current and forthcoming Social Studies curricula, what is missed regarding the spirit and intent of multiple perspectives, historical consciousness and conceptions of reconciliation that are limited to the insertion and inclusion of Indigenous histories, lived experiences and sensibilities. These insights can also help guide current curricular redesign efforts, that specifically address, but are not limited to, standards 3 and 6 of Alberta Education's curricula architecture. It is dangerous to continue promoting curricular and pedagogical imperatives that either ignore holism or promote the inclusion of secularized expressions of holism alone. This is not to say that mindfulness practice, as evidenced in holistic educational literature and its promotion of wellness through behavior management and emotional awareness are not important. The promotion of secular expressions of holism, alone, inadequately address how holism, for many youth, teachers and community members, requires a connection with Spirit. Lastly, this dissertation is an initial contribution to learning to honour the integrity of the various sensibilities that guide us in our lives; our individual identifications as secular, atheist, agnostic, spiritual, religious, dogmatic, connecting to spirituality without affiliation to a global wisdom tradition, need not curtail deepened expressions of connectivity, but can rather inspire them.

## Chapter Four:
## The Curricular and Pedagogical Case of Aboriginal Studies 30: Recovering and Learning from Holism

As conveyed at the outset of this dissertation, my choice to learn from the curricular and pedagogical context of Aboriginal Studies 30 was inspired by what was missing from my own education. I understand Aboriginal Studies 30 as worthy of exploration because the course is directly guided by holism. Consequently, I will explore Aboriginal Studies' creation on the basis of its holistic curricular underpinnings and how these ethics flow throughout the course's curricular content and make it a uniquely curricular and pedagogical offering for students in Alberta.

The spirit and intent of Aboriginal Studies is multiplex. A fundamental commitment of the course is to guide Indigenous youth to better understand who they are and heal through the intergenerational impacts of colonialism on individual and community identity formations. It was hoped that such a course and the learnings, connections and opportunities offered would help Indigenous youth attain a sense of pride and confidence in who they are (E. Goodstriker, Personal Communication, May 2, 2017[70]). It is important to note that Aboriginal Studies was also "intended to provide a conceptual framework for all learners to enhance understandings of the diverse Aboriginal cultures within their region, Canada and the world" (Alberta Education, p. 1, 2002). Attending to difference was also significant to the course's design. Course creators desired to foster a sense of cohesion amongst different Indigenous communities while ensuring that the different sensibilities, lands and worldviews that comprised these groups' ways of knowing and being were not collapsed (E. Goodstriker, Personal Communication, May 2, 2017).

[70] I spoke with Evelyn Goodstriker in May 2017 to acquire a deeper understanding of the spirit and intent of Aboriginal Studies and the place from which the course emerged. Evelyn Goodstriker was involved with the creation of Aboriginal Studies. She was the former director of the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Branch at Alberta Education.

The course creation process initially commenced with three individuals who were seeking to create a Programme of Studies. These individuals came alongside Elders, community members, teachers and students from Dene, Cree, Saulteaux and Blackfoot territories (E. Goodstriker, Personal Communication, May 2, 2017). This guidance was conceptualized as representing the threads of history, spirituality, cultures and traditions. Particular threads had more information than others. Consequently, individuals from all nations across Alberta were consulted for guidance. Conversations across the province were particularly guided by wisdom keepers and teachers. As a more cogent understanding of the course was emerging, it became apparent that 10-20-30 levels of the course were needed to ensure that the depth of these various threads would be honoured (E. Goodstriker, May 2, 2017). These conversations and curricular formations were inspired by the insights that flowed from ceremony. Reconnecting with oneself and other life forms while partaking in ceremony guided how curriculum development was understood and what it was for. Ceremony reminded Aboriginal Studies course creators of what connected them to the land and how each nation had something to offer to this process (E. Goodstriker, Personal Communication, May 2, 2017). These experiences also reminded them of teachings that were at times forgotten. Understanding the ways in which spirituality informed the Aboriginal Studies course creation process is of utmost importance because the process involved "bringing back what was lost" (D. Mineault, Personal Communication, May 19, 2017[71]). The notion of spirituality as a way of life has far too often been occluded by anthropological interpretations of various histories, spiritualities peoples and places (D. Mineault, Personal Communication, May 19, 2017). While it is not implausible to suggest that notions of Indigenous

[71] I also spoke with Debbie Mineault in May 2017 to acquire a deeper understanding of the spirit and intent of Aboriginal Studies and the place from which the course emerged. Debbie Mineault was also involved in the creation of Aboriginal Studies.

perspectives are understood as primarily encompassing histories, it is the traditional teachings, guidance from elders, teachings about ecology, medicines and guidance from circle as a way to live that significantly guides and informs the curriculum and pedagogy of the course (D. Mineault, Personal Communication, May 19, 2017). For these reasons, it is integral to understand that "the pedagogy of the course had to be supported by the story keepers and knowledge keepers" (D. Mineault, Personal Communication, May 19, 2017). In this way, spirituality is always related to worldview and cannot be separated from it. Spirituality also affirms particular traditions and teaches how connecting with place is integral for students to support their understandings of who they were and where they came from.

The Aboriginal Studies Programme of Studies manifests the holistic underpinnings that guided Aboriginal Studies' curriculum design. The Aboriginal Studies 30 POS emphasizes philosophical commitments that guide the spirit and intent of the course. Some of these philosophical commitments include:

1. Enables all students to demonstrate an understanding that societies are made up of individuals, but each individual has a responsibility to the well-being of the society.
2. Illustrates the importance of the spiritual nature of Aboriginal peoples and their relationship with all things in the universe.
3. Helps all students to develop respect for the environment and commitment to use resources wisely.
4. Helps all students to appreciate values related to their personal, ethical and spiritual beliefs. (Alberta Education, 2002, p. 2)

Such philosophical commitments exemplify how Aboriginal Studies is guided by ethics that embody Spirit, kinship, interconnectivity, and subsequently highlights difference. These ethics

were enacted throughout Aboriginal Studies 30 activities. Course activities were guided by traditional teachings, engaging with Treaty and Treaty relationship and opportunities to learn from nature outside the confines of school contexts. These curricular and pedagogical opportunities and their anchoring in holistic-guided sacred ecological insights opened up deeper understandings of self and other life forms. Such ethical expressions envision a human being as deeply enmeshed and connected, which differs from other curricular orientations that are predominantly guided by liberal notions of citizenship in support of nation and nationality. Learning from these generative ethics, as expressed through the holism that undergirds Aboriginal Studies, also guides conceptions of survival that honour purpose.

**Situating Centre High in Connection to Aboriginal Studies 30**

During the mid 1990s the Edmonton Public School Board decided that high school students who took more than three years to complete their diploma requirements needed a new learning environment (Harding[72], 2013), which would manifest as "an adult environment similar to a junior college". Centre High Campus's mandate was to give students support and direction to complete their high school studies and cultivate a clear pathway to postsecondary institutions and career goals. The school is located in the centre of Edmonton's downtown and business core; this location helps young adults to connect with their future goals. Centre High Campus has disproven the assumption that the school would "render itself un-necessary" 10 years following its opening in the fall of 1997. The school has created numerous partnerships with industry, postsecondary institutions, and career emergency services (Harding, 2014).

**Centre High Campus Demographics**

[72] Dr. Kelly Harding was a former assistant principal at Centre High Campus.

Harding (K. Harding, Personal Communication, February 2015) reported that, 2,300 students were enrolled at the beginning of February 2015. These students embody differences in their cultural, religious, linguistic, ethno-racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds. As a high school, Centre High has the largest Indigenous student population in Edmonton. The school has a strong presence of students who identify as Muslim and who have recently immigrated to Canada (Harding, 2015). Students who attend Centre High speak over 50 languages other than English in their daily lives. Many recent newcomers and those who have not experienced success in their initial high schools attend Centre High because of the specific supports they receive that are often unavailable at other schools in the district. For example, Centre High Campus has an on-site social worker, career coaches, First Nations, Métis and Inuit Liaison and ESL consultants.

**The Genesis of Aboriginal Studies 30 at Centre High Campus**

Aboriginal Studies was first offered in 2011 at Centre High Campus. Former Centre High assistant principal Rick Stanley saw the need for Aboriginal Studies to support Indigenous students. Former Center High principal David Morris concurred and developed the program with Sean Lessard and Naim Cardinal (N. Cardinal, Personal Communication, February 2015). Although the school initially offered the course to support its Indigenous students, enrollment was not limited to Indigenous students; non-Indigenous populations in the school have also expressed interest and enrolled in it. Centre High Campus offered four sections of Aboriginal Studies (Ambrozy & Cardinal, 2015) as of 2015.

At Centre High, Aboriginal Studies is rooted in the hope that students will acquire a more thorough understanding of "the current issues facing Aboriginal peoples in Canada and worldwide" (Ambrozy & Cardinal, 2015, p. 1). The course speaks to colonialism, paternalism,

assimilation, laws and legislation that affects FNMI[73] peoples, discuss[es] the Indian Act, Treaties, the Royal Proclamation, history of Indian Residential schools, significant events like the Meech Lake Accord, various Aboriginal activists, the Oka crisis, Aboriginal self-government, sovereignty, provide[s] students with information on Idle No More, land claims, Aboriginal title, speak[s] to various contemporary issues such as stereotypes, racism, and Indigenous world issues. (N. Cardinal, 2014, Kinkade and Kelly Interview)

These learnings are rooted in and guided particularly by Cree sensibilities and Indigenous pedagogy (N. Cardinal, 2015) and strengthened by giving students "the opportunity to engage in a variety of cultural experiences. Elders and guest speakers will share Indigenous knowledge and students will attend cultural events at locations throughout the city" (Ambrozy & Cardinal, 2015). The course is intended to "assist in the change of relationships between Indigenous peoples and mainstream society" (p. 6):

> The program can serve to increase an awareness, appreciation and understanding of the rich and long-lasting history, culture and contributions of Aboriginal peoples as part of our society. Ultimately, it is our goal and hope that our spirit and intent of providing this course will only contribute to *miyo-wicihitowin*—good relations between all. (p. 6)
>
> Consequently, the course's approach is to cultivate attentiveness to the cultural and historical contributions of Indigenous peoples and the understanding that these contributions foster more interconnected ways of living.

[73] FNMI is an acronym that denotes First Nations, Métis and Inuit. The intention behind this acronym was rooted in the hope of representing various backgrounds of those who identify as Indigenous. This acronym received much favor and currency in teacher education programs beginning around 2007. The problem with such phrasing, however, is that it collapses the different spiritual orientations, cultural sensibilities, linguistic traditions and worldviews of the groups that the term claims to represent. "FNMI" can also be used to objectify Indigenous peoples and subsequently can reinforce negative stereotypes. This acronym also overrides the presence of traditional names and limits the expression of the ways in which many Indigenous peoples self-identify.

This dissertation explores how Aboriginal Studies 30 was embodied at Centre High Campus through Adam Ambrozy and Naim Cardinal's approach to the course. Adam Ambrozy taught Social Studies 30 and Aboriginal Studies 30. Naim Cardinal was the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit liaison at Centre High Campus, taught Aboriginal Studies 30 with Adam Ambrozy and also facilitated the school's Indigenous Leadership Youth Group. Adam and Naim continuously endeavored to cultivate approaches and offer encounters to deepen their students' understandings of Indigenous ways of knowing and being to "contribute to miyo- wicihitowin"—good relations between all" (Ambrozy & Cardinal, 2015, p. 6). I am grateful to have had the opportunity to learn from Adam and Naim. I regard Aboriginal Studies 30 as rooted in wisdom because of its philosophical underpinnings and the ways it was taught. As mentioned earlier, Aboriginal Studies is rooted in holistic sensibilities that begin with living in interconnected ways and exploring connections among land, identity, and spirituality. These connections are not only elucidated via conceptions of knowledge as 'thing,' but they are also attended to through holistic principles that reflect kinship. Such sensibilities embody ways of knowing and being that do not 'cherry-pick' perspectives that are considered non-conflictual with prevalent liberal orientations of difference and diversity. I wondered what it was about the place of Centre High Campus and the practices lived in Aboriginal Studies that encouraged more students to take the course. How do students at Centre High experience Aboriginal Studies?

I also had the honour and privilege of coming alongside former Aboriginal Studies 30 students and educators in 2014. My affinity for Aboriginal Studies commenced while teaching at Centre High Campus six years ago and grew following the completion of a paper related to Alberta Education's curricular conceptions of difference and diversity during my doctoral program. This paper was approached as a discourse analysis of the Aboriginal Studies, Social

Studies, English Language Arts and Science Programmes of Studies in connection to curricular design documents that articulated Alberta Education's position on inclusion and diversity. My explorations revealed that the Aboriginal Studies POS was speaking to colonial histories and connectivity in ways that the other Programmes of Studies were not. These curiosities were heightened during my time spent teaching a week of a spring session course in 2014 at Centre High Campus. Former Aboriginal Studies 30 educators graciously invited me to share time with their students. During my week at the school, I spent much time speaking with Aboriginal Studies 30 students and teachers. I was impressed with the course's possibilities and what I was beginning to notice the course was opening up. Following this time, I visited a section of Aboriginal Studies 30 on a weekly basis and participated in class activities including field trips and attended ceremony with the class. During this time, I cultivated a strong bond with particular students in the class. I am grateful to have met these inspiring youth and educators. I also shared time with other sections of the course in the fall of 2015 and opened participation in this inquiry to all sections of the course. The youth who I had come alongside in fall 2014 expressed the greatest desire to partake in the study. I have a pre-existing relationship with one of the former Aboriginal Studies educators since 2012 and became acquainted with the other Aboriginal Studies educator in the summer of 2014. Below is an introduction of former Aboriginal Studies

30 student and teacher[74] research participants. These characterizations[75] reflect the ways in which participants view themselves.

**Former Aboriginal Studies 30 Student Participants**

Chauntelle Atcheynum is from Sweetgrass First Nations. She is in her second year of university at the University of Alberta. She is pursuing a career in teaching the Cree language to youth and developing a language immersion program for educational institutions. She is passionate about the implementation of Indigenous worldviews into the education system as well as decolonization efforts within these institutions. For a long time, she distanced herself from her culture and its traditions. It took much courage for her to return to her roots and accept who she is. She has chosen to embrace and empower other individuals to honour and love who they are and where they come from. She seeks to advocate for Aboriginal communities and their healing process. Her community's perseverance and determination to rise above the wrongs of the past and present for the sake of our future generations fills her with hope and inspiration. Whenever she feels a void of passion, she looks to her community for it stirs the emotion within her being and beckons action in the fight for justice.

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[74] Teacher participants voices will not be directly reflected in the métissage. This shift in intent will be further explained following the presentation and interpretation of the métissage. Teacher contributions are shared in relation to Centre High's approach to Aboriginal Studies, and pedagogical practices that are specifically informed by holistic sensibilities. Please note that I have intentionally introduced student and teacher participants at this point in time to keep with the contextual set up of Aboriginal Studies at Centre High Campus. Student participant voices will be opened up during the presentation of the métissage and throughout the remainder of the dissertation. Teacher participant voices will be addressed following the métissage in connection to growing notions of wisdom relationality.

[75] Student and teacher participants were invited to write characterizations of themselves. These characterizations have not been altered in any way. The intent of this was to ensure that students and teachers were represented on their own terms.

Alissa James currently lives in Edmonton, Alberta. She was nineteen years old at the time of the study. Alissa is enrolled MacEwan University's Special Needs Educational Assistant Program. She wants to help students of various capabilities succeed and thrive in an educational curriculum that is otherwise stagnant and slowly developing. Alissa comes from a family of eleven with eight other siblings. She had a very hectic childhood. While she often changed schools and homes, the one constant she shared was her culture. Her family has ties in both Dene, and Plains Cree Culture, but the lifestyle she grew up with was very much Cree oriented.

Levi Matthews describes himself as having German, Irish, English and Métis ancestry. He is significantly guided by Christian sensibilities in his life. Levi is currently enrolled in a Political Sciences program at MacEwan University.

Rose Salvador was born in the Philippines and migrated to Canada when she was 17. She is an Enhanced English Major student at Concordia University of Edmonton with a double minor. She sees herself as an individual who would prefer to follow than to lead others. She loves giving her true opinions when asked. She has a Filipino, Chinese and Spanish background which has made her more open to different ways of thinking.

**Former Aboriginal Studies 30 Teacher Participants**

Naim Cardinal currently lives in Edmonton, Alberta. He is originally from Fort Vermilion, Alberta and is a member of the Tallcree First Nation which is located in Treaty 8 traditional territory. Drawing upon traditional teachings, the insights of his ancestors and family are integral to the ways in which he lives his life and informs how he conceptualizes teaching. Naim recently completed his MEd at the University of Alberta and works as a high school coordinator and Aboriginal Studies teacher at Kitaskinaw School in Enoch Cree Nation.

Adam Ambrozy is a second-generation Settler. Adam was born and raised in Calgary, Alberta and moved to Edmonton in 2008. He currently works as an education consultant in Alberta.

# Chapter Five:
# Research Design, Process and Theoretical Framings

## Situating Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics refers to the continuous process of "bridging the personal or historical distance between minds" (Gadamer, n.d., p. 1) and a fidelity to meaning making. Hans-George Gadamer (n.d.) underscores that hermeneutics requires an openness to possibility and the richness that it can bring forth. This openness suggests that the task of hermeneutics is to "avoid misunderstanding" (Gadamer, n.d., p. 1). Gadamer (n.d.) shares:

> Since the time of this original definition, the growing historical consciousness has made us aware of the misunderstanding and the possible unintelligibility of all tradition. Also, the decay of Christian society in the West- in continuation of a process of individualization that began with the Reformation- has allowed the individual to become an ultimately indissoluble mystery to others. Since the time of the German romantics, therefore, the task of hermeneutics has been defined as avoiding misunderstanding. With this definition, hermeneutics acquires a domain in that principle reaches as far as the expression of meaning as such. Expression of meaning are first of all linguistic manifestations. As the art of conveying what is said in a foreign language to the understanding of another person, hermeneutics is not without reason named after Hermes, the interpreter of the divine message to mankind. If we recall the origin of the name hermeneutics, it becomes clear that we are dealing here with a language event, with a translation from one language to another, and therefore with the relation of two languages. But insofar as we can only translate from one language to another if we have understood the meaning of what is said and construct it anew in the medium of the other language, such a language event presupposes understanding. (p.2)

Gadamer's (n.d.) assertions suggest that the continued process of meaning-making requires an ongoing attentiveness to language and the insights that arise from it. Attention to language in this regard requires paying attention to that which "confronts us" (Gadamer, n.d.,p.3) and how language has the possibility to both inspire and limit self-understanding (Smith, 1999). Drawing upon the hermeneutic imagination challenges us to "to inquire into what we mean when we use words like curriculum, research and pedagogy" (Smith, 1999, p. 28). Further, hermeneutics offers guidance regarding "how we shall proceed pedagogically after we have given up the presumption of ever being able to define in unequivocal foundational terms all of the key referents in our professional lexicon" (Smith, 1999, p. 28). In this regard, the ways in which we choose to proceed and the sensibilities that interpretive action are guided by is understood as a generative act that promotes rejuvenation (Smith,1999). Consequently, hermeneutics does not position interpretation as a singular act that is time-bound, limited to a particular historical context, place and objectified renderings of experience. Contrariwise, hermeneutics challenges the notion that the "truth of being" and truth seeking is the prerogative of unwavering methodology. People who engage in hermeneutic inquiry are cautioned to avoid prescriptive approaches to uncovering truth to ensure that interpretation is a creative act that involves an interplay between the micro and macro. The inextricable connection between the mircro and marco honours the fact that the ways in which we think are intimately connected to the world that we are enmeshed in. For these reasons, objectivity and subjectivity are in fact fallacious categories of representation. Smith (1999) shares:

> Thinking and interpreting are always and everywhere precisely about the world. I cannot abstract thinking itself out from what it is that I am thinking about. A clear split between subjective thinking and objective thinking is not sustainable because my subjectivity gets its bearings from the very world that I take as my object. Furthermore, the world is always

> a world I share with others with whom I communicate, so my descriptions of the world are always subject to modification on the basis of what I share communicatively (p. 32).

Remembering to live in ways that do not dismiss connections between subjective and objective thinking helps to circumvent the imbalance that arises when we hold on to the Enlightenment principles that have rejected the interconnectedness of all life. Hermeneutic sensibilities thus offer ways in which we can individually and collectively "avoid the flattening and trivializing of life" (Jardine & James, 1996, p. 256). Learning from the particularities of life inspires ways of thinking and living that "attempt to stick with the original difficulty of life and not to betray it" (Caputo, 1987, p. 1).

Hermeneutics expresses a commitment to learning from the generative and creative potential inherent in difference. These notions of difference are inspired by the transformative essence that flows from an openness to human experience and connectivity (Clifford et al., 2001; Jardine and James, 1996; Smith, 1999). An openness to the possibilities of a "new unity between Self and Other" (Smith, 1999) materializes through the "opening of boundaries" (Clifford et al., 2001) while connecting with the hermeneutic imagination and creating linkages between different horizons of understanding. The hermeneutic imagination has the potential to lift the notions of self and other that limit creativity and an openness to what life and living can be if we have the courage to face complexity and seek understanding through difference. Smith (1999) shares "[u]nderstanding between persons is possible only to the degree that people can initiate a conversation between themselves and bring about a "fusion" of their different horizons into new understanding which they then hold in common" (33). Recognizing the assumptions upon which horizons rest while connecting with "effective historical consciousness" inspires "malleability,

evolution, political and social changes" (p.33) that are integral to encouraging the conditions necessary for ethical forms of relationality to thrive.

While hermeneutics insists on its commitments to openly learning from difference, a desire to open up boundaries of separation that interfere with more unified ways of living and relating, the erasure of hermeneutics from sacred ecological philosophies and its focus on human relationality reinscribes the assimilation of difference. The removal of hermeneutics from its metaphysical origins and embedding in Western ontological traditions alone still promotes self-enclosed ways of knowing and being because other life forms are not considered sources of inspiration and meaning making that are integral for the continuation of life and living (Donald, 2009); hermeneutics, in the ways that Gadamer, Husserl and Heiddeger have conceptualized it promotes understandings of difference that do not account for the holistic insights that flow from sacred notions of difference. Donald (2009) articulates the ways in which Eurowestern philosophies, as espoused by Gadamer's fusion of horizons, promotes the assimilation that it is seeking to alleviate. Donald (2009) shares

> However, despite this seemingly benevolent dialogical openness to difference, Gadamer's principle of fusion of horizons has been critiqued by some theorists, most notably John Caputo (1987) as a conservative framework that actually supports the systematic assimilation and incorporation of difference within a well-established superstructure. According to Caputo (1987), Gadamer reveals his strict adherence to tradition and the idea of eternal truth—informed by his scholarly attachment to Eurowestern philosophies—in his conceptualization of the fusion of horizons (p. 111). This overreliance on tradition suggests that Gadamer is not really very interested in a hermeneutics that supports provocative interpretive engagement with difference. Rather, his philosophical

> hermeneutics, and the fusion of horizons, can be considered overly ethnocentric (Hoy, 1991) in the ways that it re-centres and thus perpetuates the dominance of meta-philosophies that descend from philosophers like Plato and Hegel. Gadamer's overreliance on Euro-Western philosophies overlooks howother traditions that can help to instill an openness to difference and others. Gadamer's approach to a provocative engagement with difference is thus limited in this regard (pp. 150-151).

The privileging of human relationality and human encounter as the sole means by which meaning is experienced and articulated differs from the spirit and intent of this dissertation's approach to hermeneutics and métissage. I suggest that Gadamer's conceptions of the fusion of horizons along with a focus on "historical consciousness" undermines deeper expressions of relationality that can inspire the individual and collective healing and return to the self that is needed to promote sustained relationships between human beings and our more than human relatives for the continuation of life and living. As conveyed throughout this dissertation, a sole focus on epistemic difference that is guided by historical consciousness alone and is primarily the prerogative of human difference reproduces rather shallow articulations of connectivity. This ethic is conveyed in Gadamer's renderings of hermeneutics which is influenced by classical liberal philosophy (Madison, 2001). Curricular and pedagogical frameworks that are guided by liberal renderings of "multiple perspectives" and "diversity and pluralism" miss holistic insights which emphasize connecting and re-connecting with life-giving energy and practices that have the potential to inspire more sustainable ways to live together in precarious times. Consequently, this dissertation posits a form and performance of métissage as a curricular and pedagogical wisdom.

This form of métissage seeks inspiration from Cree and Sufic wisdom sensibilities[76] that connect with the "metaphor of triangulating our way to meaning" (Meyer, 2006, p. 265); "Triangulating our way to meaning" requires seeking guidance from the inextricable linkages between body, mind and spirit. Manulani Aluli-Meyer (2006) shares:

> Using body, mind, and spirit as a template in which to organize meaningful research asks us to extend through our objective/ empirical knowing (body) into wider spaces of reflection offered through conscious subjectivity (mind) and, finally, through recognition and engagement with deeper realities (spirit). Finally, we are defining places science can follow into but not lead or illuminate. Other ways of knowing something must be introduced if we are to evolve into a more enlightened society. It will not occur with scientific or objective knowledge only (p. 265).

Meyer's (2006) compelling words directly relate to the spirit and intent of this métissage because she reminds us that empiricism is one way in which we can triangulate meaning but it is not the only and "final way in which to engage, experience, or summarize it" (pp. 267- 268). Our embodiment has been lost in the frontloading of theoretical and rhetorical categories of meaning making (Meyer, 2006). Reconnecting with our bodies, in connection to spirit as integral facets of

[76] Soudeh Oladi's (2018) "Rumi and Rhizome: The Making of a Transformative Imaginal Curriculum" explores how Rumi's teachings of love, compassion and justice, through Gilles Deleuze's nomadic identity (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) can help to deconstruct neo-liberalism's prevailing narrative within the context of curriculum development. While Oladi (2018) offers an interesting interpretative application of Rumi's teachings, her work removes Rumi's philosophies from its Qur'anic place-based roots and does not actively dwell in the wisdom that is housed in Rumi's poetry. Oladi (2018) reinterprets Rumi's teachings of "the desire to know, love, devotion, knowledge of all, science and wisdom, ethics, content, equanimity, unity, oneness, wonder, poverty and annihilation and nothingness" (p. 134) through the lens of social justice. This reinterpretation unfortunately removes Rumi's teachings from their original holistic context. This dissertation purposefully avoids such reinterpretations and remains committed to enacting métissage as a curricular and pedagogical wisdom practice.

our individual and collective meaning making, can facilitate a gradual distancing from "entrenched patterns of thinking" that reinforce dualities (Meyer, 2006, p. 267). Thus, this métissage seeks to help us recover how we carry "our values in our bodies" and "our culture in our bodies" ( Peese Pitsiulak, as cited in Meyer, 2006, p. 268).

**Unpacking Métissage: Métissage as Curricular and Pedagogical Wisdom**

This research inquiry is guided by an emerging form of métissage. This form of métissage will be extrapolated in great detail in relation to my research process following the sharing of the métissage itself and its interpretations in subsequent sections of this dissertation. This is because I want to demonstrate how coming alongside student participants has contributed to the nature of this métissage and allow for readers to think with the métissage before I share a discussion. My intent of sharing in this manner is to honour process and how conceptions of wisdom relationality gradually appeared. I will first begin by exploring métissage's philosophical underpinnings and ethical commitments.

Métissage is a theory and textual practice that beckons researchers and audiences "to create plural selves that thrive on ambiguity and multiplicity" (Chambers & Hasebe-Ludt, 2008, p. 3). The origin of métissage is the Latin word Mixiticus, which means "the weaving of cloth from different fibers" (Hasebe-Ludt & Jordan, 2010, p. 3). Greek mythology describes Métis as the "primordial figure of wisdom" and "a trickster with powers of transformation who resisted notions of purity by weaving and blurring textiles" (Harper, 2001). Métissage requires that individuals focus greater attention on group consciousness and reduce fascination with individual identity (Dash, 1995, p. 91). Following Donald (2009), I conceptualize and practice métissage as a way to guide the shift from identity to more deepened enactments of relationality (pp. 536-537). I understand ethical relationality as a "way of life" through my connections with Islam and

Cree philosophies. Islam is often described as “a way life”. This conceptualization supports doing this work in ways that uphold the integrity of wisdom traditions that I connect with the most. My relationship with Islam and the ways in which I practice my faith have guided me to understand that Islam’s message is also one of holism. This holistic message of course is not limited to Islam and is one instance of numerous expressions of such sensibilities. My growing connections with Cree sensibilities have also guided my understanding of ethical relationality as a way of life. Reconnecting with the insights that flow from sacred ecological holistic insights remind me that I am connected with Creator and Creation in all moments. I may forget this reality at times or find myself feeling disconnected during periods of greater imbalance. Working on maintaining this balance everyday can be made possible through committing myself to upholding Creator’s laws. This is how I understand ethical relationality as a way of life. Ismaili-guided Sufic and Cree sensibilities help me to conceptualize ethical relationality as a way of life. These principles teach that Spirit is present in every direction we turn. Missing our enmeshment in kinship relational networks forsakes the interrelatedness of similarities and differences. Donald (2009) explains that:

> Relationality is not just a simple recognition of shared humanity that looks to celebrate our sameness rather than difference. Relationality here is intimately connected with sacred ecological insights as expressed through *wahkohtowin*. This kinship of relationships makes living and survival possible. And helps us to call into question the suitability of anthropocentric conceptions of relationality that are limited to the human and material realms of existence alone. This form of relationality carefully attends to the particular historical, cultural, and social contexts from which a person or community understands and interprets the world. It puts these considerations at the forefront of engagements across

> perceived frontiers of difference. This concept of relationality instantiates an ethical imperative to acknowledge and honour the significance of the relationships we have with others, how our histories and experiences position us in relation to each other, and how our futures as people in the world are tied together. It is also an ethical imperative to see that despite our varied place-based cultures and knowledge-systems, we live in a world together with others and must constantly think and act with reference to these relationships. Any knowledge we gain about the world interweaves us more complexly with these relationships and gives us life (p. 536).

Living in ethically relational ways can encourage us to slow down and think twice before we act. Thinking, acting and living in ways that are not limited to human expressions of relationality is directly related to honouring métissage's ethic because métissage requires that we re-think our relationships. Donald (2013) suggests that rethinking our relationships can be explored through guidance from the following questions: "where is here? How might we live together? Who am I that I am here? Who is here with me? How can I tell a story that will inspire an imagination of new ways of living together that aren't traced by colonial frontier logics? How are we simultaneously different and related? How might we recognize the difference and similarity of a story". Exploring these questions and the ethics that guide how we choose to live in relation to ourselves and other life forms requires a careful examination of the ways in which we can truly honour the simultaneous presence of different Creation stories in the places that we inhabit. This directly relates to the ways in which I regard Islam as a way of life. The Creation stories that undergird Sufic wisdoms and Cree sensibilities offer different ways to live and honour relationality; we are all inspired to live in different ways; "Our challenge is to bring [these different parts" together in balanced ways" (Donald, 2014).

Métissage can also be understood as a collective and transformative practice because of its commitment to learning from the simultaneous presence of differences and similarities (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009, p. 10). Métissage is traditionally performed by interweaving and juxtaposing texts[77] in ways that underscore differences without essentializing them and highlighting textual connections (Chambers & Hasebe-Ludt, 2008, p. 4). It is important to note that métissage does not propose a singular way to juxtapose texts and encourages different ways to think about this (Donald, 2014). According to Hasebe-Ludt et al. (2009):

> Métissage offers a rapprochement between alternative and mainstream curriculum discourses and seeks a genuine exchange among writers, and between writers and their various audiences. Our aim is to go out into the world, to embrace it and love it fiercely (Arendt, 1958; Galeano, 1991), always returning home with the gifts of new knowledge, new hope that it is possible to live well in a particular place, at this time, with ourselves and with all our relations (King, 1990, p. 10). Such an approach attends to "restoring life to its original difficulty" and refrains from constructing objective representations of lived experiences (Jardine, 1992, p. 117). Rather, we practice "wayfinding" (Chambers, 2012) through métissage. Wayfinding refers to having presence in each other's writings and relationships. Bearing witness to our own experiences and others' lives helps us to focus on the "transformative possibilities" of our responses to the manifestation of similarities and differences (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009, p. 8).

[77] I purposefully state that métissage is *traditionally* performed through the juxtapositioning of texts. The intention behind such juxtaposition is to guide the representation of sensibilities that are otherwise difficult to aesthetically represent, to refrain from assimilating difference and visibly convey generative potential through the presence of differences and similarities. Later sections of this dissertation will explore how my rendition of métissage does not attend to juxtaposition in this manner.

Métissage commences with the interpretation of autobiographical texts and reveals that experiences are informed by multiple sources (Donald, 2004). Lifewriting helps to examine the ways in which we have been positioned over time and how we read and see ourselves in relation to Creation (Hasebe-Ludt & Jordan, 2010, p. 2). The act of braiding creates something more complex and deeper than our original stories. Donald (2013) shares that "braiding is done organically" and that this process requires that "we pay attention to themes as throughlines and look to these themes for guidance". The knowledge that we will never be fully complete accompanies these acts of creating (Blood, 2015; Donald, 2014). Braiding becomes a narrative interpretive act and a form of representation of the research that shows the confluence of the individual and the collective. The practice of métissage is a way to express our subjectivities, share how we remember ourselves and our relations, and embrace Creation in its fullness. The act of braiding shows interconnectedness and interdependence. Braiding enables a "richer text and texture to emerge" (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009, p. 11): As different and unique as each individual narrative is, the interconnectedness and interdependencies among the narratives are a crucial factor in this creation akin to what happens in an Indigenous storytelling circle where each story needs the other one in the circle, where "visiting" with each other is an important part of the circle in making the stories come alive (N. Blood (2008), cited in Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009, p. 11). Blood's (2008) beautiful words suggest that action and living require attending to all parts of Creation. Interconnectedness requires focusing on these parts in their morphing forms and understanding how we can learn and grow from them to create anew.

Paying attention to these parts and how they work together conveys how our stories, and embodied understandings teach us about our relationships with each other (Donald, 2009, p. 451). For this reason, life writing is integral to articulating the state of our relationships with

Creation. We understand and practice métissage in a way that does not separate the private and public. Living in this way honours an intimate relationship with place and requires a situated knowledge of one's surroundings and relationship with them (Basso, 1996; Jardine, 1998; McLeod, 1998). Therefore, "personal and family stories can be braided in with larger narratives of nation and nationality" (Donald, 2009, p. 537) and problematize simplistic identity categories and historical accounts. Practicing métissage makes evident the separation that arises from constructivist theoretical orientations that distance meaning from form. Métissage as a practice honours the continuous movement of Creation in its ambiguity and consequently generates possibilities of rejuvenation (Chambers & Hasebe-Ludt, 2008). Thus, I conceptualize Ismaili-Sufic, Cree sensibilities, aspects of hermeneutics and métissage as existing within each other. Hope arises in this wholeness when we interweave multiple experiences situated in different memories, places, spaces, and histories (Donald, 2009).

With regards to métissage, a fundamental commitment of this inquiry is to focus on the ways in which liberal philosophies, as espoused in multiculturalism, obscure difference and perpetuate imbalanced relationships. This commitment has expanded in its focus on recovering how we can honour kinship, holism and wisdom relationality as sources of guidance in our daily lives. As mentioned earlier, although the Social Studies POS, for example, attends to difference, its approach is limited to perspectival renderings of difference. This is problematic because Eurowestern philosophies manage how other perspectives are framed and conceptualized. In this regard, perspectival renderings of difference are ill-equipped to address difference in meaningful ways and on their own terms. The proceeding métissage endeavors to aesthetically represent the need for different ontologies, cosmologies and sensibilities to guide curricular and pedagogical attentiveness to difference. In particular, this métissage, through the simultaneous act of braiding

and connecting with Cree and Sufic sacred ecological insights highlights the pedagogical significance of holistic knowing.

**Revisiting the Research Process: Research Design and Enactments**

As mentioned earlier, the spirit and intent of coming alongside former Aboriginal Studies 30 students was to learn from the underlying sensibilities that guided their interpretations of difference. I was curious to inquire into how their understandings might offer guidance on new ways in which curricular and pedagogical enactments of difference can be addressed. In order to honour the métissage and hermeneutic philosophical underpinnings of this work, my research design intentionally focused on students' former engagement with specific facets of the course that students shared in common and also involved engagement with two new shared activities. The purpose of this was to circle back to former experiences in the course and also to "create anew" in response to our new shared experiences. Six former Aboriginal Studies 30 students initially agreed to participate in the study. Two participants rescinded their involvement in the early stages of our research conversations due to the pressures of personal, school and work-related commitments. This was understandable given the need for us to collectively engage in this work over a series of multiple meetings and activities. I initially intended to meet with student participants over a period of six visits. This commitment shifted to four scheduled meetings and activities in response to logistics and my assumptions regarding the extent to which students connected with particular course insights and resulted in minor changes. It is important to note that one-on-one conversations with student participants also took place in addition to scheduled meetings or in place of scheduled meetings due to time conflicts with student participants' schedules.

Research activities and their accompanying questions were specifically created to reconnect with, address and give voice to the holism that undergirds Aboriginal Studies 30. The

intention of each question was to simultaneously address how we have been typically taught to address matters of relationality, connectivity, and difference and juxtapose this with what was "lifted" through coming alongside holistic-guided curricular and pedagogical approaches in Aboriginal Studies 30. It is important to note that these activities and questions were not created to elicit an expected and convenient outcome. The questions and activities were created through riffing off of learnings and previous activities completed in Aboriginal Studies 30 at Centre High Campus and on the basis of my growing curiosities of witnessing many students over a two -year period, reconnecting with themselves and as I later began to understand as the wisdom that flows from kinship. The opening up of these beautiful wonders over my two-year engagement with Aboriginal Studies 30, primarily as an interested community member, prompted my focus on examining how holistic sensibilities may be able to shift perspectival approaches of attending to difference from 'learning about' to 'learning from'. **Activity 1** explored "how might the four directions as Elder Cardinal explained them inform our understanding of respectful relationships in the place of Edmonton?" The purpose of this question was to collectively reflect upon the ways in which the four directions might invite connections with ourselves and others in more grounded and balanced ways. In other words, how might connecting with such teachings better honour the integrity of our relationships with each other and ensure that these relationships are guided by holism and wisdom relationality in the places where we live? The purpose here was to highlight what we can possibly learn through calling upon the mental, emotional, physical and spiritual parts of ourselves for guidance and the implications of not only upholding the role of the intellect as the driving force and answer to our present and future connectivity and survival. Student research participants, along with other Centre High Students, and I participated in a session with Elder Bob Cardinal and Dwayne Donald. This session was deeply powerful for students. They were given

the opportunity to learn from the spiritual roots of Treaty and engage with the four directions teachings in embodied ways through the Elder's loving guidance. Following our session, student participants and I came together for a research conversation and shared our experiences, insights gleaned and overall connecting experiences to Aboriginal Studies 30. **Activity 2** addressed "how do we understand (or come to terms with) who we are in the place of Edmonton?" This exploration frontloaded students' learnings surrounding the histories and implications of the Indian Residential School System and engagements with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action. The purpose of this question was to investigate how we understand and articulate who we are in connection to shared histories and memories (McLeod, 2007; Stanley, 2006). Most significantly, the intention here was to reflect on how we respond to personal and collective trauma. What typically guides us to work through trauma and the intergenerational impacts of the Indian Residential School system? To what extent do we view ourselves as a part of a trauma that we have not directly experienced? What are the implications of attending to trauma primarily on the basis of intellectualized approaches that are focused on historical learnings? Again, the purpose of this activity was to re-examine how embodied learnings and experiences, as guided by holistic insights in Aboriginal Studies 30, may bring forth a nuanced understanding of the intersections between individual and collective trauma. **Activity 3** examined "in what ways does the land here teach us who we are in relation to each other" (Basso, 1996; Chambers, 2006; Simpson, 2014). The aim of this question was to come into deeper connections with kinship relational networks and what this teaches in our daily lives. What might we learn from not only drawing upon historical teachings of place, but also engaging with sacred ecological insights in embodied ways? Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2014) underscores that "the land must become the pedagogy" (p. 14) meaning that there is much to recover and learn by coming into direct relationship with the land

rather than theorizing and objectifying such learnings. Students and I participated in a River Valley Walk led by Dwayne Donald in which sacred ecological teachings were shared in relationship to the places we visited as a group. The River Valley walk was followed by a conversation surrounding our experiences with the walk and insights regarding what sacred ecology teaches us about differences and sameness. **Activity 4** addressed the question "what does equality mean to you?" This exploration was connected to how Aboriginal Studies 30 addresses differences between Indigenous and Canadian readings of equality. The intention of investigating this question as a shared research conversation was to open up the confluence of personal readings of equity, difference and belonging in connection to Aboriginal Studies 30's representation of difference and its tensionalities with Canadian Liberal Multiculturalism. Time was spent reflecting upon the significance of difference. Is it our role to manage difference? Does difference itself offer ways in which we can belong or impede unity? Does difference breed more difference? These questions were in line with the initial focus of this research inquiry on the limits of Canadian Liberal multiculturalism's interpretations and articulations of difference[78].

Established interviews with two former Aboriginal Studies 30 educators remained unchanged. These established interviews were coupled with five follow up conversations. The intent of these conversations was to more accurately grasp insights from previous research conversations and more deeply attend to the holistic curricular and pedagogical underpinnings of Aboriginal Studies 30. While these interviews inform this dissertation through offering the historical background surrounding the course's genesis at Centre High Campus and the holism that anchors Aboriginal Studies 30, these insights were not included in the braiding process and

[78] Please note that I will not be presenting research 'findings' on the basis of these four activities. Themes that emerged from sharing time with student participants will be presented through métissage.

representation of the métissage. This was an unanticipated result of the research process. Participant students' emphasis of holism, via learning from traditional teachings and frontloading those insights over historical learnings from the course was quite surprising. Though I had witnessed the emergence of these connections during my time spent in the course, I did not expect such consensus to arise during our research conversations. Truthfully, this was the first experience I had while partaking in conversations regarding difference and belonging that did not result in defensive responses nor the repositioning of logics that favor more perspectival and historical approaches to learning about onto-epistemological differences. These profound and unexpected understandings from students, and their opening up of learnings surrounding healing within the context of schooling landscapes beckoned me to make a difficult decision as the research practitioner. These insights were particularly powerful given the fact that student participants purposefully differentiated between typical conceptions of curriculum as textbook learnings with more informational understandings with a shift to embodied learnings, knowledges and the need for healing in order to relate better with self and other. I could not ignore the unfolding of these unexpected wonders and wanted to honour them as ethically as possible. For these reasons, the métissage focuses solely on student participant voices and their embodied understandings and experiences with Aboriginal Studies 30.

**Why Collaborative work is Challenging but Necessary**

As previously disclosed, a primary commitment of this work was to experience and learn from the wisdom that arises from coming together in respectful, kind and compassionate relationships. The intention here is to remind us that it is an "ethical imperative to remember that we as human beings live in a world together and also alongside our more-than-human relatives; we are called to constantly think and act with reference to those relationships" (Donald, 2016, p.

11). Relating in these ways helps us to understand more deeply and ensure that wisdoms are enacted (Donald, 2016, p. 11). I sought to remain committed to these ethics from the initial stages of the work. A teaching that I promised myself that I would not dishonour was enacting how Elders have taught that taking up such work ought not cause harm (D. Donald, Personal Communication, 2013). For these reasons, I did not feel comfortable approaching those who agreed to come alongside me as 'research participants' or 'data'. I tried my best to honour the individuals I was learning from in ways that remembered that we are all human beings. I was perhaps naïve and did not fully understand what such a commitment would entail. This process reminded me once again that one of the most trying endeavors in life is to be a good human being. As my experiences continue to teach me, living in this way demands that we think and act in ways that are not guided by ego. I also learned that this requires that we act with compassion and humility even in the midst of conduct that is disappointing and tests our patience. Such work requires admitting to and forgoing personal interests and investments, honouring process regardless of the circumstances, deeply remembering that this work is for everyone, accepting that collaborative work requires a lengthier time commitment and also accepting the potential for emotional drain in particular moments. These insights manifested in response to a variety of factors and circumstances. I continuously found myself witnessing logistical challenges while arranging time to share with participant students. All participant students were working a minimum of two jobs, completing courses in post-secondary institutions and also attending to matters of a personal nature. For these reasons, meetings were often rescheduled and there were cancellations at times from participant students. These situations made it challenging to honour the spirit and intent of métissage in traditional ways. For instance, one activity required that I meet with all student participants individually for research conversations because it was impossible to locate a time in which all

participants could meet together. I also encountered challenges while attending to the bureaucracy of working with a school. I understand and can relate to the fast-paced nature of schools and time constraints teachers and administration contend with on a daily basis. Teacher participant time constraints alongside mandatory secondary school instructional hours also resulted in complications in honouring the fieldwork in more relational ways. At times there was miscommunication with regards to what resources were required to carry out a particular research activity, specific dates in which partaking in these activities would be possible and the urgency of attending to logistical matters that I could not resolve as someone who was not a staff member at the school. These happenings beckoned me to contemplate the extent to which research participants felt implicated and a part of the research process. Did they feel a personal sense of investment in the work? These wonders also came alongside my growing discomfort with and resentment for conducting this inquiry according to REMO's [79]ethical standards. I frequently asked myself in these moments why I needed permission to work alongside individuals in which I had already built relationships of trust with. I recognized an emerging paradox; abiding by REMO's regimented approach to ethical conduct impeded my ability to guide this work through wisdom relationality. I felt constrained by time, location and protocol that managed how I ought to 'mitigate' potential emotional responses from research participants. These frustrations were heightened by the deeply emotional and spiritual nature of the research inquiry. Each research conversation with participant students resulted in openly sharing, feeling and expressing our deepest emotions. Needless to say, anger, fear and joy were evoked and tears shed during each

[79] REMO refers to the University of Alberta's Research and Ethics Management Online system. Using this online system requires following protocol that ensures that one is abiding by ethical protocol and procedures while conducting research with human participants, for example. The Research Ethics Board must first approve of one's research prior to entering the field. While I understand the need for a standardized approach to sharing one's proposed research and approvals required, I find that such research practices do a great disservice in the ability for those who draw upon more relational research sensibilities.

meeting. While my former approaches with more relational research sensibilities manifested distinct shifts in my time-commitments to research inquiries, the need to slow down and face my deepest emotions, I had not yet understood the remarkable differences between more prescriptive research approaches and undertakings guided by wisdom relationality. This research inquiry solidified my learnings over the past five years that I could not hide behind theory and forsake the emotional and spiritual in the process. I found myself responding to my work in visceral ways which I had not previously experienced while partaking in prescriptive approaches. This work necessitated that I trust in the guidance of my embodied understandings. I started to realize what I was missing when I limited myself to rational methods.

**Métissage Braiding Process: Learning from embodied knowledge and the wisdoms that flow from Cree and Sufic philosophies**

The act of braiding as interpretation and representation showcases the constant movement between and articulation of the whole and the part according to hermeneutic and sacred ecological wisdoms as expressed in Cree and Sufic sensibilities. This interpretive act not only draws upon textual interpretation, but also positions hermeneutic inquiry as a deep reading of place (Kulneieks et al., 2010, p. 16). Engaging with deep readings of place helps to summon the restorative energy and potential that can guide more embodied understandings and experiences of connectivity. This embodied interpretive act facilitates the selection of themes that are not regarded as separate from oneself. I will identify common themes revealed in the activities and the different ways in which they manifest. It is important to note that there is no formula for mixing texts (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009, p. 3). Métissage involves braiding three strands, but it is not limited to this number (p. 13). Three represents connectivity between the mind, body, and soul (D. Donald, personal communication, December 23, 2014), and a previous experience with métissage supports the use

of three strands[80]. The embodied nature of this inquiry in conjunction with the holistic sensibility of métissage work together to address that which connects us all and is what this dissertation gives voice to.

How have we come to understand what we conceive of as possible? The métissage that follows intends to reawaken that which has become dormant and is necessary to better connect with ourselves and our relations in deeper ways.[81] Its textual representations and the truths that arise from them express a way of 'doing' and understanding difference differently. This métissage enables me to proceed in a holistic-informed way because it is connected with the mind, body and soul. The interweaved texts below honour "the historical relatedness of tradition, collective contexts and individual circumstances" (Chambers et al., 2008, p.142) of former Aboriginal Studies 30 students. These texts also convey the curricular and pedagogical importance of holistic insights in guiding individual and collective enactments of healing, reconnecting with kinship and trusting in embodied understandings as sources that can help to 'lift us up' and renew our commitments in this shared life together. This is a beautiful and unfolding process that requires that we individually and collectively accept the gifts[82] we receive in life but also remember, as sacred ecological insights teach us, that we have the ability to connect with creative potential and enact transformation. Acceptance in this sense ought not be conflated with passive and complacent

[80] Please see Appendix C for an example of métissage.

[81] My use of the phrase "deeper ways" refers to expressions of connectivity that are not dependent on one's access to Canadian citizenship. I will specifically address these notions in curricular conversations following the representation of the métissage as a way to juxtapose former Aboriginal Studies 30 students' experiences and conceptualizations of connectivity with curricular underpinnings that inform the curricula design for Alberta's provincially mandated Programmes of Studies.

[82] I draw upon Qur'anic understandings of trials, tribulations and joy as *rahma* or mercy from Allah. The idea is that whatever one is faced with, whether it is an incredibly difficult circumstance or the bestowal of favor, it is important to say *Alhumdulillah* (all praise is due to Allah). This is where trusting in oneself and Allah becomes important to remaining faithful and present to life. Rumi's poetry, as espoused by Qur'anic teachings, emphasizes the importance of faith, courage, patience and perseverance if we seek to tap into that creative potential we were gifted with (Virani, 2003, p. 102).

conduct. Rather, acceptance requires the practice of *sabr* (patience) which is an act that requires a commitment to connectivity with self and other and to honouring process while having trust in not knowing the potential outcome of one's efforts. This embodied process entails attending to complexity as a way to open up the heart and mind (B. Cardinal, 2014, p. 214; Rahman, 2013; Virani, 2003). Following B. Cardinal (2014), Chambers et al. (2008), Meyer, 2006 and Rahman (2013), I suggest that what we carry within, the ways in which we attend to these insights and work through that which keeps us at a distance from self and other, addresses what 'theoretical concerns' alone miss. There is much at stake if we continue to depend on solely intellectualized approaches to life and living, connectivity and survival. Again, what happens to our relationships with self and other when we remain disconnected from the mental, emotional, spiritual and physical (B. Cardinal, Personal Communication, September 2014)? This work thus speaks to the pedagogical utility of living in ways that promote balance and renewal.

This métissage invites readers to contemplate the possibilities for wisdom relationality, which flows from sacred ecological teachings, to create ethical spaces in which students and educators can remember and live connectivity organically. As this métissage will express, wisdom relationality brings forth a form of remembering and feelings of deep love and responsibility that critical personalistic and individualistic approaches overlook. Experiencing and connecting with the wisdom that flows from sacred notions of difference may teach us to believe in our spirit and to nurture and grow change. Wisdom relationality is not to be feared, here. Rather, wisdom relationality can evidence the necessity of healing as a pedagogical imperative.

Following Donald (2003), a curriculum dialogue is presented via métissage. The dialogue is organized and into three sections. Each section begins with two purposeful Rumi poetry selections. These pieces were chosen on the basis of guidance they offer specifically pertaining to

connecting with embodied insights and living in ways that honour our shared sacred ecological roots. Islam is often not associated as offering holistic sensibilities that others can learn from, nor is it regarded as a tradition that deeply affirms sacred ecological teachings (Khalid, 2010; Rahman, 2013). Opening up these Qur'anic teachings, as expressed in Rumi's poetry, is intended to reclaim Islam's message of holism and directly address narratives of rigidity and dogmatism that various traditions in Islam are associated with. Drawing upon Rumi's poetry to begin each section is also meant to facilitate a dialogue between Sufic and Cree wisdom sensibilities and their different sacred ecological insights. The intention here is to encourage creativity and restore deeper connectivity through learning from the traditions' convergent and divergent sacred ecological teachings. Rumi's poetry is also drawn upon to invite readers to engage in interpretive acts themselves from the places that they are currently situated and partake in their own meaning making alongside the insights of former Aboriginal Studies 30 students[83]. Rumi's poetry appears in *Lucida Calligraphy font*. Following Rumi's poetry, excerpts from research conversations with four former Aboriginal Studies 30 students are shared. As previously stated, my relationship with my participants is not to confirm my theories. Rather, I am hermeneutically examining the pedagogical possibilities of holism in exploring difference differently. The act of positioning texts and reading them in relation to each other manifests a curriculum dialogue because differences and similarities are highlighted (Donald, 2003, p. 125). These excerpts will be presented beginning with Alissa in each section with Marker Felt font, followed by Rose in Bradley Hand font, Levi in American Typewriter font and lastly, Chauntelle in

[83] My choice to proceed in this regard is deeply subjective. Qur'anic insights and their expression in Rumi's poetry have been the most meaningful for me. As mentioned earlier, I regard connecting with Cree wisdom as a Treaty responsibility along with my own wisdom tradition. These wisdoms can thus be held together and guide me as a researcher.

Apple Chancery font. An interpretation will proceed each selection of texts. The interpretations that follow each section of texts will arise from the shared questions in bold font. This is to honour the hermeneutical priority of the question that Gadamer (1975) emphasizes. Donald (2009) shares:

> Gadamer addresses the experience of living in the world with others because when we ask questions, we inevitably instigate and sustain conversations with others regarding the individual and collective experiences of being-in-the-world. This conversation is both dialogical and cyclical in that it is an exchange that generates and renews interpretation and understanding. Such is the nature of interpretive inquiry (p. 153).

These questions deepen my understanding of the holistic insights that flow from Aboriginal Studies 30 as a curricular and pedagogical context that has had lasting influence on former students. The shared questions also inform how the four students express their own conceptions of difference and how sacred ecological readings of difference guide deeper practices of connectivity. These excerpts are positioned on the basis of contrasting lived experiences and embodied insights in connection to learning from Cree sensibilities. Connections to Cree sensibilities will again be explored in relation to Qur'anic insights that are conveyed in Rumi's poetry. Following the sharing of the question, each interpretation will begin with dwelling in Rumi's poetry and unpacking his words in relation to Qur'anic holistic insights. Next, I will ponder the words of each participant and how their experiences with holism in Aboriginal Studies and insights gleaned from research activities informed their understandings of emerging themes. The holistic themes that manifested during this study include healing, balance and kinship. I will also elucidate thematic unities between participants' experiences and shared insights with Rumi's poetry as way to illuminate what the false universalism of liberalism misses on curricular and pedagogical landscapes. Lastly,

a curriculum conversation will express the significance of student participant's insights in relationship to curriculum and pedagogy. This conversation will be shared at the end of each section of the métissage. The purpose of dwelling in participants' voices and revisiting their understandings throughout the braiding process is to honour the integrity of each participant and enact the organic and transformative ethics espoused by métissage.

**Chapter Six:**
**I**

*Everything is Inscribed Within*

*A HUMAN BEING is a wondrous thing: everything is inscribed within him, but "veils" and "cloudiness" prevent him from reading the knowledge within himself. The "veils" and "cloudiness" are various preoccupations, worldly schemes, and desires. Yet, despite all these things that are hidden in the "darkness" behind the "veils", the human being can still read something and is aware of what he reads. Consider how "aware" he will become when the veils are lifted and the darkness disappears and what knowledge of himself he will discover within"*

*All these different trades- tailoring, building, farming, gold-smithery, astronomy, medicine, innumerable professions- have been discovered from within the human being, not revealed from under rocks and clumps of mud. It is said that raven taught man to bury the dead"- that came from a reflection of man that fell upon the raven. It was a human being's own urge that caused him to do it, for, after all, animals are a part of the human being.*

*Fihi Ma Fihi: Discourse II (Jalaluddin Rumi, in Kabir and Camille Helminski's (2012) "The Rumi Daybook", p. 66*

*Enough Words?*

*How does a part of the world leave the world?*
*How can wetness leave water?*
*Don't try to put out a fire*
*by throwing on more fire!*
*Don't wash a wound with blood! No matter how fast you run,*
*your shadow more than keeps up.*
*Sometimes, it's in front! Only full, overhead sun*
*diminishes your shadow. But that shadow has been serving you!*
*What hurts you, blesses you.*
*Darkness is your candle.*
*Your boundaries are your quest. I can explain this, but it would break*

*the glass cover on your heart,*
*and there's no fixing that. You must have shadow and light source both.*
*Listen, and lay your head under the tree of awe. When from that tree, feathers and wings sprout*
*on you, be quieter than a dove.*
*Don't open your mouth for even a coooo. When a frog slips into the water, the snake*
*cannot get it. Then the frog climbs back out*
*and croaks, and the snake moves toward him again. Even if the frog learned to hiss, still the snake*
*would hear through the hiss the information*
*he needed, the frog voice underneath. But if the frog could be completely silent,*
*then the snake would go back to sleeping,*
*and the frog could reach the barley. The soul lives there in the silent breath.*
*And that grain of barley is such that,*
*when you put it in the ground,*
*it grows.*
*Are these enough words,*
*or shall I squeeze more juice from this*
*Who am I, my friend?*

*(Jalaluddin Rumi, in Coleman Bark's (2004) "The Essential Rumi", p. 21)*

I started learning about the lateral damage that goes on throughout the generations and I learned that the cycle of abuse and stuff that you learn in Residential Schools you know they didn't learn any sense of love. They didn't know how to love one another so whatever they learned in terms of affection and how they got disciplined it really carried on through the generations.

For me it's up to the person to change who they really are. How can they change themselves if they don't have good memories? It was all just bad memories. How do you keep yourself strong? How do you keep on surviving with the fact that there's no good in life? You'll never see good in anything.

Look at all the things Canada did. Yes, we want everyone to know what we did but it is overwhelming for some Canadians who have no idea any of this happened. Yeah, about 50% of these kids died in the first five years, they were raped, they were murdered, taken away from their families and everyone just kind of scoffs at that because I think it's a Canadian patience failure with the government in general and with the media overall. People don't know how to discuss things. To take those things into your minds is a very complicated thing to do and to stay calm in those situations. That's one of my issues...to stay calm and to listen to what's said. I think that's an issue with reconciliation. The TRC. It's hard to listen to these things that are being said and to not have an opinion about it. And not to be so emotional.

The lack of abilities to emotionally connect with one another, being able to communicate those emotions and not feeling like oneself anymore, not having a direction to follow, they are what they need to become whole again…the way that they go about their lives. Healing refers to healing our connection with ourselves. Circle is important and wisdom is somehow important because you realize that you are connected.

**In what ways can holistic teachings promote healing?**

Rumi's poem "Everything is Inscribed Within" suggests that human beings have been gifted with inner knowledge. This inner knowledge can be connected to the Qur'anic insight of *ayat* or "signs" as a trustworthy source of guidance and grounding. As mentioned earlier, *ayat* reminds human beings of the presence of Spirit, that which gifts life and the source of all connectivity. Learning from *ayat* can be understood as a process of meaning making through connecting with the attributes and inner knowledges of all life forms. Such connection speaks to a deepened expression of relationality that is guided holism. Rumi also emphasizes that 'veils' and 'cloudiness' occlude the capacity for human beings to connect with their inner knowledges. Veils and cloudiness can manifest as worldly distractions, desires and fixations on particular happenings. Distance and separation from inner knowings, as perpetuated by the ebb and flow of veils and clouds, creates imbalance; in these moments, we forget our luminous nature and what we have been gifted with. Rumi reminds us that while we might not remember our inner nature at times, access to these gifts is still possible even when preoccupied. Restoration is always possible if we are committed to opening ourselves up to awareness. Rumi invites us to ponder a deepened sense of awareness that can be inspired by living and acting in ways that lift veils and clouds. Such awareness is dependent on accessing one's inner nature or ontological truths. Restoration and renewal in this sense does not depend on seeking external objects of gratification but requires dwelling within.

Imbalance is approached in another way in Rumi's poem "Enough Words". Rumi cautions readers to refrain from resolving matters through actions that promote discord. He shares "[don't] try to put out a fire by throwing on more fire". Rumi reminds us that it is ill advised to escape our tribulations because these hardships will most certainly re-appear. Rumi

beckons readers to reconsider the purpose of seemingly negative experiences and emotions. He offers a generative understanding of that which harms and hurts us. Rumi emphasizes "[w]hat hurts you, blesses you" and "[d]arkness is your candle. Qur'anic insights speak to the gifting of difference as an act of Divine providence. Difference can manifest in countless forms including experiences and emotions. The tensionalities that arise through coming into relationship with difference and their sources of origin become gradually known if there is openness to receiving them. Gratitude in Spirit and being, as Qur'anic guidance teaches, informs an openness to that which is unknown, unfamiliar, anxiety- provoking and perhaps what one is seemingly at odds with. The proclamation of *alhumdulillah*, "all praise is due to Allah" in the face of ease and hardships is a source of grounding and reminder of how to live with humility. Humility encourages an openness to meaning making and reminds us of our transformative potential. This creative insight is articulated further in Rumi's proclamation that "[y]ou must have shadow and light sources both". Learning from a balance between light and shadow sources are made possible through silence and dwelling in the soul. Rumi highlights that facades become apparent through silence and also paying attention to the inner nature of other beings we come into relationship with. He addresses this insight by drawing upon the example of the snake and frog. Rumi reminds us that balance is restored through connecting with one's inner state and learning from the attributes of others. These holistic insights remind us that we can live in ways that are not self-enclosed and managed by external forces. Rumi's guidance as conveyed in "Everything is Inscribed Within" and "Enough words" summons readers to conceptualize healing as an act that that facilitates the recovery of inner knowledges through the practice of calm awareness and dwelling in gifted sources of inspiration.

Alissa, Rose, Levi and Chauntelle articulate notions of healing that are guided by holistic insights. Their individual and collective experiences, within the holistic-guided curricular and pedagogical context of Aboriginal Studies 30, informed these insights. Their words are contextualized by these happenings alongside re-visiting in-class learnings about the experiences of Indian Residential School survivors. Their wonders encapsulate a confluence of class learnings, revisiting Indian Residential School histories and experiences and their inner voices. Each student participant conveys what is needed for healing to occur according to their own holistic insights. Alissa emphasizes the need for relationship in the form of self -love and receiving love from others. Rose expresses the importance of individual effort and lifting the veils and clouds entrenched in painful memories that interfere with moving forth in life with balance. Levi speaks to the holistic insight of learning to dwell with emotions in careful and generative ways that guide how we speak with each other. Chauntelle underscores the importance of recovering emotional insights as a way to restore connectivity with self and other. These holistic intuitions offer an ethic of openness and transformation that is missed in the management that results from liberal philosophies' imposition of singular ways to live.

Alissa conveys how "lateral damage" and the inner and outer violence it perpetuates carries forth from generation to generation. Her learnings from survivors' experiences in Indian Residential Schools focus on the extent to which love is present in one's life. Alissa shares that survivors were not taught "how to love one another" and as a result their learnings of what it means to show and receive affection were informed by the quality and absence of relationship. Dwelling in Alissa's words indicate that a denial of relationship perpetuates imbalance. This absence of relationship does not allow individuals to be fully human because the integrity of self and other that coming into relationship inspires is denied. These notions of relationship speak to

Rumi's emphasis of the importance of learning from one's inner knowledge and the truths that flow from connecting with the attributes of other entities. Alissa helps us to ponder how the micro and macro flowing of transformative potential is lost when relationship is denied.

Rose espouses the holistic insight that it is up to the individual to "change who they really are". Her thought-provoking words convey a thematic unity with Rumi's emphasis of living in ways that promote the action of deepened awareness. This deepened awareness helps us to interpret how we can perhaps live in the midst of "bad memories" as Rose guides readers to reflect on. Thinking with Rose's words "[h]ow do you keep yourself strong" [h]ow do you keep on surviving with the fact that there is no good in life" brings forth the inextricable connection between memory and experiences of connectivity. How we remember and the locations from which memory travels, becomes animated in our thoughts and actions, and flows outward towards our relations. Memories are not limited to repositories of mental affliction. Memories also require an attentiveness to the body for healing to be made possible. Rose's reflections help the reader to rethink how intellectualized approaches to difficult memories are insufficient on their own to promote well-being. Turning inward and dwelling in the inner workings of what the body remembers can perhaps inspire an awareness that is not diminished by veils and clouds of pessimism and despair. Rose's insight indicates that balance and healing require individual will to transform pain and visions of continued despair. The idea here is that no one can undertake that work for you. This holistic insight connects with Rumi's teachings that life-giving knowledge can be accessed within. The intermingling between Rose and Rumi's words also inspire notions of what it means to survive in an ontological sense. Living in ways that seek to bring into balance the pain enshrined in difficult memories is another form of survival. Rose helps us to understand that survival is also connected to grounding in oneself as an act of healing.

This notion of survival is lost in liberal conceptions of survival that centre material acquisition as the ultimate source of balance. Rose invites readers to ponder otherwise.

Levi's explorations of imbalance and healing are situated within his own experiences of addressing difficult conversations and emotions when learning about and from Indian Residential Schools. Levi emphasizes that learning from these histories and lived experiences can be "overwhelming" for some Canadians who have no idea any of this happened". He further shares that "[p]eople don't know how to discuss things. To take things into your minds is a very complicated thing to do and to stay calm in those situations". Levi's insightful words remind us that coming into relationship with "difficult knowledge" (Pitt & Britzman, 2003) or knowledge and experiences that disrupt what we once held to be unrefuted truth, requires learning how to cultivate calmness. In other words, holistic insights help us to consider the importance of attentiveness to the ways in which we communicate and what communication is informed by. Levi shares that it is difficult for him to remain calm and listen to what others have to share in the midst of conversations regarding Truth and Reconciliation. His connections to the holism undergirding Aboriginal Studies 30 teaches him that emotional attentiveness is integral to pay attention to if he seeks to honour the traditional teaching that we have "two ears" and one mouth for a reason. Rumi also emphasizes this point through promoting silence. Silence in this regard is not indicative of passive inaction or avoidance of reality. Silence is an invitation to help individuals reconsider, to ponder and to engage with inner dialogue in preparation to listen well to ourselves and our relations. Levi's concerns with the ethicality of communication and listening practices that accompany difficult conversations speak to Rumi's emphasis that the sources of pain ought not be utilized to remedy the pain in question. Such holistic conceptions of being in the presence of our relations disrupt the common-sense logic that we must respond

immediately if we seek to remain a part of the conversation. Holism reminds us that we can respond otherwise and offers guidance to promote balance during the emergence of difficult conversations.

Chauntelle also addresses the role of emotions in guiding connectivity with self and others. Chauntelle's experiences in Aboriginal Studies 30 helped her to reconnect with the holistic teachings of her own upbringing. While she grew up attending ceremony and expressed living in accordance with traditional teachings for much of her life, these holistic insights held new meaning for her because of a re-centering of these teachings in a different context. This new context, alongside the formation of relationships that were inspired by holistic teachings, in a shared curricular and pedagogical landscape guided Chauntelle to reinterpret the significance of emotions in her own life. Chauntelle emphasizes that the inability to communicate emotions necessitates a loss of grounding and self. She expresses that such emotional connection is what is needed "to become whole again". Her experiences of partaking in sharing circle during her time as an Aboriginal Studies 30 student helped her to remember and begin the pathway to restoring connectivity with herself and others. The deep listening and connecting to inner knowledges that circle evokes connects with Rumi's teaching regarding listening and awareness. Again, careful listening and actively engaging with one's inner truths and the attributes of others sparks a generative sensibility that can promote healing through the lifting of clouds and veils.

Alissa, Rose, Levi and Chauntelle's experiences evoke nuanced readings of healing. Their individual and collective voices contest assumptions made by educators and curricularists regarding the forms of knowledge that are deemed as most worthy (Donald, 2019). Notions of what education is for and the purpose of schooling often do not address what it means to live a life of balance. As alluded to severally in this dissertation, survival, in a liberal sense assumes a

specific meaning within curricular and pedagogical contexts. The market capitalism that guides these understandings of survival betray how our inner selves require nurturing and are also worthy sources of knowledge and guidance. The storying of survival as something that can be obtained externally and in singular ways perpetuates imbalance between self and other. Such imbalance ensures that our sensibilities remain largely dormant and interfere with living in ways that promote openness towards one's inner state and others. These notions of survival are unable to offer sustainable approaches to healing.

Alissa's emphasis on the absence of self-love and learning how to love, within the context of Indian Residential School survivors' experiences, is an invitation to contemplate the extent to which relationships are considered in curriculum making and schooling landscapes. Dwayne Donald (2010) expresses that colonialism is an:

> Extended process of denying relationship whether it be with the places that we live, or our head and our heart, or with people who look different from us. And so, everyone has been colonized. It doesn't matter what colour your skin is or where you are from.

I purposefully draw upon Donald's conceptions of colonialism because it addresses how all individuals have been distanced from their inner knowledges. The point to address here is that curricula development and its enactment on educational landscapes will continue to suffer if these roots of separation are primarily addressed by philosophies that are also self-enclosed. If relationships remain guided solely by liberal philosophies that overlook the life-giving connections expressed through union between the mind and heart, what will then become of well- intentioned efforts to live wisely together in the presence of difference?

Rose's words also re-centre the importance of relationship through highlighting the linkages between memory and experiences of connectivity. As previously stated, Rose is

concerned with the ways in which moving forth in life is interrupted by an inability to alleviate the strains of clouds of despair. She sensibly reminds readers that embarking on a healing pathway of change ultimately resides with the individual in question. Her words contrast curricular and pedagogical discourse that upholds the mitigating of difficult lived experiences and memories as the prerogative of evidenced based thinking which is enshrined in historical consciousness (Gibson & Case, 2019; Seixas, 2006; Seixas, 2012). Other curricular and pedagogical approaches address traumatic individual and collective memories through frontloading how grand narrative renderings of shared histories subsume unpalatable happenings that tarnish the noble representations of Canada as benevolent (Stanley, 2006). Such approaches also bring forth the role of systemic racisms as a way to ensure that difficult histories and experiences are no longer invisibilized. While these efforts are important, I am uncertain about the ways in which such intersections with difficult histories, experiences and memories encourage generativity and proceeding differently. Sharing difficult memories are important but they do not enliven these memories in ways that guide us to live differently, nor do they inspire responses that encourage the restoration of balance. Such approaches perhaps unknowingly manage how we respond to difficult memories, the histories they are embedded in and the very ways in which we speak about and with them.

Rose's assertations articulate another ethic that encourages the importance of turning inwards to remedy the heart and body of its pain. Her words remind me of Elder Joe P. Cardinal's[84] teaching that "it's up to you" (Hoffman, 2010, p. 25). Elder Joe. P. Cardinal's teaching emphasizes that we have been bestowed with "the gift of choice" (Hoffman, 2010, p.

[84] The late Elder Joe P. Cardinal was from Saddle Lake, Alberta. His guidance was rooted in Cree traditional teachings. Elder Joe was also a mentor to Elder Bob Cardinal.

25). This teaching reminds us of our innate creative potential and what perhaps can be if we trust in ourselves and process. Within the context of Rose's words, difficult memories can be addressed if one wills himself or herself to do the work. Honouring the "gift of choice" in this regard can help build relationships of harmony and balance because individual and collective responsibility is taken into consideration. Hoffman (2010) expresses that "[w]e have been given the gift of choice and with that gift comes responsibility: responsibility to ourselves, to others, and to "all our relations". A personal understanding of the relationship between choice and responsibility is relative to everyone's health" (Hoffman, 2010, pp. 25-26). Hoffman's (2010) unpacking of Joe P. Cardinal's teachings and the insights that flow from Rose's words refocus the self in connection to healing. Their words guide an ethic of balance that requires carefully taking into consideration the interplay between our inner state and the well-being of our relatives. In other words, the safeguarding of relationship is dependent on the extent to which we can live and walk with balance. Such holistic insights can assist in the reinterpretation of self that reminds us of our inner knowledges and creative capacity. The idea to pay attention to here is that what occurs internally informs external acts and that which takes place externally impacts one's inner state. Understanding this interplay and tapping into one's inner power is then another way to approach difficult memories on curricular and pedagogical landscapes.

Levi conveys the importance of learning to speak to each other in respectful ways to ensure that difficult conversations remain generative. His emphasis on emotions points to the ways in which the enshrinement of liberal philosophies in pedagogical practices deems emotions as unworthy sources of knowledge. Levi's words, "[l]ook at all the things Canada did. Yes, we want everyone to know what we did but it is overwhelming for some Canadians who have no idea any of this happened" indicates a sense of cognitive imperialism. Marie Battiste (n.d.)

describes cognitive imperialism as the hegemonic positioning of European language and knowledge systems. The narrativized superiority of these knowledge systems and their enshrinement in socio-political institutional contexts perpetuates relationships of imbalance. The presence of cognitive imperialism underscores the inadequacy of conventional approaches to knowledge and knowing and limits the ability to connect with and learn from other sensibilities. Cognitive imperialism then impedes the cultivation of ethical relationships between Indigenous peoples and Canadians. Thoughts of abandoning "official accounts" of Canadian history, for example, are anxiety provoking and mired in fears of losing identity and belonging. Reality is difficult to comprehend and accept when it severely calls into question what you once internalized as absolute truth. These insights lead to feelings of instability and self-doubt because they interrupt the very core of how identification and association are understood and actualized for many individuals. Levi's feelings and reflections on others' responses to emotionally loaded conversations and experiences are likely a consequence of how our cultural assumptions have guided us to close ourselves off from our feelings. We have been taught to enact a specific way of relating with the world. This naturally informs how language is encoded, decoded and our subconscious thought processes. Descartes' philosophies encourage the practice of viewing the world as a picture (Bowers, 1993, pp. 28-29). Situating human beings as "observers" who can generate "separate and objective judgements" accentuates other Western cultural assumptions (Bowers, 1993, pp. 28-29). While living life as an observer may appear desirable to those who seek to sieve ambiguity, discomfort, pain and anger, there is much harm in practicing avoidance. In treating life as a picture to be observed, we remove opportunities to learn from holistic insights.

Levi's commentary on how cognitively unpacking previously unknown difficult histories and memories evokes complication, and subsequently heightened emotions, also summons a reconsideration of the role of communication. Perhaps an ethic of silence and treading carefully may inspire "more ethical forms of communication" (Chambers, 1992, p. 3) during the course of difficult conversations. Following Levi and Chambers (1992) communication during conversations that inspire discord due to historical unfamiliarity and feelings of denial requires "a balance between telling (narration) and listening" (Chambers, 1992, p. 3). Chambers emphasizes that "there is a need for silence so that we can learn from others" (p. 3). The difficulty of listening to matters that invite anxiety, fear and anger, as Levi expresses can perhaps be rebalanced through learning to remain silent and speaking at appropriate times. Chamber's unpacking of more ethical forms of communication are inspired by her experiences learning from Dene peoples. She shares that the "Dene remind us of the need for restraint, silence and discernment of the right moment for speaking and writing, for listening and reading…" (p. 3). The coupling of Levi and Chamber's insights offer other ways and sources of inspiration that guide how we can respond. These holistic insights call into question the ethicality of responding hastily and in the moment. The culturally pervasive notion that all deliberations and answers ought to be immediately shared can cause much harm. A re-examination of what guides communication and a holistic attentiveness to emotion can perhaps encourage healing.

Chauntelle's experiences of healing within the context of Aboriginal Studies 30 and learnings from the history of Indian Residential schools generated the insights that healing oneself is needed to be able to emotionally connect with others. Her participation in circle during Aboriginal Studies 30 informs how the wisdom of the circle can invite connectivity with self and others. Circle represents "a powerful symbol of the connection between First Nations people and

the Creator in many Canadian Indigenous communities" (LaBoucane-Benson et al., 2017, p. 27). Circle reflects interdependence between peoples, communities, nations, and the natural and spiritual orders of the universe. The ethic of the circle teaches that "everything the power of the world does is done in a circle" (Black Elk, 1995 as cited in Michell, 2011, p. 72). Black Elk (1995) shares that the sky, earth and stars are all round and that the birds make their nests in circles. He expresses that "the sun comes forth and goes down again in a circle. The moon does the same and both around. Even the seasons form a great circle from childhood, and so it is everything where power moves". The teachings of the sacred circle are drawn upon in many First Nations ceremonies which honour natural law and life cycles (Michell, 1995, p. 73). The sharing or talking circle is understood as a form of relational teaching that connects people through differences and promotes healing. Partaking in circle encourages the regaining of balance because it teaches patience and respectful listening. Jean Graveline (1998) shares,

> [w]e must learn to pay each other attention and to take responsibility for maintaining focus on what each speaker is sharing. This assists people in learning not to project their experiences and feelings onto others. The only way to really "know", to really see and hear someone else, is to fully experience and own our emotions and thoughts. Through respectful listening we are better able to enter into another's experience through their words (p. 138)

In addition to patience and respectful listening, the wisdom of the circle promotes healing through teaching the "foundations upon which a proper relationship to oneself and others is developed" (Graveline, 1998, p. 141). Graveline (1998) shares "[t]he state of conscious awareness contained within a Circle of interconnectedness can generate openness that is rare in Western society today. The energy of a circle can create a space that can allow for the unorthodox to enter and the

unexpected to happen" (p.141). The openness and generative potential that is cultivated through partaking in circle teaches that time is needed to connect with one's embodied knowledges to "to learn, heal, to change and to grow" (Graveline, 1998, p. 140).

Chauntelle is expressing that healing is made possible through connectivity by realizing that while we are different beings in Creation we are connected through Spirit and circle helps us to remember that. What makes circle and wisdom "somehow important" as Chauntelle emphasizes? The opportunity to physically face one another in circle, to hear individuals to speak from their deepest places one at a time, to express oneself without feeling pressurized to adhere to a particular 'academic' convention or mode of communication and to learn from the experiences and insights of others in non-informational-ways awakens trust and relationships of strength (Graveline, 1998, p. 142). It is this facing that assists in lifting the "veils and cloudiness" that limit the self- love that is needed to connect with self and others. Circle as used in ceremony is an expression of holism that teaches individuals how to be human, to pay attention, to listen with our two ears and to remember that our being is reflected in one another. Such guidance teaches us that connecting with difference, through the confluence of self and others can be a source of healing

**Chapter Seven:**
**II**

*BIRDWINGS*

*Your grief for what you've lost lifts a mirror*
*up to where you're bravely working. Expecting the worst, you look, and*
*instead, here's the joyful face you've been wanting to*
*see. Your hand opens and closes and opens and closes.*
*If it were always a fist or always stretched open,*
*you would be paralyzed. Your deepest presence is in every small*
*contracting and expanding,*
*the two as beautifully balanced and coordinated*
*as birdwings.*

*(Jalaluddin Rumi, in Coleman Bark's (2004) "The Essential Rumi", p. 174)*

*The Tongue:*

*O tongue, you are both the fire*
*And the hay that's been gathered:*
*How long will you keep burning this hay?*
*My soul in secret laments because of you,*
*even though it does whatever you bid it to do,*
*"O tongue, you are an endless treasure.*
*O tongue, you are also an endless disease."*
*You whistle to lure birds, and you lend comfort*
*During the desolation of separation from the Beloved.*

*Jalaluddin Rumi, in Kabir and Camille Helminski's (2012) "The Rumi Daybook", p. 57*

I am always trying to find ways to connect with who I am spiritually and culturally. I have grown up with this culture but I have always been hesitant the past years to go to ceremonies. It's important to go to these things because when I do I always end up finding that sense of clarity and belonging and then sometimes I feel guilty when I don't go to them because it is who I am as a person.

Participating in Aboriginal Studies connected me…it was weird. Like I felt like I was not alone. Like I kinda experienced some of the stuff and it was not good stuff at the same time. It made me kinda lift a burden that I know is still there. Words are really powerful. We just need to learn to say it properly without killing anyone in a sense of like emotionally, spiritually and physically…like you don't need to harm someone just to tell the truth.

Every single emotion has beauty. Like anger and sadness…like the best poems …everyone likes to go see a sad movie …nobody likes to feel sad but everyone likes to see it because it's so beautiful and everything needs to have balance. You can be obsessed with being positive and you can be obsessed with being negative. You need to have balance in your life. This [drawing upon the four parts of ourselves] is a different way of doing that.

Mentally in school I realized such a dissonance between the Western and Indigenous ways of thinking and ways of learning and in university it has really frustrated me. I have had such issues with integrating those into my way of learning because they both play such an important role and [Dwayne Donald] spoke on the possibilities and the reality that we can learn to integrate and balance these two ideologies. Mentally that gives me a peace of mind because I am not the only one that believes it's possible which is so important.

**In what ways can reconnecting with self and other inspire balance?**

Rumi's poem "Birdwings" beautifully addresses how coming into balance, through holism, requires acts that are always in motion. Holism is not a 'thing' but rather opens up what one does in relation to thoughts, speech and action. As Some (1994) shares "you cannot be who you are until you can put what you remember into action in your life" (p.309). Rumi articulates holism as action through drawing upon the metaphor of a fist and opened hand. Rumi expresses"[y]our hand opens and closes and opens and closes. If it were always a fist or always stretched open, you would be paralyzed. Your deepest presence is in every small contracting and expanding". His words convey that remaining in singular states results in a conformity that may leave one stagnant. Pursuing a balance between contracting and expanding hands is the site of deep reflection, dwelling and creative potential. The hermeneutic sensibilities and holistic insights expressed here underscore that balance, as guided by connecting with difference, ensures the "restoration of life to its original difficulty" (Jardine, 1992) because life and living can always be reinterpreted. Rumi's words help us reinterpret how seeking balance, through connecting with difference, can alleviate tendencies to "flatten lived experiences" (Jardine & James, 1996) and live in ways that are fully human (Donald, 2019). These teachings offer inspiring ways to reconceptualize how difference necessitates balance in the presence of the false universalism of liberalism that suggests otherwise.

Rumi's poem "The Tongue" explores holistic conceptions of balance in another way. His poem cautions that while sacred notions of difference manifest balance through connecting with contrasting attributes and the meaning that flows from these attributes, we need to tread carefully with these gifts and pay attention to how we use them. Rumi invites careful attentiveness and consideration for the consequences of failing to pay attention to the simultaneous life giving and life taking nature of the tongue. Rumi shares "O tongue, you are both the fire, and the hay that's been gathered". He proceeds to share that "O tongue, you are an endless treasure. O tongue, you are also an endless disease". Rumi's words call for a reinterpretation of the presence of dualism. Liberal guided conceptions of dualism indicate that differences and similarities do not inform each other. Such conceptualizations ensure that differences and similarities remain at odds with each other and at a distance. These notions take for granted the living nature of attributes. Rumi's holistic conceptions of difference help us to think about difference and similarities not as things or categories but rather as qualities that are forever in motion. The Qur'an explicates this insight through the 99 names of Allah which represent different manifestations of Allah's presence in Creation. According to a *Hadith* (saying or tradition of the Prophet Muhammad), "[t]here are 99 names that are Allah's alone. Whoever learns, understands and enumerates (ihsa) them enters paradise and achieves eternal salvation" (al Jerrahi al-Halveti, 1985, p. 3).It is important to note that the *Hadith* does not imply that Allah has only 99 names. Rather, Allah has made these 99 names *Zahir* or evident to Creation (al Jerrahi al-Halveti, 1985). These names show how Spirit interacts with the physical world and the spiritual development of the soul. They are revealed selectively (Khalid & O'Brien, 1992, p. 73). The point to address here is that connecting with these attributes requires action and responsibility. In this regard, balance can be holistically re-interpreted as carefully paying attention to the gifts of difference and how we are responding to

and enacting these gifts on a daily basis. This ethic also helps to refocus balance as an individual and collective responsibility regarding the choices we make.

Alissa, Rose, Levi and Chauntelle each interpret how reconnecting with self and other inspires balance. These interpretations are informed by overarching reflections of the holistic insights that flow from Aboriginal Studies 30 and a field work activity in which students shared time with Elder Bob Cardinal and Dr. Dwayne Donald. During this time, we learned from traditional teachings, received guidance about the four directions teachings and also participated in experiential learnings. Dr. Dwayne Donald facilitated conversations surrounding Treaty Sensibility and its connections to holism. Alissa expresses that balance is restored through reconnecting with her spirituality by partaking in ceremony. Rose reconnects with what was already within her because of coming into relationship with the holistic insights espoused by Aboriginal Studies 30. She speaks to the need to carefully use words. She advises readers that words can enhance and harm our capacity to build relationships (Ermine, 2007). Her conceptions of balance are informed by the gift of speech. Levi revisits how we can learn from our emotions through bringing them into balance. His words open up the dangers of managing emotions in curricular and pedagogical contexts and how this leads to imbalance. Chauntelle's reflections attend to how imbalance manifested in her own life because of impositions of singular ways of knowing and being on educational landscapes. The presence of the false universalism of liberalism in Chauntelle's educational experiences invited much grief.

Alissa's reflections on Aboriginal Studies' holistic insights and experiences learning from Elder Cardinal evidence notions of balance that are deeply connected to culture, spirituality and ceremony. Alissa emphasizes that while she is hesitant to attend ceremony at times, she realizes that partaking in ceremony is important because it offers her a "sense of clarity and belonging".

Her words indicate a restoration and renewal that is made possible through partaking in ceremony. Alissa helps us to consider how partaking in ceremony offers a "sense of clarity and belonging" that is different from notions of belonging associated with citizenship and identification via the Canadian Nation-State. Alissa's reflections of experiencing ceremony in a curricular and pedagogical context on repeated occasions reminds her that an absence of such connectivity perpetuates imbalance. Drawing upon Rumi's metaphor of fists and open hands in relation to Alissa's words, indicates that perhaps a balance can be sought between holistically guided notions of belonging, grounding and citizenship conceptions of connection. Rather than centering one conception of belonging over another, both aspects can inform each other and invite balanced ways of living.

Rose's words also speak to the ways in which Aboriginal Studies' holistic insights helped her to experience connectivity in deeper ways. These insights and their reinterpretation while learning from Elder Cardinal in a different context, reminded Rose that she was not alone. The way that Rose experienced connectivity because of learning from the holism undergirding Aboriginal Studies 30 perhaps re-awakened a sensibility that already existed in her. Her words convey a thematic unity with Rumi's poem "Birdwings". Rose shares that reconnecting in a sense ought not be framed as an easy affair or singular event. Rose shares that her experiences of reconnecting brought to the forefront "not good stuff". This unpleasantness, however, helped her "lift a burden" that she knew was "still there". Rose's process and experiences reflect the importance of learning from the rhythm and motion that manifests while striving towards balance. She did not become paralyzed by the emotions she was experiencing while reconnecting with herself and others. The indwelling between difficult emotions and the wonders she was gifted with helped her to remain present to gifts that emerged from this indwelling.

Rose also explored the relationship between connectivity and balance as a gift of responsibility. She opened up these profound insights by reconsidering the ways in which words are used and the power they evoke when uttered. Rose shares "words are really powerful. We just need to learn to say it properly without killing anyone in a sense". She proceeds to assert that "you don't need to harm someone just to tell the truth". Rose's inspiring and deeply insightful words open up a holistic interpretation of speech that is far too often ignored. Her words mirror Rumi's sentiments regarding the dualistic nature of the tongue. The tongue possesses attributes of treasure, disease and comfort. It is up to us to determine how we put into motion different attributes that can flow from our words. Words, once uttered, have the power to give and take life and create our realities (King, 2011, p.9). Rose beckons us to ponder how these holistic insights may guide curricular and pedagogical contexts by resituating the ethicality of our words in relation to nurturing the "gift of choice"; living in ways that enact our shared responsibility to each other in this regard can help to promote balance.

Levi's reflections on Aboriginal Studies' holistic sensibilities in connection to Elder Bob's teachings guide him to revisit the pedagogical utility of emotions. Levi's words caution readers to refrain from limiting the knowledge that arises from emotional insights. He reminds us that emotions are also in movement and cannot be relegated to embodying singular attributes. Levi shares "[e]very single emotion has beauty. Like anger and sadness…like the best poems. He continues to express that "everything needs to have balance" . Levi advises that remaining seduced by obsessive states of positivity and negativity impedes balance. This notion mirrors Rumi's cautioning against the perils of remaining trapped by particular thoughts and actions. Levi's emphasis that an openness to what can emerge from learning from the wisdom that flows from pain and anger can guide a presence that necessitates balance. His conceptions of balance as

openness to our emotions as deeply pedagogical is also inspired by learning from the four directions teachings. His words invite us to re-examine how the false universalism enshrined in liberal philosophies insist that emotions ought to be managed in curricular and pedagogical contexts.

Chauntelle's interpretations of balance in conjunction with her experiences in Aboriginal Studies and learning from Elder Cardinal's guidance informs her interpretation of balance as learning to live in harmony in the midst of different ideologies. Chauntelle's words also address how the false universalism of liberalism and its imposition of a monolithic onto-epistemological framework, during her schooling experiences, sparked 'dissonance" and unease within her. She shares that "mentally in school [she] realized such a dissonance between the Western and Indigenous ways of thinking and ways of learning". This dissonance led to feelings of frustration and perpetuated a revisiting of former experiences where she felt compelled to reconcile contrasting knowledge systems. These tensionalities were lifted when she heard of possibilities to 'integrate' and 'balance' Western and Indigenous ideologies. Chauntelle's words encourage a circling back to Rumi's guidance on striving towards balance as a way to instill presence. Such presence can inspire an ethic that does not forsake one sensibility over another. While the false universalism of liberalism may suggest that it is untenable to bring into confluence contrasting ideologies, holistic sensibilities, as expressed by Chauntelle's wonderings suggest otherwise.

Alissa, Rose, Levi and Chauntelle facilitate a pondering that refocuses how holistic perceptions can restore balance through offering what individuals need in ways that feed their souls and support a deeper sense of purpose. The absence of the language of inclusion, diversity, equity, justice, and education for citizenship is noteworthy in their articulations of living more

harmoniously. This absence supports how holism can assist and inform educational experiences for students.

Alissa's experiences of partaking in ceremony in curricular and pedagogical contexts offers a powerful source of remembering in her life. Drawing upon the guidance of Elders, Potawatomi scholar Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013) asserts that "ceremonies are the way we remember to remember" (p. 7). I interpret Kimmerer's words as understanding how the transmission of knowledge flows in different ways ( Michell, 2013, p. 19) in the forms of multiple attributes and entities. The confluence of paying attention to these attributes, deeply listening to them and remembering our enmeshment with them and Spirit instructs, in non-prescriptive ways, a pathway to live. Ceremony facilitates reconnection with oneself because it serves to bridge the distance between self and kinship relational networks (Wilson, 2008). This process evokes connectivity between self, Spirit and other life forms that help to sustain and promote balance. The "sense of clarity and belonging" that Alissa voices as a result of participating in ceremony and dwelling in Spirit brings forth a connectivity that is informed by her inner state and flows outward towards her relations. Connectivity is then understood, experienced, received and enacted in ways that are not external to oneself. Ceremony invites the memory of the "cosmological coherency of all beings" (Bouvier & MacDonald, 2019, p. 2) and assists living in ways that do not take for granted our relational enmeshment; this cosmological memory can live within us if we allow it to.

Alissa's experiences help us to ponder the continued promotion of Canadian citizenship and citizenship education as the sole means by which belonging and unity can be experienced (Donald, 2019, Westheimer & Kahne, 2004; Sears, 2004). The positioning of Canadian citizenship and citizenship education as the arbiters of belonging flattens how holistic insights can connect with deepened expressions of balance, grounding and belonging on curricular and pedagogical

landscapes. Westheimer and Kahne (2004) pose the question "what kind of citizen do we need to support in an effective democratic society?" (p. 239). Westheimer and Kahne propose that the categories personally responsible citizens, participatory citizens and justice -oriented citizens help to address their question. A personally responsible citizen is one who demonstrates responsibility within community contexts, pays taxes, obeys the laws and recycles. A participatory citizen is an individual who is an active member of community organization, organizes community efforts and has an awareness of how government agencies work. A justice-oriented citizen is one who critically assesses social, political and economic structures to see beyond surface causes and makes commitments to addressing social injustice (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004, p. 240). The intent of these categories is to convey how individuals can come together in unified ways to support and uphold the nation and democratic citizenship. While I understand that citizenship education, as Westheimer and Kahne explicate, is meant to honour democratic values, the promotion of particular ideals to put into practice responsible citizenship ironically diminishes the equity that democratic nationhood promises. The promotion of prescriptive ways to honour citizenship is troubling in itself. In particular, the emphasis on the justice-oriented citizen who visibly enacts social justice practices to demonstrate attentiveness to systemic issues becomes yet another imposition. This imposition curtails the possibility for individuals to connect with their inner beings as sources of guidance that inspire balance and connectivity with others within the context of the Canadian democratic nation-state. Other orientations and sensibilities can also inform the practice of accountability to others within the situation of civic responsibilities. Alissa's experiences of reconnecting with restorative energy by partaking in ceremony evidences this point.

Rose's experiences of balance illustrate ways of working towards connectivity that revisit notions of inner awareness and individual agency that are inspired by holism (Hoffman, 2010).

Notions of the individual, as guided by Sufic and Cree philosophies, indicate that human beings have been gifted with choice. We are gifted with inner awareness if we choose to tap into that power and energy and honour it in fulsome ways. This gift, however, emphasizes the need to dwell in the ethicality of individual choices and how they impact our relations and subsequently, the well-being of all. Rose's experiences of reconnecting with her inner power as a result of her experiences in Aboriginal Studies and partaking in ceremony, can help us to re-evaluate the purpose of epistemic, cosmological and ontological knowledges within the framework of curriculum and pedagogy. Youth may be taught countless histories and lived experiences, in Social Studies, for example. To what extent are these knowledges remembered and enacted upon in generative ways? How do such learnings inspire ways to live that promote balance and wellness in our present and shared futures? Rose's experiences of re-connecting with herself through the healing energy of her relations and facing certain discomforts informed experiences of balance for her in lasting ways. Cree and Sufic philosophies, for example, are opening up the insight that balance within oneself is important because it can then be enacted in one's daily life. This connection to one's inner being is understood as impacting relationships in healthy ways. These insights are then understood to enhance the quality of life and ensure that life goes on.

Rose's emphasis that "we need to learn to say things properly without killing anyone" highlights the importance of understanding the relationship between the sacredness of all beings and living in ways that honour the integrity of that sacredness. Henderson (2000) conveys that "the Aboriginal worldview asserts that all life is sacred and that all life forms are connected" (p. 259). This reminder can guide an ethic that cautions a careful attentiveness to maintaining the integrity of ourselves and our relations. It is easier to lose sight of the shared sacredness of all entities and deeper undercurrents of connectivity when difference is merely conceptualized as a perspective.

Neil McLeod (2007) wisely articulates that "what you put in the world with one hand, you will eventually get back with the other" (28). His words enhance understandings of the "gift of choice" and the power enmeshed in words. The ways in which we think, act and speak are often overlooked as sources that can inspire greater balance on curricular and pedagogical landscapes.

Rose's conceptualizations of balance in connection to thoughtful speech compels me to revisit Rumi's poem "The Guest House". Rumi shares:

*This being human is a guest house.*
*Every morning a new arrival.*
*A joy, a depression, a meanness,*
*some momentary awareness comes*
*as an unexpected visitor.*
*Welcome and entertain them all!*
*Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,*
*who violently sweep your house*
*empty of its furniture,*
*still, treat each guest honorably.*
*He may be clearing you out*
*for some new delight.*
*The dark thought, the shame, the malice.*
*meet them at the door laughing and invite them in.*
*Be grateful for whatever comes*
*because each has been sent*
*as a guide from beyond.*

*(Jalaluddin Rumi, in Coleman Bark's (2004) "The Essential Rumi", p.108 )*

The holistic insights offered in "The Guest House" also serve as a reminder of the sacredness of all life forms and what we can we can learn from them. The sacredness of all beings, in connection with "the gift of choice", and how these teachings can guide ethical expressions and relationships can perhaps inform difficult conversations on epistemological, ontological and cosmological differences on schooling landscapes. These insights offer another way to engage with tensions that arise from learning about and from "difficult knowledge" (Pitt& Britzman, 2003).

Levi's words address balance by putting into practice the holistic teaching of learning from emotions. He shares "[e]very single emotion has beauty. Like anger and sadness…like the best poems…everyone likes to go see a sad movie…nobody likes to feel sad but everyone likes to see it because it's so beautiful and everything needs to have balance". Levi's words convey that while it is our natural tendency to avoid feeling grief and sorrow, it is necessary for us to humbly invite these feelings as a part of our current being in order to learn from them. Dwelling in this regard can facilitate balance. Drawing upon our emotions reminds us that learning is not limited to conceptions of "curriculum as planned"[85] (Aoki, 1991). Ross (1992) explores the notion that generative insights come in all forms. The point to address in Ross's extrapolations is how the false universalism of liberalism has constrained possibilities of what constitutes a teacher. Truncating these possibilities reduces openness to self and others. Ross shares "anyone and anything has the potential to be a teacher, including children and youth, adults, the elder, harmony, thus all help individuals to develop their balance" (p. 92). In this way we can learn from everything because everything has purpose. Levi's words in relation to Ross's (1992) articulations of connectivity remind us that what we learn from ought not be limited to a particular form, attribute, sensibility, theory or framework. In this regard, wisdom relationality and its curricular and pedagogical commitments open up that it is an ethical responsibility to offer youth and educators "the space to be who they are in the classroom" (Fellner, n.d., p. 15). Levi and Ross's words thus underscore that enabling youth to be who they are involves access to learning from different parts of themselves. Impeding the access to such insights leaves individuals feeling unwell.

[85] Ted Aoki's (1991) conceptions of "curriculum as planned" refer to the strict replication of curricular objectives and outcomes as expressed in provincially mandated curricula. This contrasts the organic enactment of the "curriculum as lived"

While Levi addresses emotional connectivity as a way to instill and sustain balance, he also references “the parts of ourselves” in connection to the four directions teachings. This referencing directly connects with how Levi has also come to understand ways of living that can cultivate balance in his own life. Elder Cardinal teaches that “the longest journey that you will ever have to make is form your head to your heart” (B. Cardinal, Personal Communication, September 2014). This teaching helps to re-contextualize the four directions teachings and how learning from these insights may promote balance on curricular and pedagogical landscapes. Opening up the head and heart and the wisdom that arises from such awareness brings to life a relational ethic that creates entry points for openness and renewal. A full-bodied attentiveness to difficult conversations for example, inspires a deepened sense of connectivity with self and other that is needed to go on. Elder Cardinal teaches that “we are all lifting something [and] have been trained to lift different things”. Missing the pedagogical significance of this teaching overlooks what we are individually and collectively working out. The privileging of the mental over all aspects of the whole is rather dangerous because signs of guidance can be missed in the process (B. Cardinal, Personal Communication, October 25, 2014). When dwelling in this manner becomes removed from our curricular and pedagogical context, it is difficult to connect with our creative inner space (Ermine, 1995).

As mentioned, Chauntelle experienced dissonance on educational landscapes because different cosmologies, ontologies and epistemologies were positioned in opposition with each other. Her words evoke feelings of confusion and a searching for ways to bring into balance the sensibilities that she carries within her to live her life. Imposing upon others a particular ideology as the most suitable guiding force in their lives can be rather harmful. Curricular and pedagogical

contexts can address different sensibilities in non-conflictual ways. Russell et al. (2000) (as cited in Michell et al., 2008, p.39) share:

> Insights from the multiple practices and theories of environmental justice, Indigenous knowledges, feminism and ecofeminism, critical pedagogy, environmental thought, deep ecology, bioregionalism and the other educations… all have much to offer environmental education, just as environmental education can enrich the theory and practice of each. While not wishing to minimize the important differences and tensions between these movements and educations, each contributes to a diversity of voices, each is grounded in specific communities and experiences. (p. 209).

Chauntelle and Russell et al.'s (2000) insights underscore the need to pay attention to the Whole in ways that do not assimilate contrasting sensibilities, but rather seek guidance from these insights with "opened and clasped hands". Her perceptions remind that relationality ought not be conflated with sameness. As Chauntelle emphasizes, the insistence on sameness prompted experiences of dissonance and imbalance. Chauntelle's words beckon us to address how focusing on "cultural difference" and its currency in curricular and pedagogical approaches, interferes with our ability to conceive and imagine otherwise and learn from knowledge systems other than our own (Brayboy & Maughan, 2009, p. 18). Proceeding as we always have can undermine transformative potential.

The importance of learning from the openness that wisdom relationality invites is evidenced in Chauntelle's expression of relief when she heard of the possibilities to "learn to integrate and balance these two ideologies". This holistic inspired insight provided her with a "peace of mind" as she did not see herself as alone. Her emotional relief in response to Dwayne Donald's teachings evidences a relief in her body from carrying the burdens of having to work out

these tensionalities in ways that are palatable to others. These insights may encourage us to heal the parts of ourselves that we might not realize invite argumentative responses to connectivity that separate differences and similarities. These understandings also highlight the necessity of humility as anchoring our shared learning. In this regard, education is about "cultivating self-knowledge" and "a way of life" (Lertzman, 2002, p.3). If we see and experience how each part of ourselves informs how we think and act, we can perhaps build anew in ways that honour all of our relations.

**Chapter Eight:**
**III**

*One Task*
*There is one thing in the world that you must never forget. You may forget everything else except that one thing, without any cause for worry. However, if you remember and take care of everything else but forget that one thing, you will have accomplished nothing. It is as though a king were to send you to a village on a specific mission. You go and perform a hundred other tasks, but if you neglect to take care of the task for which you were sent, it is as though you did absolutely nothing. The human being has come into the world for a particular purpose. If he does not accomplish that purpose, he will have done nothing at all. We offered the trust to the heavens, and the earth, and the mountains: and they refused to undertake it, and were afraid of it, but the human being undertook it- but, surely, he has been unjust to himself, and foolish (31:72)*

*(Fihi ma Fihi: Discourse 4)*

*(Jalaluddin Rumi, in Kabir and Camille Helminski's (2012) "The Rumi Daybook", p.24)*

*Truth Within Us*

*I was a fair orchard,*
*Full of trees and fruit*
*And vines and greenery. A Sufi there*
*sat with eyes closed, his head upon his knee,*
*Sunk deep in meditation mystical.*

*"Why," asked another, "do you not behold*
*These signs of God the Merciful displayed*
*Around you, which He bids us contemplate?"*
*The signs, "he answered," I behold within,*
*Without is nothing but symbols of the Signs"*
*What is beauty in the world? The image,*
*Like quivering laughs reflected in a stream,*
*Of that eternal orchard which abides*
*Unwithered in the hearts of the Perfect Men*

*(Jalaluddin Rumi, in Dunn et al.'s (2010) "The Illustrated Rumi", p. 2)*

I think difference does create more difference. But I think it's done in a way in order for people to find where they belong. The right to belong and feel accepted is a feeling sought after by all life-long but is never far away.

I think that in some way we are connected. If we weren't we would be annihilated already. Like we wouldn't be here if we weren't connected by nature in some ways.

Water makes up everyone's body. And like people say the water that people bathed in the 1700s is the water that we could be drinking today. It just shows that everything is truly a cycle and is connected. I don't think that our differences are a hindrance to that at all. I think that we should celebrate the differences and similarities because everything is about balance in that regard.

We are not perfect beings. We are filled with error and faults and mistakes and that's how we learn and if we were surrounded by a world that is perfect and looked identical and the same and every tree grew at the same place what would we learn from? We would destroy ourselves. The land is different in every place.

**How does kinship guide deepened understandings of connectivity?**

As I revisit Rumi's breathtaking poem "One Task", I am reminded of Rose's generative insights regarding her experiences in Aboriginal Studies 30 as a bundle carrier. Upon receiving a bundle[86] form Jodi Stonehouse[87], Rose shared:

> It is such an honor [to receive a bundle]. It is the greatest gift that an Aboriginal person can give. It is an experience that no one can take from you. You have it for life. I feel so proud that she picked me. I cried when Jodi gave it me. I can't explain why it means so much to me. It makes me more compassionate. It's not just about me. It's a European perspective, a Spanish perspective, an Aboriginal perspective. I see it as all perspectives going together. When I experience like this it makes me more honest with myself. It is different from just reading about it (R. Salvador, Personal Communication, November, 2014).

Rose's compelling insights convoked me to reconsider the positioning of perspectival approaches to difference and the extent to which they can promote unity. My ability to engage with Rose's words at the time was rather limited because I was in the process of beginning to reconnect with myself and sacred ecological insights. As mentioned at the outset of this dissertation, I had forgotten my connection to kinship and its life-giving potential. I had forsaken these teachings

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[86] The Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental health(n.d.) explains that bundles play an integral role in the health and well-being for many Indigenous peoples. Physical bundles refer to a collection of sacred items including eagle feathers and medicines that are important to share with others. Bundles are often carried by Indigenous peoples attending ceremony. Particular Indigenous cultures hold the belief that:

> When a child is born they come into the world with a spiritual bundle which holds all of the gifts the Creator gave to them. Both physical and spiritual bundles serve the purpose of helping a person to engage with creation in a healthy and balanced way (The Ontario Centre for Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health, n.d. para. 1).

[87] Jodi Stonehouse co-produces an Indigenous radio program called Acimowin on CJSR. She also co-owns Miyo-Pimatisiwin Productions which is an Indigenous film company. Stonehouse has been a frequent guest speaker in Aboriginal Studies 30.

because I did not feel I could honour them if I wanted to 'become somebody' and strategically position myself in the Canadian labour market situation. I understand more clearly today that Rose also helped me to re-awaken within myself what had become dormant in my memory and being. I do not believe it will ever be fully possible for me to truly understand or capture the essence of Rose's insights in their entirety. Layer by layer, I can interpret Rose's words in ways that are informed by my inner state and living in a manner that honours my relations. I am not claiming that I have the answers nor am I suggesting that I have these matters figured out. I, however, can interpret Rose's words with clearer sight and a mind and heart that is opening up. Her words speak to the gift of the "One Task" as a trustworthy teacher that can inspire openness to others and a deepened sense of connectivity. Rose's words and their enmeshment with sacred ecological insights also convey how holistic insights offer generative understandings of difference.

Rumi shares "[t]there is one thing in the world that you must never forget. You may forget everything else except that one thing, without any cause for worry. However, if you remember and take care of everything else but forget that one thing, you will have accomplished nothing". Drawing upon Rose's words and learning from Cree philosophies, I interpret Rumi's words as directly expounding the Qur'anic teaching of *Ashraf al-Makhluqat.* As previously mentioned, *Ashraf al-Makhluqat* is understood as a sacred gift from Allah that entrusts human beings with the lofty responsibility of ensuring that Creation remains protected, well taken care of and most importantly ensures balance and harmony for all life forms. This responsibility is imbued in humility and meaning making that can be espoused through learning from the *ayat* (signs) embedded in our relations; these signs inspire communication amongst our relations that renew life and actively promote and sustain connectivity. Shainool Jiwa (n.d) expresses this thought and shares that "one of the key manifestations of God's *rahma* (mercy) is the communication with

humanity. Divine communication occurs through the numerous *ayat* (signs) in creation and through the prophets (para. 10). This *rahma* (mercy) through the appearance of difference as it arises from *ayat* (signs) is a deep source of guidance but also a task that requires careful attention. Jiwa (n.d.) further underscores that from Qur'anic sensibilities, human beings are gifted as the most Noble of Creation because they are appointed as Allah's *Khalifat* or vicegerents on earth. This designation positions human beings as the "care-taker[s] of Creation and [as] accountable for its well-being to their Creator, who is the sustainer of the worlds" (Jiwa, n.d., para. 9). Rumi subsequently refers to this Qur'anic cosmological teaching as the "One Task" that ought not be forgotten. Rumi's emphasis that the "human being has come into the world for a particular purpose. If he does not accomplish that purpose, he will have done nothing at all" is highlighting how striving towards deeper connectivity is lost if cosmological guidance is ignored in the face of other tasks. Rumi's referencing of the Qur'anic *ayat* that "We offered the trust to the heavens, and the earth, and the mountains: and they refuse to undertake it, and were afraid of it, but the human being undertook it, but surely, he has been unjust to himself, and foolish" addresses the gifting of the *Khalifat* (vicegerents*)*. Rumi elucidates Qur'anic teachings that our more than human relatives were initially gifted with the responsibility of *Khalifat* but did not accept this task in fears of being unable to uphold this promise. Rumi cautions that while human beings accepted the *Khalifat* they have not honoured this position in the ways that are required to support such a lofty responsibility. Thus, Rumi emboldens our human tendency to forget that our life and living is in fact beholden to other entities. He compels us to reflect upon the potential results for forgetting this "One Task".

Rumi's poem "Truth Within Us" similarly evokes remembering the Divine granting of difference as gifted through *ayat* (signs). Rumi narrates this poem via an exchange between a Sufi and another individual. Trees and fruit sit before the Sufi who is sitting in deep meditation. An

individual asks the Sufi "why do you not behold these signs of God the merciful displayed around you, which He bids us contemplate". The Sufi answers that he carries these *ayat* within. I interpret this exchange as calling for the importance of inner interpretation, which is a key theme in Rumi's poetry and the *wahkohtowin* teaching that what surrounds us is inside of us. Rumi is suggesting that meaning is lost when the different sources of guidance are merely treated as symbols. Rumi again invites the pedagogical importance of inner dwelling and embodiment. He speaks to another way of living that is occluded by liberal philosophies' false universalism and managerial tendencies.

Alissa, Rose, Levi and Chauntelle's experiences of deeper expressions and enactments of connectivity are informed by the holistic underpinnings of Aboriginal Studies 30 in general, participation in a River Valley walk during the course and partaking in a River Valley walk for this research study under the guidance of Dr. Dwayne Donald. Alissa attends to her initial presumptions that difference begets more difference but also is a deep source of belonging. Rose frontloads nature as a source of connection that ensures the continuity of life. Levi specifically addresses how water is often taken for granted as a sacred gift and teaches us about connectivity in the midst of difference. Chauntelle expresses how sacred ecological insights inform how she understands errors and faults as profound instructors on life and living.

Alissa initially states that "difference does create more difference". She, however proceeds to share that the pervasiveness of difference is needed to help "people to find where they belong". Her words indicate that the integrity of all beings ought to be honoured as they work towards acceptance and belonging in their own ways. Of noteworthy attention in Alissa's ponderings is her emphasis that the work of belonging and acceptance is "lifelong". Matters of living and beingness cannot be resolved in fleeting moments. Perhaps the sacred ecological ethics she was enmeshed in

through her Aboriginal Studies experiences and while partaking in the River Valley walks inspired this conception of time as integral to matters of belonging and connection.

Rose speaks to connection in another way through emphasizing that without nature we might very likely be annihilated already. She shares "we wouldn't be here if we weren't connected to nature in some ways. Her insights open up Rumi's emphasis on paying attention to the "One Task". Her words also emphasize that connecting with our kinship relational networks in the places we reside teaches us what we need to live well (Donald, 2016). Rose's words speak to a holistic understanding of connectivity that makes evident the pedagogical nature of sacred ecological philosophies.

Levi also draws upon holistic-guided sacred ecological insights which inform his interpretations of connectivity. He reflects on the teaching that all bodies are made of water, people bathe in water and also drink water. His learnings from the sacred gift of water help him to articulate an understanding of connectivity that holds our relations together. Levi's understandings of "water" as a gift can be understood as an *ayah* or sign regarding that which connects us all and ensure the continuity of life. Levi further explains that the different ways in which water supports life and living conveys the understandings that "everything is truly a life cycle". Drawing upon inspiration from these holistic-guided sacred ecological insights, Levi understands the simultaneous presence of similarities and differences as another opportunity to instill balance. His words indicate a contemplation of *ayat* in an inner sense which Rumi continuously advocates for. It is Levi's kinship with other life-giving entities that invites inner reflection and a deepened sense of connectivity.

Chauntelle's conceptions of connectivity and generativity are inspired by holistic -guided sacred ecological insights. She shares the dangers that would arise "if we were surrounded by a

world that is perfect and looked identical and the same". Chauntelle ponders if "every tree grew at the same place what would we learn from?" She indicates that the presence of sameness would inevitably lead to the destruction of ourselves. Chauntelle's words also display thematic unity with Rumi's poetry because she is deeply dwelling in the *ayat* (signs) of meaning making that grant life. Her dwelling in these insights and alongside her kinship relational network reminds her that "the land is different in every place" and that there is a deeper reason for this. Chauntelle's holistic readings of connectivity, also reposition and help us to explore the differences that arise through error and faults which have transformative potential that supports openness.

Alissa, Rose, Levi and Chauntelle's perceptions uphold the importance of inner-dwelling as a source of guidance and meaning making in their lives. Inner-dwelling, according to their experiences, is inspired by connecting with kinship or relational networks that also honour connections to our more than human relatives. Their insights share thematic unity with Rumi's emphasis of upholding the "One Task" and holding signs within oneself to generate deeper meaning that reduces the separation between all life forms. These cosmological and ontological notions are unfortunately overlooked under the prescriptive discourse of diversity rhetoric on curricular and educational landscapes, as guided by liberal ideologies. Maxine Greene (1993) voices how the prescriptive nature of diversity orientations impose "a single standard of humanness" (p. 212). As a way to recover what is lost from the life-taking capacity of such impositions, Greene advocates for honouring human beings "in terms of open possibility" (p. 213). Greene locates art as a source of awakening that can "guide other possibilities of existing, of being human, of relating to others, of being other" (p. 214) that beg centrality in curriculum and pedagogy. Drawing upon Greene's insights on difference and diversity, and as evidenced in this

métissage, I suggest that connecting with our kinship relations can also inspire other possibilities of living and relating that do not begrudge difference.

Exploring these wonderings necessitates revisiting "our focus on education as an epistemological rather than an ontological question" (den Heyer, 2018, p 10). Kent den Heyer ponders the ways in which our educational focus can shift from an epistemological focus to who we are as humans ontologically speaking (p. 10). He further shares:

> Is there a human nature, for example? What capacities are all humans potentially capable of expressing? What is our relationship to the nonhuman world, from the menstrual moon to innumerable microbes in our guts? Ontologically, what is and therefore should be our relationship to the earth- the very humus of our being? What of our schooled disciplines can help us all address such ontological questions? (p. 10).

Re-examining Alissa's words can offer a starting place to dwell in den Heyer's questions. While Alissa's articulations do not immediately position difference as restorative in relationship to being, she later shares that difference is needed to attend to each being in their fullness as a way to promote more authentic expressions of coming into being. Belonging in this sense is not situated as an epistemological concern or matter to be resolved. Alissa's experiences with reconnecting, through holistic-guided sacred ecological principles, begin to open up how sacred ecological principles can problematize notions of belonging and citizenship (Donald, 2009b). There is an openness in the quality of Alissa's words that are perhaps indicative of understandings that arise from relating with our kinship networks that can bring us back to the origins of who we are and what encourages connectivity and makes life possible. These notions speak to conceptions of educating for identity that is informed by sacred ecological insights. Morris (2002) shares that:

> Identities are constructed around reflections and relations; identities are invented and imagined around others and the world. Ecological consciousness co-constructs identities with others (human and non-human). In fact, the animals and plants are not absolutely exterior to us, but are part of us (p. 583).

Riffing off of Alissa's insights and Moriss's curricular and pedagogical framing of ecological consciousness articulates another way to connect through difference as guiding a relational ethic that informs identity creation and belonging that is dependent on all life forms

Rose's words communicate an ethic of being that is guided by our kinship relational networks. Her words speak to the importance of recovering from our individual and collective "ecological amnesia" (D. Donald, Personal Communication, November, 2014) on curricular and pedagogical landscapes. Rose's assertation that "We would be annihilated already" if "[we] weren't connected by nature in some ways" indicates remembering ecological consciousness. Rose's words convey how an ecological paradigm can inform the recognition of our integration in the world (Morris, 2002, p. 571). Her experiences, within a holistic-guided pedagogical context in which sacred ecological teachings were shared emphasizes that humans and all life forms are wired for relationships that promote the nourishment of ourselves and others (Morris, 2002, p. 583). It is the knowledge and meaning that flows from other life forms which supports nourishment and the continuity of life that Rose is speaking to. Knowledge in this sense resembles something contrary to the curricular and pedagogical framing of epistemology. Holistic insights, as espoused by kinship teachings, convey that knowledge is alive and moving. Kimmerer (2013) articulates how kinship with human beings and our more than human relatives is a source of meaning making that sustains life. She emphasizes that for her people the connection to the land and meaning of the land could not be surrendered (p. 17). Kimmerer reflects:

> But to our people, [the land] was everything: identity, the connection to our ancestors, the home of our nonhuman kinfolk, our pharmacy, our library, the source of all that sustained us. Our lands were where our responsibility to the world was enacted, sacred ground. It belonged to itself; it was a gift, not a commodity, so it could never be bought or sold. These are the meanings people took with them… (p. 17).

Pondering Rose and Kimmerer's experiences of coming alongside our kinship relational networks and the meaning that flows from them, thus beckons us to learn from and communicate with our relations. This guides an ethic of re-awakening to the sacredness of all of our relations and brings forth a way to honour the "One Task" that can deepen connectivity. Thinking with den Heyer (2018), Donald (2009b), Greene (1993), Kimmerer (2013) and Moriss (2002) alongside this métissage inspires how reconnecting with our kinship relational networks might guide a deepened understanding of self and connectivity. The point to address here is the ways in which life-giving energy and deepened expressions of connectivity for many individuals have been removed from curricular and pedagogical contexts. I am not suggesting that kinship is the answer to reducing the space that epistemologically manifests while attending to difference. I am instead opening up what we can perhaps learn from kinship in this regard.

Levi, from his own experiences of reconnecting with his kinship relationships, does not view difference as a source of suspicion or loathing. Learning from and thinking with teachings about the sacred gift of water illuminates an openness to difference. It appears as though Levi was reminded of his enmeshment with his relations. The interplay between the recovery of these insights within oneself and how these inner knowledges can inform more ethical relationships to emerge can perhaps welcome a curriculum of restoration and renewal. Because of relating with

kinship insights, Levi does not regard difference as interfering with connectivity but suggests that balance arises when we learn to respect and learn from similarities and differences. Levi's pedagogical insights do not position human beings as the arbiters of knowledge and knowing, nor do they frontload an individual ethic as the only way to experience belonging and connectivity. Sylvia McAdam (2015) elucidates the Cree kinship ethic of *wahkohtowin* as a powerful reminder of what is forgotten in anthropogenic positionings of curriculum and pedagogy. She shares:

> Long ago after the human beings were created, they were allowed to walk with the animals and talked amongst each other like relatives. Even the trees, plants, all manner of life was able to communicate with each other. This was the beginning of understanding *wahkohtowin* and the laws surrounding it… (47).

McAdam's (2015) words along with Levi's experiences also open up how kinship, through listening to the different truths that manifest from these relationships, can teach us how to listen to each other more deeply and love one other on pedagogical sites. Again, these holistic insights juxtapose impositions of singular ways of living and managerial approaches to attending to difference.

Chauntelle's experiences with holistic-guided sacred ecological insights also inform deepened expressions of connectivity. Her proclamation that we would not learn anything if the world was perfect and looked identical offers a transformative understanding of difference. Her emphasis of sameness as a potential source of destruction of self and the land circles back to an earlier assertion in this dissertation that sameness does not equate relationality. Her words speak to the assimilative trap of relational ethics on curricular and pedagogical landscapes that are informed by the false universalism of liberalism. Chauntelle's experiences help us to glance forward and ponder the pervasiveness of the ethic of sameness that claims to speak for all while

saying very little in reality and forsaking the meaning that we are engulfed in. Her words also bring us back to Rumi's "One Task" as a way to juxtapose  a curriculum of common sense that continues to abandon the integrity of ontological and cosmological questions on pedagogical landscapes.

Former Aboriginal Studies 30 students' reflections on their connections to holism, through healing, balance and kinship, as inspired by sacred ecology, opens up levels of depth that quite often invite feelings of discomfort on seemingly secular educational landscapes. This interpretative insight reveals that the erasure of holism from curricular and pedagogical contexts requires reconsideration (Patrick et al., 2017; Shahjahan, 2005). The discourse of secularism undeniably "flows through how we have been historically trained to think about thinking" (Shahjahan, 2005, p. 686). Unfortunately, the imposition of the discourse of secularism as a guiding logic in curricular and pedagogical contexts does not affirm the ways of knowing and being of many other people. Within forms of secular discourse there is a commitment to notions of neutrality as the way to promote equality for all. Ironically, though, such a commitment subsumes difference. The imposition of sameness in this regard removes youth, educators and communities of representation from their relations and inner beings as sources of guidance and meaning making. This is concerning because other facets of being that can encourage personal and collective transformation and very different insights are perpetually removed. Distance from this transformative potential is of concern for all individuals and is not limited to those who prescribe to holistic philosophies because we are all connected by our shared sacred ecological roots (Morris, 2002). The continued management of holism is yet another manifestation of the false universalism of liberalism which continues a curriculum of common-sense. These realities

clearly conflict with established policies and standards that claim fidelity to diversity and inclusion. What results from the continued removal of holism on educational landscapes?

The interplay between Rumi and student participants' words open up a craving for wellness, grounding and pathway that promotes lasting connectivity. As mentioned, connecting with the holism that undergirds Aboriginal Studies 30 guided students to reconnect with their inner selves which was essential to promoting balance in their own lives. The insight to pay attention to here is that "we cannot understand the external world if we do not understand ourselves" (Rendon, 2000, p. 9). The absence of ways to cultivate one's inner self is expressed further through Paramhansa Yogananda's insights. Paramhansa Yogananda (n.d.) shares:

> Millions of people never analyze themselves. Mentally they are mechanical products of the factory of their environment, preoccupied with breakfast, lunch, and dinner, working and sleeping, going here and there to be entertained. They don't know what or why they are seeking, nor why they never realize complete happiness and lasting satisfaction. By evading self-analysis, people go on being robots, conditioned by their environment. True self-analysis is the greatest art of progress (Paramhansa Yogananda, The Minds Journal, Para.1).

Drawing upon Yoganada's words, the absence of self-analysis and removal from one's inner knowledges, ensures that youth remain beholden to values of individualism that instill the idea that we are isolated beings. The promotion of a particular form of survival that is promised through 'becoming somebody' and acquiring 'material recognition' can lead to imbalance that is difficult to recover from. Student participants' experiences indicate that a loss of self is perpetuated by forgetting our enmeshment with our kinship relational networks and subsequently the "One Task" that Rumi opens up. This loss of self and our relations also promotes the concealment of deeper

meaning that can guide individual and collective transformation as evidenced by student participants' experiences of healing. Enhancing the "curriculum as planned" (Aoki, 1991) through adherence to epistemological notions of difference that are assimilated by anthroprocentric conceptions of sameness and unity interferes with the potential for students to connect with their embodied knowledges. This distance from kinship and embodied knowledge ensures that learnings that are meant to promote greater openness to others remain dormant in life and living. Student participants' experiences reveal that holism enlivens memory and brings to life what is disseminated in curricular and pedagogical contexts in ways that the "curriculum as planned" (Aoki, 1991) cannot. Their connections to holistic-guided sacred ecological insights invited a recovery of memory that offered guidance on how to become better human beings. This is why Aboriginal Studies 30 was life-changing for Alissa, Rose, Levi and Chauntelle. The knowledge they acquired from reconnecting with themselves through holistic insights was life changing because it became a part of their embodiment. Student participants were not isolated from their learnings but rather became enmeshed in difference with their whole bodies. Alissa, Rose, Levi and Chauntelle remembered their enmeshment which resulted in a return to inner dwelling and the cultivation of an awareness that was transformative and life giving. Remembering that we are not "isolated creatures with isolated thoughts" (Morris, 2002, p. 581) through reconnecting with our shared ecological roots, as guided by holism, offers ways in which balance can be restored on curricular and pedagogical contexts. Survival ought not be limited to the confines of individualism and materialism but can also be understood and enacted in ways that promote recovery from our shared "ecological amnesia" and safeguards all of our relations. This is the ethic of holism and wisdom relationality.

# Chapter Nine:
# Juxtapositions: the wisdoms that flow from Aboriginal Studies 30 and the philosophical Underpinnings of Alberta Education's Curricular Design

## Is this it? My Stories of Curriculum and Pedagogy

Unlike former Aboriginal Studies 30 students' experiences, connecting with myself, sacred ecology and other facets of life were excluded from curricular and pedagogical approaches on my elementary and secondary school landscapes. These schools' interpretation of "what education is for"(D. Smith, Personal Communication, March, 2014) and overreliance on the "curriculum as planned" (Aoki, 1991) did not honour the flux of life and living. The proceeding brief narratives extrapolate my experiences prior to attending university.

*"Hard work yields a profit".* These are the words of my former Junior High's motto. As I write these words, I am reminded of my golden rod, navy blue and white junior high school uniform, the Avon- lady sounding bell that signaled the end of each class, and the school's 'back to basics' approach to K-12 education. I grudgingly recall the practice of 'recitations' during my English class. The purpose of memorizing poetry and being graded on our ability to recite the poem in its entirety seemed absurd to me. I wondered what the purpose was of memorizing poetry without exploring its meaning. I vividly recall my French teacher labelling me as "loquacious" because I chose to help my friend with his French homework during class time. I apparently had disrupted the classroom's perfect order and stability through my conduct. I also recall with much disdain, the school's emphasis that 'optional' courses ought to remain limited to French and Physical Education. Learning from other ways were regarded as conflicting with the lofty material rewards that a solely 'academic' curricula could and would provide. By the end of my education at my Junior High School, I had learned two things: rote memorization was the only way in which

I could attain outstanding grades which I needed if I wanted ‘to become someone’ and that schools were the brokers of one’s future material prosperity. *Was this it?*

As these experiences flow through my being, I find myself traveling backwards to my elementary school. The smell of crayons and pencil shavings are all too familiar. I can see myself daydreaming in my small desk in my grade one classroom. The phonics workbook was not at all appealing to me. I thought being a ‘big kid’ was supposed to be exciting? When will we get to do things, explore and create? I desperately wanted to run with the dandelions in the field outside. By the end of my elementary school education I had learned that creativity was incommensurable with growing up. *Was this it?*

Flashing forward. I am utterly bored of school. It is midway through grade 11 and I am counting down until graduation. My trajectory into high school is truly a means to an end. What have I learned about myself? What feeds the soul? I found myself meandering from class to class, visiting one ‘subject’ after another and not feeling the connections between them. I recall feeling increasingly frustrated with the Social Studies curriculum in particular. I was unable to fathom how Muslims were once again storied as those ‘evil terrorizing heathens’. I feared the rising glances of distrust towards me when a video of Muslim men shouting *Allahu Akhbar* and firing weapons was shared in our Social 20 class. When will it end? When will there be depth and understanding? By the end of high school, I had learned that this supposed formal education journey was about acquiring the skills of learning how to be recognized as having worth in an undeniably material landscape. *Was this it?*

The narratives shared above voice how curricular foundations encourage a particular kind of schooling experience which advocates that “becoming somebody” is directly dependent on the removal of deeper expressions and understandings of complexity, creativity and connectivity, as a

way to promote 'material recognition' and progress. Frontloading the philosophical underpinnings of Homo Oeconomicus (Economic Human), are not the only values present on schooling landscapes. Faber, Peterson and Schiller (1992) explain that Homo Oeconomicus is regarded as an evolutionary stage of human development that centres human beings as motivated by the individual pursuit of material wealth based on rational, opportunistic, and calculating propensities (as cited in Donald, 2009, p. 225). These sentiments continue to receive the greatest currency through the redesign of current curricula, a focus to solely prepare youth to follow a fully liberal version of responsible citizenship and enter the labour market while attributing the sole purpose of diversity as encouraging Canada's presence as a leading global economic contributor. This is the reality that we find ourselves increasingly interwebbed with. While neo-liberal conceptions of education (Apple, 2004; Giroux, 2002) and what schooling is for are deeply entrenched in current curricular conceptions and are also informing the redesign of Alberta curricula, there are ways in which we can work alongside these realities with hope. Working alongside does not suggest that we share the goal in mind to extinguish another reality. Rather, working in this way requires a faithfulness to deeply feeling within ourselves that we are not limited to this reality and that being bound in singular ways exacerbates the challenges we continue to face with regards to addressing difference.

Former Aboriginal Studies 30 students' learnings from holistic-guided sacred ecological insights reveal that we can in fact connect in deeper ways that inspire sustainable balance. As previously addressed, remembering and living in ways that honour our shared ecological roots inspires a return to embodiment and a renewed commitment to safeguarding the life of all of our relations. Living with balance can then be understood as forgoing the assumption that our realities and attempts to create meaning in our lives are self-enclosed. I wonder about the possibility to

learn from these insights on educational landscapes and what our shared relationships to healing, balance and survival might look like if we have the courage to proceed and pedagogically consider these holistic insights.

In order to better understand the implications of these holistic conceptions, it is important to revisit the philosophical underpinnings that guide how inclusion, identity, belonging and diversity are attended to and represented in Alberta's provincial curricula. Alberta Education (2018) shares that "[i]nclusion is a way of thinking and acting that demonstrates universal acceptance and promotes a sense of belonging for all learners" (para.1, retrieved from https://education.alberta.ca/inclusive-education/what-is-inclusion/). Their conceptualizations of inclusion attend to making learning opportunities accessible for all, ensuring that learners with special needs are given the care and attention needed and that equal opportunities are accessible for all learners (Alberta Education, 2018, para. 3). These formulations also specifically address "embracing diversity" as a cornerstone for inclusive frameworks in Alberta schools. This commitment to "diversity" is voiced through the Ministerial Order on Student Learning that school authorities must ensure that :

> All children and students (Kindergarten to Grade 12) regardless of race, religious belief, colour, gender, gender identity, gender expression, physical disability, mental disability, family status or sexual orientation, or any other factor (s), have access to meaningful and relevant learning experiences that include appropriate instructional supports" (para.1, retrieved from https://education.alberta.ca/inclusive-education/policy/everyone/inclusive-education-policy/).

The ministerial order on student learning curiously leaves out holism as an expression of diversity. Conceptions of the ideal human being in this context do not address kinship. Such readings of

human-beingness perpetuates liberal notions of life and living. The safeguarding of a fully anthropocentric human being overlooks what grants life and what can thus inspire greater connectivity with self and other. The potential to engage with difference more deeply on curricular and pedagogical landscapes is relegated to diversity discourse that promotes sameness and assimilates difference.

It is also important to examine how Alberta Education's curricular documents approaches the "self" in relationship to identity and belonging. Alberta Education's "Guiding Framework for the Design and Development of Kindergarten to Grade 12 for Provincial Curriculum" highlights belonging and identity as one of the five core student values. Alberta Education (2016) shares that "by exploring identity and developing a sense of self and belonging; by confidently interacting and engaging with others; by embracing opportunities to learn through interaction with others; by pursuing dreams, talents and aspirations; and by recognizing diverse abilities and the importance of cultures and languages as part of a bilingual, multicultural, inclusive and pluralistic society (p. 3) students will have opportunities to experience, learn about diversity and cultivate themselves in the process. As mentioned earlier and evidenced by this excerpt, we see that difference is interpreted via multiculturalism and notions of pluralism. The document proceeds by sharing that:

> As a pluralistic society, Alberta recognizes and celebrates diversity. Pluralism is intended to safeguard and foster understanding and respect for social, cultural, religious and ethnic diversity. Provincial curriculum is intended to reflect the values of society and prepare students to be contributing citizens of our pluralistic and increasingly diverse society (Alberta Education, 2016, p. 8).

While this understanding of pluralism attends to facets of difference, its framework is limited to social justice orientations that do not speak to expressions of identity and belonging beyond the

parameters of experiences of marginalization and discrimination (Alberta Education, 2016, p.8). Social justice orientations[88], while well intentioned, may give voice to holism, but only do so in the hopes that individuals that embody such sensibilities can also experience the "full benefits of participation in society" (Alberta Education, 2016, p. 8). The ethic here, as reflected in social justice orientations, is that we need to ensure that manifestations of difference ought to be included so as to deter further exclusions on the basis of systemic discrimination. Unfortunately, these orientations do not address the heart of what connects many individuals to holism, nor do they address what we can learn from these traditions. Again, a generative ethic that reflects "learning from" and moves away from objectified insertions of difference is overlooked in such theorizing. These sensibilities are still "incorporated" and "infused" in an effort to effectively manage difference (Donald, 2013, para. 3). The objectivity inherent in infused forms of difference overrides the complexity of the differences in question, such as holistic insights and ensures that we remain at a distance from these learnings. This approach is regarded as a common sense curricular practice because the liberal ideologies guiding the infusing of difference are both normalized and invisibilized (Donald, 2019). As previously articulated, a curriculum of common sense relies on "normative worldviews" (Eisner, 1992) which contends that access to successful futures is dependent on social, economic and political power. The pervasiveness of these ideologies in the language of curricular documents, policies and the "curriculum as planned" (Aoki, 1991) makes it difficult to recognize the extent which liberal cultural assumptions regulate curricular priorities. The normalization of liberal cultural assumptions as curricular priorities

[88] The overreliance on social justice orientations as the sole curricular and pedagogical orientation to articulate difference will be discussed further in the "Weaving it all Together: The Curricular and Pedagogical Significance of Wisdom-Guided Sacred Ecological Expressions of Difference" section of this dissertation

subsequently closes off other ways to proceed. The key idea to address in this discussion is that cultural assumptions are not the problem per se. Rather, what is concerning is the significance of the cultural assumptions and what they guide individuals to say and do. For these reasons the insights that many might otherwise draw upon as sources of guidance in their daily lives that inspire renewal and connectivity are removed. The utility of the individual is then limited to acquiring an economic presence.

Alberta Education's Social Studies POS (2005) also highlights the importance of the "development of self" (p. 1). The POS asserts that "Social Studies helps students to develop their sense of self and community, encouraging them to affirm their place as citizens in an inclusive, democratic society" (p.1). Developing a sense of self is dependent on the extent to which one partakes in "responsible citizenship at the local, community, provincial, national and global level" (Alberta Education, 2005, p. 1). In other words, the Canadian nation-state is the sole broker of belonging and acceptance in the context of Alberta Education and its mandates. The problem of promoting belonging and unity according to nation and nationality is that these approaches block opportunities for ethical relationality to arise to its fullness as a guiding ethic for reimagining ourselves on kinship terms. It is not implausible to suggest that these limited conceptions of identity, belonging and acceptance distance individuals from connecting with themselves more deeply.

Hindering deeper expressions and experiences of connectivity, through theoretical frameworks that manage difference, reduce complexity and do not attend to embodied understandings has substantial implications for the ways in which multiple perspectives are meant to inform improved relationship building with other communities (Alberta Education, 2016, p. 10). Alberta Education (2016) states:

> Increasing inter-and cross-cultural understanding and initiating shifts in thinking and in attitudes will build trust to improve relationships among all Albertans. The inclusion of First Nations, Métis and Inuit historical and contemporary experiences and contributions, residential schools and their legacy, and treaties will help rectify social injustices and support better relationships. First Nations, Métis and Inuit songs, stories, histories, languages, arts, sciences, and contributions to the rich history of Alberta need to be part of every Alberta students' education. First Nations, Métis and Inuit experiences and perspectives are included and reflected throughout Kindergarten to Grade 12 provincial curriculum; every student in the province, not only First Nations, Métis and Inuit students will learn about the diverse Indigenous peoples of this land and how First Nations, Métis and Inuit contribute to the vibrancy and fabric of Alberta and Canadian society. (p.1)

The commitments articulated above indicate that "learning" about Indigenous peoples' histories and contributions to Albertan and Canadian society will help to rectify past mistakes and improve the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. It is of course important to have a historical understanding of the ways in which past and present events have created our reality today with regards to Canada's historical relationship with Indigenous Peoples. Again, my concern is that the approach to rebuilding these relationships in sincere, meaningful and lasting ways that are dependent on perspectival approaches alone are ill-equipped to bring about healing and balance and are unable to renew relationships on more ethically relational terms. Alberta Education shares that commitments to including Indigenous perspectives also within the scope of current curriculum redesign efforts is meant to address the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action (Alberta Education, 2016; Alberta Education; 2018). I wonder about the extent to which they truly reflect reconciliation if

the frameworks that are used to interpret and represent Indigenous histories and perspectives do not honour holism and sacred ecological wisdom teachings. This is deeply concerning as we collectively engage in reconciliation and efforts to address this in curricular discourse and our classrooms. In response to these concerns, I humbly ask, "to what extent are we enacting reconciliation if holism is left out?[89]" This is not to say that the curricular representations of Indigenous worldviews are currently absent. The conundrum here is that these sensibilities are filtered through common-sense liberal logics. These filtered interpretations undermine the integrity of wisdoms that guide the lives of many individuals and their relationships with other life forms.

[89] I will return to this question in a subsequent section entitled Weaving it all Together: The Curricular and Pedagogical Significance of Holistic-Guided Sacred Ecological Expressions of Difference"

**Chapter Ten:**
**Métissage Process and Reflections**

As previously alluded to, métissage was selected as the guiding ethic and research sensibility that was most appropriate to honour the holistic nature of my research inquiry. I experienced much affinity for the ways in which métissage as a collective practice and the specific approaches of Indigenous métissage seek to "lift" the barriers that impede the cultivation of more ethical relationships. The distinction between métissage and Indigenous métissage is purposeful. Indigenous métissage honours métissage's undergirding ethics of commitments to textual representation, highlighting juxtaposition, giving voice to lived experiences, memories, stories and various place- based knowledge systems. The central commitment here is to explore ways in which we can re-imagine relationships with each other that promote openness. Indigenous métissage draws upon sacred ecological insights that inform enactments of ethical relationality and draws upon what artefacts can teach us in relation to the places they are from and the wisdoms that flow from them (Donald, 2011). Métissage and Indigenous métissage's commitment to opening up the undercurrents that guide the enactment of ethical relationality in connection to re-imagining our relationships with people and other life forms, generative approaches to similarities and differences and its commitments to drawing upon sources of guidance that are often not regarded as "knowledge" on many institutional landscapes, spoke to me in deeply embodied ways. I have spent much of my life thinking about how the depth that arises from holism can be honoured meaningfully on pedagogical sites. This interest commenced towards the end of Junior High when I started to pay closer attention to the dynamics at play surrounding cultural assumptions in connection to the ways in which teachers, peers and friends perceived me. As mentioned earlier, many critical incidents in my life and their manifestation on the basis of superficial readings of Islam and Muslims that were completely removed from the traditions inherent in Islam beckoned

me to contemplate these tensionalities throughout my high school experiences and the completion of my university degrees. I had not realized the extent to which I had been carrying these wonderings until the recent discovery of a research paper I wrote during the final years of my BEd degree. This paper was situated within a Religious Studies course dedicated to learning from Jesus as a historical and spiritual figure. The final paper I wrote spoke to how learning from the esoteric teachings of Jesus, Prophet Muhammad and Guru Nanak as three specific examples could bring forth greater unity amongst people. In hindsight, I realize I was searching for ways in which people could get along better with each other and also view holistic insights as sources of guidance rather than the fear and disdain that they had become more increasingly associated with. Again, my early commitments to these ethics were largely guided by my Shi'a Ismaili Muslim faith and the example of my parents learning from other traditions as a source of guidance in their lives. I will forever be grateful to my parents for guiding me in this way since a very young age. I grew up hearing stories and teachings from spiritual figures that were not limited to Islam while attending prayer in *Jamatkhana,* during Saturday religious school and most significantly, from my parents. Learning from other traditions was not an abnormal experience for me. I never once regarded learning from other traditions as making me less of a Muslim nor did I feel I was unethical for drawing upon traditions other than my own as a source of guidance in my life because I understood everything as unfolding from Creator. While I found myself on various institutional landscapes that regarded holism as "invalid" sources of knowledge, I did not abandon these wisdoms and the practices connected to them. Unfortunately, I often silenced the wisdoms within me on schooling landscapes, including the majority of my undergraduate career, because I simply did not feel that it was permissible to express those teachings unless it was within the context of Religious Studies classes (which also were not immune to objectifying holistic teachings). I also felt that it was only

possible to express holistic insights in "academic" ways to make this palatable especially to those who do not draw upon these sensibilities in their own lives and in response to Canada's representation as a predominantly secular country. The process of continuously being made to feel that I had to filter out aspects of my own sensibilities, how I spoke about Islam and Muslims and approaching this via a default historical approach resulted in much complexity being left out. I realized over time that I was doing much harm to myself and others if I continued in this manner and needed to honour the sensibilities that guide me the most in my life. I knew that this would be difficult and emotionally tasking at times. As I started giving myself the permission to more openly connect with my sensibilities in public institutions, including the University of Alberta, I began to notice a stronger connection to my inner self. These experiences encouraged me to locate a research practice that would best attend to these embodied insights and would not seek to manage them in their varied manifestations. It was challenging to locate a research approach that would refrain from objectifying lived experience and give voice to knowledges that are often deemed as unempirical. I was also seeking a framework that would not give voice to one part of my being over another. When I revisited métissage, I found that its philosophical underpinnings extensively honoured what I was seeking to give voice to and uncover.

While métissage's generative ethic is incredibly beautiful, honouring such complexity with grounded clarity, requires much time and patience. I did not fully understand why enacting métissage and creating the métissage itself is guided by deeply ethical conduct until I formally came alongside former Aboriginal Studies 30 students and teachers. As mentioned earlier, the collective nature of this work required locating the time for all participants to meet in shared spaces over many occasions. This was very important for me with regards to honouring my relationships, learning together and directly experiencing moments of tensionality and connectivity. It was

essential for this work to be done face-to-face because we would be collectively drawing upon our experiences with holistic insights. Giving meaning to holistic sensibilities through the expression of words and given the limits of our intellectual capacity to express such depth made it necessary to carry out the work in this manner. It was important for me to pay attention to the emotions and body language that manifested during our shared time together and the potential emergence of inner truths. I did not realize at the time that my inquiry was gradually unfolding as a commitment to uncovering embodied experiences and understandings.

My commitment to recovering embodied experiences and understandings gradually unfolded in response to a confluence of numerous experiences from the past and present. I also found myself thinking about the growing insights and implications for these experiences in my future relationships with others and the work that I have committed myself to doing long-term. The process of creating each métissage text, in their individual stanzas, was both perplexing, anxiety- provoking at times and life-giving. As mentioned earlier, identifying the themes for a métissage requires fully attending to métissage's relational ethic and also collectively selecting themes as they appear through shared time together. My application of métissage in this sense was different in comparison to traditional collective embodiments of the practice because my role as a métissage practitioner in this context was not to draw upon the interweaving and juxtapositioning of texts that were already created and autobiographical in nature. My textual commitment in this sense specifically drew upon excerpts from research conversations with student participants.

It is also important to note that I did not directly share in the same experiences of former Aboriginal Studies 30 students because I was technically not a student of the course. I however, spent two years sharing time with former Aboriginal Studies 30 teachers and students via different

sections of the course in a very committed way[90]. In this regard, I did share certain common experiences with my research participants, including field trips I had attended with former Aboriginal Studies 30 students and teachers and significant in-class learnings that connected to kinship as I later understood. I purposely sought to create shared experiences that would help to connect research participants and I in meaningful ways that would also highlight our tensionalities. The intention here, in a deeper sense, was to help connect us with the wisdoms that flow from our kinship relations and the four directions teachings. This was most specifically addressed by coming together during a session that was guided by Elder Bob Cardinal and Dwayne Donald and during a River Valley Walk under Dwayne Donald's direction.

The four planned activities with former Aboriginal Studies 30 students and additional conversations brought forth many surprises. As previously stated, I did not anticipate connectivity in the ways its expressions unfolded during my time shared with research participants. This invited much anxiety particularly during the initial stages of reviewing transcripts and during conversations I had with student participants following the sharing of transcripts. It is important to note that transcriptions were made available to student participants soon after the completion of each activity and following any follow-up research conversation. This was carried out to ensure that I was adhering to my participants' voices with integrity and also to identify instances in which tensionality might have been missed. I also carried out the same process with teacher participants.

The process of initially creating métissage stanzas that interweaved participant student voices, teacher participant voices and lastly, my own voice, was fraught with unforeseen obstacles. I was rather naïve to assume that the interweaving of texts would involve fewer complications. I

[90] It is important to note that the student participants who agreed to partake in this study were students that I had spent the most time with during my two years coming alongside different sections of Aboriginal Studies 30.

created countless drafts that highlighted different strands of transcripts from participant teachers, students and myself. The piecing together of these drafts was arduous because, while themes for the métissage were collectively selected, the actual crafting of the métissage textual representations became my sole responsibility. This was a departure from the performance of collective métissage where all participants together choose text selections and shape these selections in ways that directly showcase connectivity while purposefully juxtapositioning tensionality through the careful writing and attention to these texts. As noted earlier, I have experience performing this traditional articulation of métissage. Logistics, coupled with student and teacher participants' demanding schedules both professionally and personally did not allow for the co-creation of texts to emerge, that was in line with my previous experiences of enacting métissage and honoured the research approaches to métissage that I had studied in the literature. However, I shared drafts of the emerging texts with research participants in person to ensure that they approved of the ways in which their voices were being connected and juxtaposed and also to attend to anything that I had missed in the process. I continued to experience hardships while juxtaposing the texts in response to the connectivity I had experienced with students. I also felt conflicted with regards to the extent to which I was honouring the depth that was unfolding through insights in relation to interweaving teacher participants' voices and finally, my own. I had wondered if I was even enacting métissage because instances of juxtaposition and tensionality were not as apparent in comparison to métissage presentations at conferences that I had participated in. At this time, I had also found myself in the midst of shifting commitments to this inquiry in response to learnings from student participants. This shift manifested in the ways in which healing became the most significant theme that unfolded during research activities, conversations and follow up conversations with students. Healing and its importance were highlighted in all research conversations. The significance of

attending to one's emotions was particularly addressed with regards to conversations about learning from the history of Indian Residential Schools and how we seek to collectively attend to Truth and Reconciliation. Healing was expressed as being made possible by connecting with oneself and doing the inner work and reconnecting with our kinship relations. I needed to honour these emerging insights and the ways that métissage draws upon the guidance that flows from collaborative expressions as a way to select themes. I could not ignore the pervasiveness of this theme in all of our research conversations. The turn towards healing indicated that the holism that undergirds Aboriginal Studies 30, through sacred ecological expressions, reveal that self-study is important if we seek to move forward together in meaningful ways. Reconnecting with the land as our relative encouraged this process and reminded students of the importance to work through their anger and pain. Students later juxtaposed these learnings in connections to "formal curricula" as a profound source of guidance for them in taking up the difficult and life-long task of identity work, belonging and connectivity. These growing wonders finally compelled me to remove teacher participant voices and my own voice to more carefully and respectfully attend to student participant voices.

As the embodied nature of this inquiry[91] became clearer, I also found myself seeking profound ways that would maintain the truths of the holistic learnings that I was seeking to give

[91] I have refrained from previously defining "embodied understanding" and "embodied knowledge" in definitive ways to reflect the time it has taken for me to articulate understandings of embodiment in connection to Cree and Sufic wisdoms and learnings from participant students. Locating research that specifically addressed my emerging experiences and understandings of embodiment was rather challenging and contradicted the spirit and intent of this work. Mark Johnson's (1989) work on "embodied knowledge" underscores the importance of how "interactions, social encounters, and communicative exchanges that are critical for our survival and the enhancement of the quality of our experience" (p. 368) are interpreted and understood because they are directly guided by our bodies and movements. These interpretations certainly offer important contributions regarding the role of our bodies with regards to how we carry and

voice to within the métissage. I witnessed myself becoming mired in the fears of what others might think if I did not honour métissage in a specific manner that was evidenced by the literature. I noticed myself becoming increasingly drawn to recovering what we carry within and the ways in which holistic philosophies, through their expressions in oral traditions, reconnecting with kinship relations and learning from sacred texts and poetry can invite that recovery. I purposefully did not wish to rely upon research papers about holism that objectified embodied experiences and presented sacred insights in contrived ways to support the work I was doing. For me, this would undermine the integrity of the wisdoms I had been learning from and the places from which they flow. Paying attention to these intuitive insights was integral to my process because it reminded me of my departure from working within discourses that uphold a particular kind of relating and framing of lived experiences. I found myself circling back to the things that I have been trying to "lift" in my life. In those moments I remembered that I did not want to be angry anymore and live my life in ways that invited defensive responses. This was a burden that had become too weighty to carry and was causing much harm to myself and others. I started to understand this more clearly as a significant reason that initiated my departure from critical traditions of inquiry. Again, doing the emotional work of attending to my inner state needed to be addressed if I wanted to improve my relationships with others and proceed in ways that best enact holistic teachings. As time progressed alongside these insights and the ups and downs of my groundedness, I realized that I

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interpret experiences. However, this particular interpretation does not directly speak to the ways in which the specific parts of our being guide our connections to intuitive insights.

For these reasons, I draw upon the teachings of the four directions and Rumi's examples of an individual who persevered to recover his inner voice throughout his life as sources of inspiration that inform what "embodied understanding" refers to in the context of this dissertation. My conceptions of "embodied understandings" are specifically connected to recovering from our "ecological amnesia" (D. Donald, Personal Communication, November 2014) and living in ways that uphold the "One Task".

was once again getting in my own way. I was forgetting all that I was learning because of fears surrounding convention. In the midst of my forgetting, I was neglecting métissage's organic ethic. As I gradually peeled away the layers of conformity I had imposed upon myself, I was able to see with a patient heart, mind and eyes, what I was overlooking; I had forsaken my inner voice.

As I worked through these tensions, I remembered all of the experiences and guidance that had led me to work from the ethic of métissage. Drawing upon my tensionalities, learnings from Sufic and Cree wisdom traditions, my departures from critical theory discourse, learnings from Aboriginal Studies 30 students and teachers, I realized what I was seeking to articulate. I revisited my experiences with learning from Elder Bob Cardinal on Enoch Cree Nation in 2014. As previously mentioned, learning from Elder Cardinal and my peers guided me to renew my relationship with the land as my relative who I had been taking for granted for far too long. This process helped me to connect with sacred ecological insights that I had not recognized within Islam. Learning from Cree traditional teachings sparked a generative process that promoted deepened self-understanding and connection to my own traditions. As mentioned throughout this dissertation, learning from the gifts of the land, the water, the sun and wind helped me to interpret the Qur'an differently. Cree traditional teachings and Qur'anic elaborations of nature are expressed and approached differently. For example, Islam does not have teachings that explicitly give guidance surrounding the different parts of ourselves. Of course, connecting with the heart and mind is expressed in the Qur'an. The ethic is different, however. Learning from the four directions, our grandmothers and grandfathers is also not a part of Islam. These learnings helped me to pay attention to Qur'anic *ayat* and *ayat* in my own life in ways that I had not done before. I was also able to reinterpret a ceremony that Ismailis perform in *Jamatkhana* as acts of repentance to Allah that I now understand as seeking forgiveness for mis-actions committed from "head to toe". I had

not understood that meant seeking forgiveness from the all the parts of ourselves that guide our thoughts and actions. Following my time learning from Cree traditional teachings, I have found myself repeatedly reconnected to Elder Cardinal's teaching lodge while I am praying in *Jamatkhana*. I reflect upon these learnings in connection to Qur'anic teachings that are shared while I am at *Jamatkhana* and create new meaning for myself. This has become a profound source of guidance and grounding in my life. Some may find the combining of differences unethical, uncomfortable and blasphemous. I do not regard these experiences as such. To do so would deny the ways in which sacred notions of difference inspire creativity and the continuation of life.

This métissage was directly inspired by Elder Cardinal's guidance, learning from Cree sensibilities and the ways in which they have helped me to interpret and create anew in relation to my Qur'anic interpretations and how I live my life. This inspiration has guided me to remain committed to process and the continued learnings that arise from trusting in process. My approach to métissage here seeks to create dialogue between Sufic traditions in Islam and Cree sensibilities in ways that draw upon their differences and similarities to create anew. The dialogue between the two inspires reconnecting with our inner selves and reminds us of the importance and necessity to trust our inner knowings. This was a key insight recovered during my time learning from Elder Cardinal. During and following my time with Elder Cardinal, I started to honour Islam's holism in its fullness on institutional landscapes. This is what was missing in my life and had caused me much grief in the past. Connecting with the wisdoms that I carry within in all parts of myself helped me to begin the process of lifting a burden that I had been carrying throughout my life.

Seeking inspiration from Sufic and Cree sensibilities, in the midst of their connections and tensionalities, has guided me to reconnect with my intuitive insights. While the métissage does not illustrate physical representations of my voice, I suggest that the ethic underlying my approach to

métissage and its embodied nature reflects my voice throughout the strands alongside participant students. I drew upon purposeful selections of Rumi poetry to instantiate further tensionality, creativity and interpretation with Cree sensibilities as expressed by student participants' experiences with Aboriginal Studies 30. Drawing upon Rumi's poetry is purposeful in that it reflects Qur'anic teachings and was used to help interpret participant students' experiences through dialoguing with the four Directions teachings, Cree sacred ecological insights and students' interpretations of these insights. Rumi's poetry also functions to show tensionality with aspects of students' experiences with sacred ecological wisdoms and also invites readers to interpret and re-interpret alongside student participants and myself. I draw upon Rumi poetry that voices the presence of the life-giving energy that connects all life forms. This is also purposeful because it helps to directly name the tensionality that this métissage specifically addresses.

As mentioned earlier, the significance of holism is missed within curricular underpinnings that inform representations and interpretations of difference in Alberta's provincially mandated curricula. The theoretical discourse that informs the inclusion of particular forms of difference is paradoxical. As previously stated, social justice frameworks advocate for the inclusion of difference but somehow do not allow for the expression holism in ways that promote balance. At times, such discourse does not even acknowledge holism as a manifestation of difference. Somehow it becomes okay to avoid or tiptoe around the spiritual connotations of holism while maintaining a commitment towards advocating for all. This tensionality is directly expressed through the "invisible" and "formless" source that guided former Aboriginal Studies 30 students in their experiences and enactments of deeper connectivity with themselves and their relations. Seeking inspiration from Sufic and Cree sensibilities, in the midst of their connections and tensionalities, has guided me to reconnect with my intuitive insights.

## Chapter Eleven:
## Healing Through the Convergence of Difference: Guidance from Wisdom Relationality[92]

### A Wisdom-Relationality Response: Rethinking belonging, difference and Ayad Akhtar's *Disgraced*

My friend and I attended a production of Ayad Akhtar's play *Disgraced* today. I was not too familiar with the script but was intrigued by the play's synopsis. As I understood, the intent of the play was to toil with identity politics and extrapolate Islamophobia and Muslim identification. For obvious reasons I was intrigued and had to attend this play. From the outset of the play, it was clear that Akhtar was purposely accentuating identity politics. The main character, Amir Kapoor was depicted as an angry- albeit worldly successful man who was disconnected from Islam, South Asian cultural traditions and loathed himself. I interpreted his character as a person who felt defeated by life and who had no sense of connection with himself. Desperate to 'belong' and completely remove himself from his Muslim roots, he changed his surname to Kapoor and fooled many of his colleagues into believing that he was in fact Hindu. The anger that he displayed towards anything regarded as "other" was hatred towards himself. His very life was committed to receiving the gaze of those who oppressed him. He inevitably mirrored the actions and thinking of those who colonized him. Amir Kapoor's character was juxtaposed with his wife Emily's gentle demeanor and openness to Islam. She was an artist who was drawn to Islamic architecture and was in love with Islam's wisdom as she saw it. I was particularly struck by a conversation Emily had with her colleague, Isaac. They were discussing the potential repercussions of her drawing upon

[92] Please note that this section will elaborate wisdom relationality on the basis of a reflection following my experiences thinking with Ayad Akhtar's (2013) *Disgraced*, Rumi's poetry, Cree wisdoms, student participants' embodied experiences, teacher participants' insights and my own embodied knowledges rather than referencing 'theory'. This is intentional to honour the recovery of embodied truths and also enact métissage's ethic which emphasizes the importance of not relying on theory alone.

Islamic wisdoms and architecture in her work. Would she be accused of co-opting ways of knowing and being that she was learning from and connected with? I could tell that these lines were making some members of the audience rather uncomfortable. This discomfort mounted towards the play's end where Amir discovers that his wife had an affair with Isaac during a dinner party hosted at the Kapoor residence for Isaac and his wife. Amir becomes furious at the revelation of this news and later beats his wife resulting in the break of their union. Isaac proclaims, "all of you are animals" within. This segment of the play was rather difficult to watch and listen to.

My friend and I who attended had a lengthy discussion following the play's end. My friend, who identifies as a coloured and marginalized woman, was deeply offended by the play's turn. Once again, the 'brown man' was depicted as a violent, intolerant and authoritarian non-human. Contrariwise, his wife was a White saviour' who was attempting to bring her husband back to his faith, traditions and people. We were both genuinely concerned with how the play's nuances, complexities and attempts to expose identity politics might have been missed by segments of the audience. I, however, did not share my friend's offence with the play and how she interpreted Amir's character as yet another villainized brown man and regarded Emily as the stereotypical 'White savior'. I did not hold the same anger and frustration as my friend and wondered why I felt this way. I regarded Amir's character as one who was in need of healing. He could not fathom who he was and unleashed his self-hate towards those who he professed to love. I also did not regard Emily as someone who was trying to co-opt Islam but rather understood her as a person who felt love and affinity for a tradition she was not born into. Was it problematic that Emily, who was not born into Islam, found herself connected to the faith? Is learning from ways other than one's own impermissible? I noticed myself answering these questions with great opposition and shaking my head. In these moments I realized that my reactions would have been quite the contrary four years

ago. I am confident that I would have taken offence to Amir's storying as a 'violent Muslim man' and positioned Emily's character as yet another 'White savior'. What had changed? My relationship with holistic philosophies and the insights that flow from them have invited a more loving and compassionate response to *Disgraced*. A wisdom-relationality response to Disgraced opens up the dangers that arise when centric notions of difference, belonging, otherness, inclusion impede our ability to learn from anything other than the familiar. These conceptualizations of difference and the barriers and separation imposed by identity politics allow anger to fester, resentment to grow and do not allow us to be fully human. I continue to learn from holistic insights that guide me to live with openness through remembering my shared ecological roots with other life-giving entities. These insights teach me everyday that transformation and renewal in myself and relations is possible.

As I linger in the insights gleaned from thinking with Ayad Akhtar's "Disgraced", I ponder Amir's inner state and the extent to which his inability to work through his inner turmoil perpetuated much imbalance in his life. As I ponder, I am reminded of the spirit and intent of what the métissage was proposed to lift and of Rumi's story the "Lion and the Beast". Rumi shares:

*Those who run from pain*
*Fall into the pain again,*
*And those who escape from the snake meet only the dragon*
*For work is a man-made trap.*
*That drains life's blood with what he thought to be his heart. The door was locked with the enemy still in the house. There are too many defects in human foresight*
*So better trust only in the greatest Friend.*
*Better balance with the sight of God.*
*Where you will find your desires.*
*So long as the child has no strength*
*He rides on his father's neck.*
*He who gives rain from heaven gives also bread.*

*You have feet, why pretend to be lame?*
*You have hands, why hide the fingers? When God gave a spade to his servant*
*There was no need of explanation.*
*The hand and the spade*
*Have implicit use.*
*Isn't it clear enough?*
*If we take the hand and the spade to hear*
*We'd better devote our lives to their use.*

*(Excerpts from Jalaluddin Rumis's story, "The Lion and the Beasts", Dunn et al., 2000, pp. 32-47)*

As conveyed earlier, my intention to share a cohesive understanding of wisdom relationality towards the latter part of my dissertation was purposeful. I wanted to honour the confluence of the different parts that continue to guide how I have come to embody, enact and conceptualize wisdom relationality over time and will continue to do so. As mentioned previously, this is a significant commitment of my life's work as I see it unfolding. I experience wisdom relationality as manifesting from my learnings and connection to holism, self, and the interwebbing of my relations; I understand holism, self and my relations as intextricably connected and working hand in hand with each other. Learning from Cree and Sufic holistic philosophies, in relationship to sacred ecological practices, the Qur'an and its expressions via Rumi's poetry, and drawing upon former Aboriginal Studies 30 students' insights regarding what makes healing possible, brings forth wisdom relationality. Wisdom relationality does not seek to limit or manage our individual and collective experiences with holism. Rather, it seeks to re-awaken these sensibilities and bring them to the forefront of the ways in which we come to understand each other, build long-lasting relationships and honour, respect and learn from our more than human relatives within this process.

Sharing in this manner is not meant to undermine other essential conceptions and enactments of relationality. Imparting these insights is intended to communicate a form of

relationality that does not fear expressions of holism and assimilate facets of our being that cannot be measured. Again, this perception of relationality is made possible because of direct connections with the enmeshment of our relationships, the wisdom that flows from these relationships and how such insights can guide greater balance and harmonious ways to live . The métissage intended to aesthetically convey these insights.

Former experiences with learning from and alongside distinctive conceptions of relationality have brought forth varied responses. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to engage in circle in various contexts and the wisdoms that came forth from shared time with others. These experiences for me, however, had a pronounced focus on intellectually attending to how lived experiences guide our lives. This focus is of course integral and should not be abandoned. Experiencing circle, in ways that encouraged self -study, engaging in practices of renewal and restoration and realizing in a deeper sense the source of our connectivity, brought forth a vastly different response for me than more intellectualized approaches to circle that did not directly connect with these insights. Such engagement keeps us forever bound to the *Mystery*. I found myself contemplating why I felt so differently in such contexts and what it was, in the layering of these life-giving sources of inspiration, that was awakening me in more intuitive ways.

I sought guidance from Cree wisdoms and Qur'anic teachings, through my faith and Rumi's teachings to make meaning. I unexpectedly was gifted with other meaningful sources of interpretation from the insightful sharing of former Aboriginal 30 Studies students. I gradually found myself making connections in our research conversations with the importance of healing in embodied ways that are not only connected to knowledge bases as we have come to understand them in curricular manifestations, but also in deep relation to healing oneself. This involves courageously attending to our deepest emotions and collectively working through the burdens that

we are seeking to "lift". This growing awareness supported another ethic that can guide how we understand and enact healing both individually and collectively.

In order to further explicate my conceptualizations of wisdom relationality, I will draw upon participant student insights related to their experiences of partaking in sharing circle[93] in the curricular and pedagogical context of Aboriginal Studies 30. Circle is a manifestation of holism which brought deepened understandings of difference for student participants. Student participants' collective voices evoke the interplay between healing and connectivity. The point to remember here is that student participant insights reveal a restoration of meaning, purpose and connectivity that is lost in liberal framings of curricular and pedagogical priorities. Their experiences indicate that holistic notions of difference inspire a deepened sense of connectivity with their inner selves and kinship relations that promote healing and guide more ethical ways to live.

Alissa shares that "when you don't have a good relationship so many problems can arise whether that be with an Aboriginal person or how we treat gender or equality or the different pay grades between men and women." Alissa further shares that perceived differences of ideology and orientation override the "quality" with which we ought to be honouring each other with. With regards to the understanding of traumatic lived experiences and survival, she questions "where information is coming from" and the ways in which we have been taught to come into relationship with that information. She further shares that we tend to have a better understanding of "genocide in Rwanda" but do not have an understanding of the traumas in the places in which we live. Alissa's insights help us to contemplate the relationship between enmeshment, connectivity and

[93] Please note that student participant insights articulated here are not addressed within the métissage itself. I initially attended to these insights in previous renditions of the métissage but removed them because they were inflating the braid and making it difficult to juxtapose texts.

healing. In other words, the very fact that we live together ought to offer a more meaningful response to how we collectively think about, engage with and learn from traumatic lived experiences. These realities also connect us and require attention. Alissa emphasizes that these insights are integral to our shared healing journeys but that we also need to have the "willingness to talk about [our] deep dark emotions" if we seek to acknowledge past hurt and be able to say "although it was bad, I learned how to love myself further and therefore taught my children how to love themselves". She speaks to the sharing of these "deeper, dark emotions" in the context of partaking in sharing circle in community contexts and in the Aboriginal Studies 30 classroom. Alissa highlights that the "emotional and physical connection" that circle brought forth in Aboriginal Studies 30 was a "special space in which students felt safe to openly speak from their emotions and that could not be achieved in situations where students were asked to do group work and merely talk about things". Her words communicate the importance of individually and collectively facing our emotions in anchoring how we proceed in our lives.

Chauntelle, in another way, underscores that facing others in circle helped her to face herself and the burdens she was carrying. The intergenerational impacts of Indian Residential Schools contributed to her "identity crisis" and "disconnect" that she experienced while partaking in ceremony with her family and community during her youth. Chauntelle shares:

> One thing I really valued about the class is that it emphasized our connection and sort of an Aboriginal perspective was having our sharing circles. You come to school…you read books …you learn…it's all intellectual…you look at the board…you write down notes…you look at the computer and you soak in all of this knowledge inside your head and it's a very head space I guess curriculum. And when you walk into the Aboriginal Studies class and you sat in the sharing circle it suddenly became like a five-sense learning

> experience. You were sitting around people physically connected by the circle. You were listening to them and you were feeling their emotions. And learning from their experiences. Apart from the books. Like it might have had sort of a basis …like how has the history of I dunno Indigenous people affected your life or how do you think it affected your life and bringing in the contemporary issues and really directing it towards somebody else's experiences and asking them. I learned more about the people than from the books in that class and that meant a lot to me and it became a part of me in a sense rather than a part of my transcripts to get into another educational institution. But it has a lot to do with respecting one another and recognizing that you're sitting beside two people or six other people. You're in a classroom with souls who are learning on their own journeys and aside from this class they are going through a hundred other things that you are not aware of but it's being conscious of that person that is next to you".

Chauntelle's comments that partaking in circle offered a "five sense learning experience" that was not limited to intellectual approaches and invited "being conscious of that person that is next you" reveals a deepened sense of relating. Sitting face to face in this manner for Chauntelle was a reminder that she was connected to her friends, peers and teachers because this practice illuminated the voiced and unvoiced journeys that they were each partaking in. She further shares that emotionally connecting in this manner was important for her because it helped her to work through her "defensive" responses to others viewing her people as "stereotypical Aboriginal people". Chauntelle emphasizes that she "fell into the trap of viewing other Aboriginal people" in the same way. She shared that her identity crisis, defensive responses and at times, disdain towards her own people were "lifted" while partaking in circle and witnessing responses of deep concern, love and responsibility. Chauntelle articulates:

> Going into classes and seeing people like [Rose] cry was like someone was looking in and it was so beautiful. It was a very compassionate experience and it was inspirational and eye opening. Like there is a lot of love and beauty in the world. You have to have the eyes to see it. When it's clouded by this pain or resentment in your past or other people, it prevents you from seeing the connection that you have and your relationships with other people whether they're sitting beside you or having actual conversations. It's pretty nice.

Chauntelle's words indicate the generative power of emotions. The excerpt from Rumi's story, "The Lion and the Beasts" emphasizes that "those who run from pain fall into pain again" (Dunn et al., 2000, p. 33). Rumi explains that escaping one's tribulations only results in a temporary reprieve. Rumi advises individuals to use the gifts that they were bestowed with including feet and hands to bring forth change in life. I understand these words as turning inward while also utilizing and connecting with the gifts that we were granted as a way to promote balance. Friends, such as Rose, reminded Chauntelle of the support and understanding that our relations have the potential to bestow us with. We forget our relations, however, and what truly connects us, when we are "clouded by this pain or resentment in [our] past or by other people" which deters connectivity, as Chauntelle reminds us. I understand Chauntelle's response to her emotions and Rose's tears of compassion as how we are also connected by what we are trying to "lift" in our own ways. While our inner burdens might be different, collective efforts to face these difficulties, as enacted in circle, and guided by the energy that flows from our relations, offer much generative strength and courage to go on. Maintaining a balance between our inner selves and feeling safe to give voice to our embodied sensibilities is crucial to healing. This inner and outer movement is integral to understanding that if we wish to heal ourselves, "we have to heal what is within", as Chauntelle advises. Chauntelle's words illuminate the ancient wisdom of the circle as a manifestation of

holism. Its insights stem from understanding life, what sustains us and the movement of what grants life. Rather than avoiding it, overcoming it or thinking that we smarter thant hat, this ancient wisdom can also guide us to follow circle teachings in our curricular and pedagogical imaginings.

As I think with Alissa and Chauntelle's insights, I conceptualize wisdom relationality as offering generative ways in which we can accept our mistakes. Wisdom relationality helps us to understand that mis-actions, and errors do not keep us bound. As the land teaches us and as Rumi expresses in his poetry, we have the capacity to change if we will ourselves to. This requires acceptance if we want to ascend the metaphorical ladder that Rumi[94] often articulates which requires inner awareness and attentiveness to *ayat* that exists internally and externally. Rose similarly communicates the importance of acceptance on shared pathways in the service of continued healing. Rose shares that we can live together in better ways if:

> We accept the fact that we have our faults. That we are human. That we do make mistakes. That we can be down to earth. Like we can accept all of the negative factors that everyone can tell us and still be strong and proud of it and change our ways if it's really bad. For me, like I see people that have good things and bad things and it's really up to them on how they are going to use it.

Her wise words remind us, in another way, of the inner strength that is needed to admit to our oversights and the importance of learning from them. Rose's words also circle back to her earlier

[94] Rumi's poetry and stories often relate to climbing a ladder that brings us closer to our relations. Climbing the ladder requires acceptance and a trust in what connects us and in our current conditions. Again, acceptance in this context should not be conflated with passive inaction. Trust here relates to trusting in life giving energy and most importantly in ourselves. As many Elders share, "it is up to you" (Hoffman, 2010) if you sincerely seek change and no one else can do that work for you but yourself.

insights that it is up to the person in question to change and that human beings are bestowed with "the gift of choice (Hoffman, 2010).

How might drawing upon our emotions, working through "our darkest emotions", lifting the "cloudiness" that separates us, simultaneously remembering, experiencing, renewing, and enacting our shared connectivity encourage the continuation of healing work? Levi shares that while "we learn many things in school", "how much do we remember?" He proceeds to share" I know some things affected me when it was related to a particular situation in the past or a story that I felt but I think playing with peoples' heart strings is something to get used to in situations to get the message across". Levi's insightful words indicate that emotional connections in relation to trauma, other learnings, whether they manifest in curricula or in different moments in our lives, help us to remember more profoundly and deeply provided that emotions are carefully attended to. This means that we are partaking in the work to alleviate emotions that impede connecting with self, nature and others, but also draw upon these learnings in ways that open our hearts. Levi's awareness is important to pay attention to because it signals a deeper connection to the heart in relation to our individual and shared experiences and life, through kinship, and summons an ethic of continued care that is required to build *miyo-wîcêhtowin* or relationships of harmony. Elder Bob Cardinal has patiently shared that "the longest distance we will ever have to travel is from our heads to our hearts". This guidance, as I reinterpret it in connection to Alissa, Chauntelle, Rose and Levi's intuitions, convey that it is helpful to do the individual and collective work to "unlock our hearts" (Rahman, 2010). This is an underlying ethic of wisdom relationality. Rahman (2010) emphasizes:

> We know from our own experiences that when we are treated with compassion and dignity, our hearts respond in harmony and appreciation. But when we are treated with anger or

> distrust, our hearts clench in self-defense and slam their metaphorical windows shut. (Kindle Location 971).

Rahman's words, regarding encounters with difference, remind us that anger and self defense beget more anger and increased isolation. The presence of such feelings also inform how we remember and the ways in which we proceed. Working from the place of our emotions in ways that remove judgment and invite openness and trust, can help to "unlock our hearts". Rahman further shares that "the only key to a locked heart is forged of qualities that the heart recognizes as its own: compassion, love, forgiveness , and higher understanding. Only that which comes from the heart can open another heart" (Kindle Location 979). Levi, Elder Cardinal and Rahman's words illuminate how holistic insights open up embodied knowledges. What is carried within can help us to remember more deeply, with greater care and commitment in the service of our relatives. Guidance from our emotions, as holistic teachings emphasize, and their connections to individual and shared traumas can help us to remember in more profound ways that encourage the practice of continued healing.

Wisdom relationality's unfolding, as expressed above, articulates the importance of always keeping close to our hearts what gives us life and invites connectivity as foundations of balance. Appreciating the presence of such connectivity is made possible through dedicating ourselves to self-study and individually and collectively lifting our burdens. The lion in Rumi's story "The Lion and Beasts" is reminded that he has hands and fingers to "climb the ladder". A deeper effort to draw upon our gifts and trust is needed to climb the ladder. Trust can be honoured through our embodied commitments to lifting burdens, as Rumi shares. Enacting and learning from wisdom relationality, in this regard, may help us to think, live and act ways that help us to "speak to each

other on more ethical terms" (Donald, 2008) and promote more sustainable living in our shared lives together.

**Chapter Twelve:**
**Weaving it all Together: The Curricular and Pedagogical Significance of Holistic-Guided Sacred Ecological Expressions of Difference**

We don't often get to see that side of culture, from an Indigenous perspective. Like just knowing traditional First Nations teachings. We don't see that everyday. What we see a lot of times are negative things that are portrayed through media and through word of mouth and that creates a lot of stereotypes. And what I find the best thing to do is, is to show students that there is something of value that they can take from this [Aboriginal Studies]. Not just knowing history and having knowledge, but also learning about how to be a good human being and learning about how to be a good person which is what I feel is the best thing about learning from traditional knowledge and cultures because those are things that help guide us every single day. Not just learning about history which is also valuable but we do not typically get to learn these wisdoms and cultural teachings.

Naim Cardinal, Former Aboriginal Studies 30 Teacher

I had some kids say some very profound things. Students' experiences with Social Studies I don't think are generally life changing. For the most part it seems that the majority of kids share that the course changed how [they] understand the world and Canada and [themselves]. There is something about the class that the kids…it just affects the kids.

Adam Ambrozy, Former Aboriginal Studies 30 Teacher

Former Aboriginal Studies 30 educators articulate that many Aboriginal Studies students connected with the course's underlying holism. Again, the study context in which Aboriginal Studies was created is the only course offering in Alberta as per my understanding that engages with holism as a curricular and pedagogical guide. Naim emphasizes that while the historical aspects of the course are valuable components, students have the opportunity to engage in deeper ways, through learning from traditional teachings, which can help guide their everyday living. Adam shares that many Aboriginal Studies students regard the course as life changing. He purposefully conveys that such responses are not prevalent in his experiences of teaching Social

Studies and also highlights that there is “something” that is incredibly impactful for the students that brings forth transformative energy. I interpret that “something” that Adam speaks to as the holism that anchors Aboriginal Studies 30 and reawakens that which already exists within individuals. Learnings from former Aboriginal Studies 30 students and teachers convey that there is much to learn from the holistic insights that arise from sacred ecological philosophies. The curricular and pedagogical case of Aboriginal Studies illustrates the possibilities for educational settings to be guided by holism and wisdom relationality which serves to reposition people in kinship terms (Latremouille et al., 2016). This curricular approach offers alternative ways to proceed in the currency of a curriculum of commons sense that promotes a fear of difference. Providing opportunities for youth to connect with themselves and others in more meaningful ways can generate a deepened sense of care for those around us and other entities. In this context, the evoking of such care summons profound love for others in ways that may promote renewal. Engaging with holistic-guided sacred ecological teachings, can help to open up that which perspectival renderings miss. These ideas will be articulated further through circling back to Alberta Education’s Teaching Quality Standards and enactments of the “Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action”(TRC, 2015) as an exemplar of the problem that this dissertation is exploring. I will specifically explore how the Teaching Quality Standards and “Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action” (TRC, 2015) are approached within social justice orientations and the suitability of relying upon these principles alone. Lastly, I will share former teaching experiences that have embraced a wisdom-guided pedagogical approach and how students responded to such teachings. These learnings will be shared in connection to my recent teaching experiences as a high school Social Studies and English Language Arts teacher with Edmonton Public Schools.

Alberta Education's Teaching Quality Standards provide the assurance that Alberta teachers will offer students the highest quality learning experiences, that youth will have access to inclusive learning environments where diversity is honoured and that the success of First Nations Métis and Inuit students will be realized (Alberta Education, 2016). Achievement of this will be demonstrated through "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, 2016, p.6). Alberta Education (2016) proceeds to share that Programmes of Study will be utilized to offer all students ways to foster "knowledge and understanding of, and respect for the histories, cultures, languages, contributions, perspectives, experiences and contemporary contexts of First Nations, Métis and Inuit" (p.6). One can infer that these indicators are guided by epistemological understandings about Indigenous histories in a Canadian context. The idea here is to foster respect and appreciation for Indigenous peoples' particular histories, implications and contributions from a socio-historical lens. I suggest that the insertion of knowledge is inadequate on its own to bring forth the understanding that we are all related and to eventually improve our relationships with each other (Bouvier & MacDonald, 2019; Donald, 2013; Scott, 2013). This is because the curricular underpinnings that seek to give voice to Indigenous onto-epistemological understandings are guided by frameworks that assimilate difference. Again, the liberal philosophies that guide curricular frameworks assimilate difference in order to make difference less threatening. This is problematic because such framework are not aligned with holistic Indigenous worldviews that emphasize that we are all related. In this manner, there is a profound disconnect with the ways in which Alberta Education guides the enactment of these curricular promises. It is imperative to revisit the spirit and intent of social justice commitments within the context of curriculum and pedagogy.

Social justice is a "concept that is founded on the idea that all people and groups within society are afforded equal access to freedoms, liberties, opportunities and participation within their societies" (Egbo, 2009, p. 235). The underlying quality of social justice orientations is to espouse liberal philosophies, via democratic discourse, equality and citizenship. The idea here is that it is a legal and basic human right for all individuals to experience equality on schooling landscapes. Social justice education theories hold in common that while schools can be sites in which dominant discourse and culture is upheld, schools are also the sites whereby inequities can be alleviated (Mthethwa-Sommers, 2014, p. 9). Numerous theories are associated with social justice education theories. Such theories include but are not limited to critical theory, critical race theory, post-modern, post-structural, feminist and multicultural education theories (Mthethwa-Sommers, 2014). These theories share in common a commitment to revealing and transforming oppressive policies and practices. Theories that are categorized as social justice orientations indicate that specific norms, habits and symbols are embedded in numerous historical contexts that perpetuate the systemic expressions of exploitation and marginalization of specific groups of people. Further, these theories indicate that there are people who have access to power and others who are purposefully kept at a distance from it to maintain cultural and imperial hegemony. Solutions to addressing these inequities are situated in social, economic and political responses that will encourage "equal participation" of all members in society through the equal distribution of resources and the insertion of different knowledges that can reduce the hegemony of dominant ontologies. The infusion of these ideas and their underlying commitments, however, are directly related to classical philosophical interpretations of justice that reflect a particular ethos (Mthethwa-Sommers, 2014, p. 11). In the context of liberal democratic societies, these contemporary expressions of justice may draw upon Kant's categorical imperative which promotes a

universalized enactment of morality that is rooted in rationalism, liberal individualism, and reflects an understanding that freedom is available "as long as others share the same freedom" (Mthethwa-Sommers, 2014, p. 11) and market individualism which posits that access to material benefits is directly dependent on the individual's specific efforts. Other approaches, as manifested in Alberta Education's curricular design, are guided by liberal expressions of what it means to be socio-political and economic contributors. These notions are heavily guided by participatory and responsible citizenship as the primary source that promotes responsibility for self and others (Mthethwa-Sommers, 2014, p. 12).

As evidenced earlier, the problem with liberal approaches to justice is that their underlying orientations are anchored by philosophies from specific places that offer minor credence to sensibilities that are intimately connected to holism. These sensibilities do not regard human rights and responsible citizenship as the panacea for inequality. Such sensibilities rather express belonging and harmony as being made possible through a deep ethic of care for all relatives in Creation. Difference in this sense is not regarded as palatable for what it can offer in an economic sense or because it requires validation due to human rights legislation. The issue that requires careful attention here is that what connects us all is not acknowledged in these orientations in ways that might inspire "restoring life to its original difficulty" (Jardine, 1992) and creating anew. Matters of holism are spoken on the terms socio-political acceptance within the parameters of civil society and nothing else. In other words, what can be learned from other traditions of expression is dismissed because the blue-print model of social justice orientations does not allow for the voicing an enactment of anything else and at times enacts violence to those social justice advocates seek to support (Smith, 1999, p. 36). The other point to highlight is that social justice is taken up as a purely human endeavour. In other words, kinship beyond human beings is forgotten.

Claims to addressing and voicing the needs of all within the parameters of social justice orientations can also at times reinscribe the management that it champions to remedy. This is evidenced in the Teaching Quality Standards' commitment to infusing First Nations, Métis and Inuit knowledges and histories in current Alberta curricula and in K-12 curricula redesign. Anchoring the Teaching Quality Standards in this manner, alongside the foundational knowledges expressed in K-12 Programmes of Studies limits our ability to proceed together in ways that are guided by wisdom relationality's generativity. Knowledge alone, cannot remedy relationships where trust needs to be restored. Nor can it address the burdens that are carried through intergenerational trauma. These approaches also do not allow for us to be fully human because they dictate the terms on which we can speak to each other. The language of intersectionality can unfortunately invite greater feelings of anger and resentment. Again, the individualism inherent in these approaches are restricted in their ability to bring forth the restoration and renewal we desperately need.

These perceptions can be shared in connection to the extent to which we are collectively honouring the "Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action" (TRC, 2015). It is important to note that in the last two years, only seven Calls to Action have been honoured (CBC Radio One, Unreserved, May 8, 2018). This reality is both disappointing and concerning but offers an entry point for us to reconsider the suitability of popular curricular and pedagogical approaches in the service of Truth and Reconciliation. It is not overly assumptive to suggest that Canadian educational institutions predominantly respond to the "Calls to Action" through a liberal ethos. For example, Gibson and Case's (2019) paper "Reshaping Canadian History Education in the Support of Reconciliation" offers ways in which Canadian history education can respond to the "Calls to Action". Gibson and Case emphasize that their response is to meet these ends "without

radical epistemological restructuring" (p. 251) and specifically address how Indigenous perspectives have been regarded as irreconcilable with Euro-Canadian knowledge systems on curricular and pedagogical contexts. Gibson and Case (2019) suggest that strengthening the centrality and representation of Indigenous peoples and their histories can help to address the "Calls to Action" in more fulsome ways. They also propose a nuanced reading of Indigenous histories and indicate that "more inclusive and anti-racist interpretations that incorporate Indigenous perspectives and present alternative perspectives that must be the basis for constructing overarching historical narratives about Canada's past" (p. 258). These suggestions unfortunately miss how the lens of anti-racism is often inappropriate for interpreting Indigenous histories because anti-racism inadequately addresses colonialism and does not significantly address Indigenous conceptions of holism (Lawrence & Dua, 2011). Gibson and Case's (2019) paper continues with this reasoning by responding to Samantha Cutrara's (2018) piece which addresses how historical consciousness and its epistemic rooting in evidence-based thinking misses the relationality that is needed to honour the "Calls to Action" (TRC, 2015). Interestingly, Gibson and Cases' (2019) piece overlooks Cutrara's (2018) points in this regard and does not address relationality at all. While Gibson and Case (2019) offer a well-intentioned effort to address Reconciliation, their work does not draw upon the knowledge of Indigenous Elders and holistic sensibilities. For this reason, many Canadians may assume that reconciliation is not their responsibility because a connection to something deeper and that binds us all is overlooked. The secular framing of Truth and Reconciliation and the ways in which we typically interpret the "Calls to Action", once again, promote a watered-down application of these mandates. Reconciliation is a verb and also necessitates active engagement and learning from the sensibilities with whom we are remedying relationships with. This is the ethic of Treaty sensibility. Again, revisiting our

shared sacred ecological roots might assist in the process of reconciliation. We can recall responses to the rising Idle No More[95] movement in the height of its momentum in 2013. Many Canadians could not comprehend the intent and purpose of the movement and viewed it with disdain. Those who participated in the movement were regarded "as trouble-makers". I venture to say that such responses were largely antagonistic because many Canadians do not understand how different Indigenous worldviews relate with the land; the land holds wisdom, memories and teaches who we are in relation to each other. Learnings from the wisdom that flows from sacred ecological insights and reconnecting with ourselves and others may offer guidance in this regard. Again, this is certainly not the only way to approach reconciliation. This work may appear daunting, uncomfortable and unrealistic to some but that does not mean engagement with these sensibilities ought to be discounted as invalid sources of contribution. Rather, we can ponder the possibility of honestly coming together with patient eyes, hearts and minds to collectively "lift" what will keep us at a distance from other ways of honouring connectivity. This lifting can perhaps be a way in which common sense curricular commitments and orientations can be countered.

I have wondered about the ways in which wisdom teachings can manifest on the place of secular educational landscapes. Like many others, I have had my anxieties surrounding pedagogical approaches that opening up holism and the interwebbing of our relationships. Through receiving support in the energies around me, trusting in myself and the wisdom that flows from sacred ecology, I have found it easier to engage in these pursuits. I have trusted in process in four specific curricular and pedagogical contexts in which I was a principal instructor for pre-service education courses. Three of these courses were required in the University of Alberta's Faculty of

[95] Idle No More is an ongoing grassroots movement that was founded in 2012. The movement was founded by three Indigenous women and one non-Indigenous woman in Canada. The goal of the movement is to encourage greater respect and understanding of Treaties and specifically enact Indigenous ways of knowing and being to protect the water, land and air for future generations.

Education and the other was a course I had designed that specifically related to a possible intersection between critical race theory and wisdom inquiries surrounding difference and inclusion. I approached each course in ways that did not disparage theories and practices that promoted social justice orientations. I still taught in ways that honoured these orientations and these contributions. I wanted my students to have the opportunity to learn from them and to most importantly decide for themselves the extent to which they would take up such discourse in their future classrooms. However, I approached my teaching in a manner that adhered to holism and holistic sensibilities. Holism was not infused as an add-on in these classes but was the driving force that I had committed myself to with regards to sharing together, regardless of ideological stances and anchoring our relationships together. This is not to say that I did not experience hardships and outbursts from students; I experienced cognitive dissonance, resistance and accusations of exclusionary conduct in deeply palpable ways at times. While those moments were emotionally tasking, they did not deter my commitments and trust in process. I had to remind myself to refrain from engaging with the cynicism when frustration and anxiety seemed to abound during the course of class discussions and activities that were purposefully created to address what we carry within. I also needed to remember humility. I have not always thought in these ways and I have much to learn. This humility helped me to respond to my students more compassionately and not take their responses to heart. These learnings were guided by the ethic of the circle and practices such as daily encounter journal writing[96] and actively speaking to and learning from what grants life. I did

[96] As previously shared, drawing upon daily encounter journal writing was inspired by learnings from a graduate seminar course on Globalization and Wisdom Traditions. Dr. David Smith invited us to learn from the ways in which "life is deeply pedagogical" (Smith, 2012) by learning to pay attention to all that is around as sources of meaning making in our lives. Students were asked to keep a notebook of reflective 'encounters'. These encounters refer to moments when something 'happens' to call your attention. Write out your thoughts on what the encounters teach you about yourself, life and living. Students were asked to think about how these encounters can help guide their future teaching practice specifically related to the

not shy away from drawing upon Rumi's poetry to further express these ideas and share the wisdoms of Willie Ermine and others in relation to the reality that we are all particles that exist together. These practices and learnings were bolstered by activities that encouraged the importance of "self -work". Such practices included encounter writing where students spoke to their relationships with texts, lectures and guest lectures in connections to life happenings. The intent here was for us to engage in more embodied ways with our learnings and think about how they guide us in our lives. Students were also asked to draw their identities in each of these classes and to add new drawings with regards to how they saw themselves at the end of the course. Many students initially found this rather silly and wondered why they were being asked to use markers and crayons in a university classroom. Over time, many students started to understand why they were being asked to do this and the process of locating who they are. When students experienced themselves struggle through such activities, we spent much time getting to the root of such struggles. Many students commented that they were never asked to do work related to how they view the ways in which they belong and what informs who they are and the importance of emotions during their time on elementary and secondary school landscapes. These conversations became important sources of guidance for us as we proceeded together and built greater trust. The ethic of circle was foundational in building this trust and teaching us that it is okay to feel dissonance, anger and disbelief as we embarked on this work together. While partaking in circle initially evoked anxiety for many, students later became comfortable and saw the connections that were manifesting through their journaling, learning from others, our class discussions and facing each other in circle. The manifestations of such insights, of course took time and did not come forth for everyone in the same ways. I understood these happenings as a promising starting point to build

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course's objectives.

anew in other contexts. I was incredibly touched to witness students share deep emotions over time and feel comfortable to cry in the presence of their classmates while doing this work together. These experiences have reminded me of the importance of "lifting" our burdens together. I feel humbled and deeply honoured to have come alongside courageous beings who have taught me a great deal about trust and reconnecting with myself and others. These experiences continue to guide my commitment to curricular and pedagogical approaches that enact wisdom relationality. It is possible to proceed in ways that are not reliant on the false universalism of liberalism that informs common-sense curricula.

I continue to contemplate how holistic-guided sacred ecological teachings can inform curricular and pedagogical approaches on secondary school landscapes. I am grateful for recently teaching again in high school classrooms. My most recent experiences of primarily teaching English 30-1 and English 30-2 along with Social 30-1 has brought forth much concern and hope. While many students I have come alongside have expressed feelings of disconnect with self and other, deep anxiety surrounding pressures to achieve, they have not entirely forgotten facets of their lives that bring forth grounding for them. The memories enshrined in their countries of origin, the traditions of their families, the values inherent in their own sensibilities have come forth in the classroom during unexpected moments. These moments of fidelity to life and loving suggests that we ought not fear sources of learning beyond the representation of formalized knowledges as valuable teachers. Offering opportunities to honour connectivity more deeply, even within the situation of education in Alberta which is not ideal for many, should not be avoided because the conditions are not perfect. A Treaty sensibility alongside notions of sacred ecology as espoused in Rumi's poetry can guide holistic approaches in our schooling and educational contexts.

In the midst of "Chromebook teaching" and increased distractions that inhibit connectivity, we desperately need more opportunities to connect with each other that are not limited to the traditional classroom structure. Learning from the wisdom that flows from kinship relational networks does not need to be limited to Social Studies and English Language Arts classrooms. Holistic-guided sacred ecological teaching can expand our curricular imagination and invite us to believe, in a visceral way, that our feelings of, "*is this it?"* are temporary. It is up to us to proceed in ways that guide our youth to understand that 'material recognition' alone will not absolve them from life difficulties and unexpected trajectories. Attending to renewal, restoration and deeper connectivity can guide youth to live life with greater courage and trust in what they carry within. Connecting with that inner source and remembering our relations may bring forth lasting ways to address the complexities that we will continue to find ourselves enmeshed in as life unfolds. What is important to remember, as proceed together, is that we are all "craving[97]" connectivity in particular ways. In this sense, we are perhaps all craving a way towards truth. This craving is always and forever present whether we consciously realize it or not. "Constant craving has always been".

[97] The use of "craving" here is inspired by K.D. Lang's song "Constant Craving. Please see Appendix E for song lyrics.

**Epilogue**

Gadamer (1989) proposes that "understanding begins when something addresses us" (p. 249). This work results from giving myself permission to linger a bit longer in my subjective experiences of ontological exclusion on pedagogical sites. I did not realize the extent to which I had kept myself at a distance from that which repeatedly summoned attentiveness in my head and heart because of the assumptions I held about the pedagogical worthiness of these intuitions. I had not made the connection between the micro and macro interplay of the false universalism of liberal philosophies and how the imposition of a normalized way to think and live dulled my senses and ability to see, feel, speak and wonder with my whole body. The regulating of my inner wonders to maintain the integrity of what I had learned was worthwhile to consider and pay attention to in curricular and pedagogical contexts became the site of my recovery. My commitments to honouring my inner wonderings in more 'appropriate' ways encased in secular and intersectional discourse was repeatedly interrupted at the most unexpected moments. It is the confluence of holistic insights and its mutual existence with normative ideologies that reminded me of the possibility for kinship between the two. The transference of these insights mentally, emotionally, spiritually and physically evoked the hermeneutic task of recomposing who I thought I had to be in my daily affairs and my *role* as an educator, curriculum theorist and scholar.

It is the recovery of kinship with my inner being, the ontological Qur'an that lives within me, and my relations with other entities that has compassionately and lovingly beckoned me "to learn to wonder again" (Safi, 2018b). Holistic insights, as inspired by Sufic and Cree

sensibilities, patiently resituate my beingness at the forefront of Mystery. To be alive is to be full of mystery, to live in awe and allow for that which exists within me "to rise up and become expressed" (Safi, 2018b). The spilling over of my inner knowings, the cosmologies and *ayat,* evoke wisdom relationality. I am reminded of a prayer by Imam Ali (PBUH) as I write these words. Imam Ali implores:

> O God, ease my heart with the Qur'an, fill my being with the Qur'an; illuminate my sight with the Qur'an, and guide my tongue with the Qur'an. Grant me strength for as long as you allow me to live, for there is neither strength nor power, except in you" (cited in Jiwa, n.d., para. 2).

The wisdom that arises from Imam Ali's prayer opens up the ethic of how the "ontological Qur'an" supports my existence and "lifts me up" in ways that I cannot ignore and subsume for the temporal recognition of  a singular guiding logic that flows through the Canadian nation-state, citizenship and curricular design and enactments. Thinking with the fluxic tension between similarities and differences, Alissa, Rose, Levi and Chauntelle's life-changing experiences of reconnecting with holism on a pedagogical site guides an ethic of "finding composure in the face of what we have encountered" (Jardine, 2003, p.3) and inherited with the curriculum of common sense. I thus see this work as an initial contribution to encountering difference and similarities through a holistic attentiveness to restoring balance, kinship with self and other entities and inspiring healing. The recovery of our shared ecological roots and intuitive insights may guide ways to re-imagine living and relating that do not succumb to the epistemic trap of inserting and objectifying knowledges. As stated, holistic insights are enshrined in body-memory and are not a thing. Holism is what we do. The generative feature of Imam Ali's prayer explicates this ethic. Circling back to Rumi's poetry, Cree traditional teachings and student participants' intuitions

brings to life a curricular and pedagogical sensibility that re-centres the ever-shifting movement between similarities and differences. Sacred ecological holistic insights support the understanding that while we are not the same, we are still connected.

These insights have much pedagogical utility because they situate difference not as pejorative categorical descriptors that elicit threats of discord, but rather bring forth a sense of purpose and meaning that is lost in epistemic, perspectival and historical accounts of difference. I circle back to the notion of how I have come to articulate my *role* as an educator, curriculum theorist and scholar in connection to Alissa, Rose, Levi and Chauntelle's life-changing experiences in Aboriginal Studies. The generativity that guided student participants' experiences manifests from connecting with the gifts of one's inner state, the cultivation of these gifts through the process of meaning making with one's kinship relational networks and the palpable realization of our shared existence as a result of such meaning making. What grants life and the sources of our embodied knowings can perhaps offer another way to promote openness to others because the dialogue between these insights reminds us of our commitments and responsibilities to each other. Wisdom relationality, as gradually opened up in this work, speaks to this notion of commitment. Commitment, as wisdom relationality articulates, is not temporal, fleeting, or anchored by that which is convenient. Remembering and enacting our shared commitments can be explained as enacting the gift of our subjective inner knowings and how we are responsible to utilize these gifts in our daily affairs. These teachings are expressed in both Sufic and Cree philosophies. Kimmerer (2013) explicates that the bestowal of gifts necessitates responsibility:

> Many Indigenous peoples share the understanding that we are each endowed with a particular gift, a unique responsibility. Birds sing and stars to glitter, for instance. It is understood that these gifts have a dual nature, though: a gift is also a responsibility. If the

> bird's gift is song, then it has a responsibility to greet the day with music. It is the duty of birds to sing and the rest of us receive the song as a gift (p. 347).

Kimmerer's poignant words uphold understandings of difference as a sacred gift that has specific purpose. Our responsibility can be interpreted as allowing for these insights to spill over and into our relations.

These foundational insights have much to offer to the future of curriculum and pedagogy. Firstly, re-interpreting my subjective experiences of holism in relationship to Cree philosophies brings forth a manifestation of holism that does not erase Spirit in fears of secular institutional impositions. Secondly, this work recovers how Islam is also a holistic tradition that can inspire living wisely and well by dwelling in Rumi's poetry. Thirdly, this work proposes a métissage through dialogue between Cree and Sufic sensibilities that tries to aesthetically represent what is left out on pedagogical sites when holism is abandoned. Lastly, this work invites readers to take seriously the curricular and pedagogical significance of healing and how holistic insights in this regard can promote wellness and relationships that inspire us to acknowledge and seek guidance from the transformative beauty of our relations that are always here and beckon us to live in accordance with the "One Task".

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Appendix A: Glossary of Arabic, Blackfoot and Cree Terms

**Allah (Arabic*)***: "God"; a contraction of Arabic *al-ilah*, "the God" (Denny, 1994, p. 387).

**Amanah (Arabic*)***: Fulfilling or upholding one's trust with Allah (in promise to protect Creation and maintain balance).

**aokakio'siin (blackfoot*)***: Being wisely aware (D. Donald, personal communication, December 23, 2014).

**Ayah (pl. ayat) (Arabic)**: "Sign" of God in the created universe. Also means 'verse' of the Qur'an (Denny, 1994, p. 387).

**Dhikr (Arabic*)***: Remember, remembrance, and remembering. One of the Qur'an's names is *al-Dhikr*, which denotes 'the book of remembering God.' *Dhikr* also refers to practices that call for the internal and/or verbal chanting of different attributes of God. This chanting is often accompanied by physical movement.

**Hadith (Arabic*)***: 'Report,' 'event,' 'news.' A literary form that communicates a *sunnah* of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) (Denny, 1994, p. 389)

**Hikmah (Arabic)**: Wisdom.

**Ihsan (Arabic)**: Doing that which is beautiful.

**Imam (Arabic)**: 'Leader,' as in the daily *salat* (prayers). The Shi'i hold an exalted view of their *imams*, who have been invested with infallible guidance by God. An *imam* is also a religious teacher with no special sacrality (Denny, 1994, p. 390).

**Insha'Alla*h***: 'God willingly.'

**Islam (Arabic)**: 'Surrender, 'submission.' The name of the religion of the Qur'an. One who surrenders is called a *Muslim* (Denny, 1994, p. 390).

**Ismaili (Arabic)**: A major Shi'i branch, which takes its name from Ismail, the sixth *imam*, Jafar al-Sadiq's older son, who is regarded as the true successor to Jafar. His position in the succession gives the alternative name of *seven-imam Shi'ism* (or *seveners*) to the Ismailis. The Ismailis have a complex, esoteric doctrine of the *Imam* (Denny, 1994, p. 390).

**Jamatkhana (Farsi)**: *Jamatkhana* literally means 'house of prayer' in Farsi. The structure of the *Jamatkhana* differs from other *masjids* (mosques) in a few ways. These differences include the absence of a physical minaret and the presence of geometric symbolism both inside and outside the building that specifically reflects the values of the Shi'a Ismaili *tariqah* (pathway). As well, the setup of Ismaili prayer halls, although similar to other *masjids*, reflects the current historical interpretation of Islam as expressed through the *Nur* or light of the *Imam* of the time.

**kîkway ehpatahahkik ôma (cree)***:* Elder Bob Cardinal often used this phrase while teaching. This phrase humbly refers to "what is missing" and "what is left out". I understand these wise words as a powerful reminder of the Mystery.

**miyo- pimatisiwin (cree)**: Living the 'good life' (LaBoucane-Benson et al., 2012, p. 2).

**miyo-wahkohtowin (cree)**: How people understand themselves enmeshed in a series of relationships. It can be referred to as kinship (D. Donald, personal communication, December 23, 2014).

**miyo-waskawewin (cree)**: Walking gently on Mother Earth.

**miyo -wîcêhtowin (cree)***:* Living in harmony together (Online Cree Dictionary, 2019)

**Niyat (Arabic)**: Intentions/intent. Specifically refers to having pure intentions.

**Sabr (Arabic)**: Patience.

**Shi'a (Arabic)**: 'Party,' 'faction,' 'sect.' The adherents of Imam Ali (Prophet Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law), who believed that Muhammad had chosen him and his descendants as rightful successors and rulers of the Muslims. There are various subbranches (Denny, 1984, p. 394).

**Sunnah (Arabic)**: Sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

**Sunni (Arabic)**: Popular name for the Muslim majority, which is technically known as *Ahl al-Sunna wal Jama'a.*

**Surah (Arabic)***:* Denotes a 'chapter' in the Qur'an.

**Tariqah (Arabic)***:* Denotes spiritual pathway.

**Tawhid (Arabic)***:* The doctrine of Unity or Oneness in Islam. Also refers to Allah's numerical Oneness.

**Ulama (Arabic)***:* Refers to Muslim scholars who have special training in Islamic theology.

**Wahhabi (Arabic)**: Refers to "sternly puritanical" ideologies of the Wahhabiya movement founded in Arabia in the eighteenth century by Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (Denny, 1994, p. 396). These ideologies are not to be conflated with Sunni or Shi'i interpretations of Islam. *Wahhabi* ideologies have co-opted Qur'anic teachings in rigid ways to promote the political and economic expansion of Saudi Arabia.

Appendix B: Métissage Example[98]

# *kistikwânihk êsko kitêhk:*[1] *Storying Holistic Understandings in Education*

**Jodi Latremouille, University of Calgary Antonella Bell, University of Alberta Zahra Kasamali, University of Alberta Mandy Krahn, University of Alberta Lesley Tait, University of Calgary Dwayne Donald, University of Alberta**

Learning alongside Dr. Dwayne Donald and Elder Bob Cardinal in a Holistic Understandings of Learning class held in Fall 2014 on Enoch Cree Nation evoked different ways of living well and wisely in the world. This course created a sacred place for the "four-part person" (mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual) to emerge, as we learned to pay deeper attention to the interconnectivity of creation in our educational practices. This multimedia métissage (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, & Leggo, 2009) combines life writing, readers' theatre, and visual representations, weaving together our embodied responses to Elder Cardinal's teachings. Each individual's journey *kistikwa̓nihk e̓sko kite̓hk* (Cree: from head to heart) maintains its integrity and unique voice as it is intentionally woven into the Cree principles of *meskanaw* (pathway), *miyo waskawewin* (to walk in a good way), and the Blackfoot concept of *aokakio'siit* (being wisely aware).

Keywords: holistic education, place-based education, indigenous education, life writing, métissage, contemplative pedagogy

[1] Following the textual practices of McLeod (2007), the Cree or Blackfoot words used in this article are not capitalized regardless of where they appear in a sentence. This is an aesthetic choice intended to emphasize difference and make the point that indigenous language use need not conform to conventions of English language use.

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[98] Please refer to this published paper as an example of métissage that I participated in: Latremouille, J. M., Bell, A., Kasamali, Z., Krahn, M., Tait, L., & Donald, D. (2016). kistikwânihk êsko kitêhk: Storying Holistic Understandings in Education. *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies*, *14*(1), 8-22)

# Appendix C: K.D. Lang's "Constant Craving" Lyrics

Even through the darkest phase
Be it thick or thin
Always someone marches brave
Here beneath my skin
Constant craving
Has always been
Maybe a great magnet pulls
All souls towards truth
Or maybe it is life itself
That feeds wisdom
To its youth
Constant craving
Has always been
Craving
Ah ha
Constant craving
Has always been
Constant craving
Has always been
Constant craving
Has always been
Craving
Ah ha
Constant craving
Has always been
Has always been
Has always been
Has always been
Has always been
Has always been

# Appendix D

## Information Letter for Aboriginal Studies 30 Student Participants

My name is Zahra Kasamali and I am a PhD Candidate at the University of Alberta. I want to learn more about Aboriginal Studies 30 students' experiences and understandings of difference. The title of this study is "Enacting Wisdom-guided Sacred Ecology and Ethical Relationality: The Curricular and Pedagogical Task of Reconsidering Difference.

I would like to invite you to tell me about your experiences with Aboriginal Studies 30. I would also like to hear about how your in-class learnings and field trips shape your understandings of difference and what identity means to you.

I will be visiting with you at Centre High Campus, Enoch Cree Nation and the Edmonton River Valley. Research activities and conversations will take place over six visits and will involve sharing alongside two other Aboriginal Studies 30 students. I will be writing notes at times for myself to ensure that I do not forget what I see and hear. I will record our conversations and write them as part of my research. Writing based on this exploration will be used in my dissertation, shared during conference presentations and submitted for publication in journals. Your privacy and confidentiality are important to me and I will protect it at all times throughout the research. All material collected will be safeguarded to ensure confidentiality. Study data, including personal information about you, will be securely stored for five years after the study is over, at which it will be destroyed. Participation in this study may contribute to newfound conceptions of exploring and interpreting difference in educational contexts. Potential risks for participating in this study may include the evocation of emotional experiences.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw any time during the study without penalty. Should you withdraw, the data collected from conversations will only be used with your consent. You have the option to withdraw all data regarding participation at any time before June 1, 2016.

My research process and methods have been approved by the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board (REB). If you have concerns about this study, you may contact the Research Ethics Office, at 492-2615. This office has no direct involvement with this project.

Thank you for your consideration of this request for participation. Your experiences and learnings are integral to this research project. It would be greatly appreciated if you could sign the attached consent form. Should you have any questions or desire clarification, I can be reached at the contact information shared below. You may also contact my research supervisor, Dr. Dwayne Donald at ddonlad@ualberta.ca

Sincerely,
Zahra Kasamali, PhD Candidate
zahrak@ualberta.ca

# Appendix E

## Information Letter for Aboriginal Studies Teacher Participants

Dear Mr._____,

My name is Zahra Kasamali and I am a PhD Candidate at the University of Alberta. My research study focuses on Aboriginal Studies 30 students and teachers' conceptions and experiences with difference. I would like to work alongside you for this research exploration. This involves meeting once for a one- two-hour conversation over the next three months. The purpose of this conversation is to learn about how you conceptualize difference and your reflections of teaching the course.

The title of my study is "Enacting Wisdom-Guided Sacred Ecology and Ethical Relationality: The Curricular and Pedagogical Task of Reconsidering Difference. Métissage is the research sensibility that I will be exploring from. Métissage requires the sharing of lived experiences in relationship to national narratives of living and being. Métissage seeks to show how individuals understand themselves in relationship to each other through the presence of different histories, memories, cultures and knowledge-systems. A single one- two hour long conversation will take place with your Aboriginal Studies 30 colleague. This interview will be recorded with a digital recorder. Writing based on this exploration will be used in my dissertation, shared during conference presentations and submitted for publication in journals. Your privacy and confidentiality are important to me and I will protect it at all times throughout the research. All material collected will be safeguarded to ensure confidentiality. Study data, including personal information about you, will be securely stored for five years after the study is over, at which it will be destroyed. Participation in this study may contribute to newfound conceptions of exploring and interpreting difference in educational contexts. Potential risks for participating in this study may include the evocation of emotional experiences.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw any time during the study without penalty. Should you withdraw, the data collected from conversations will only be used with your consent. You have the option to withdraw all data regarding participation at any time before June 1, 2016.

My research process and methods have been approved by the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board (REB). If you have concerns about this study, you may contact the Research Ethics Office, at 492-2615. This office has no direct involvement with this project.

Thank you for your consideration of this request for participation. Your experiences and learnings are integral to this research project. It would be greatly appreciated if you could sign the attached consent form. Should you have any questions or desire clarification, I can be reached at the contact information shared below. You may also contact my research supervisor, Dr. Dwayne Donald at ddonlad@ualberta.ca

Sincerely,
Zahra Kasamali, PhD Candidate
zahrak@ualberta.c

Appendix F

Letter of Consent for Students and informed letter of Consent for Aboriginal Studies 30 Student Participants

My name is_____. I agree to participate in the research study entitled "Wisdom-Guided Sacred Ecology and Ethical Relationality: The Curricular and Pedagogical Task of Reconsidering Difference". I understand that this research will be carried out by Zahra Kasamali, a PhD Candidate from the University of Alberta.

I have been informed that Zahra will write field notes describing her participation with me and that on six occasions we will partake in six digitally recorded conversations and activities with two other Aboriginal Studies 30 Students. I understand that the purpose of this conversation is to share my experiences with Aboriginal Studies 30, my reflections from the class and my experiences and understandings of difference. Zahra will abide by the University of Alberta Standards for Protection of Human Research Participants (https://www.registrar.ualberta.ca/calendar/Regulations-and-Information/General-U-Policies/20.7.html0)

I am aware that writing based on this exploration will be shared during local, national and international conferences and also will be submitted for publication in journals. I have been informed that my anonymity will be respected. I understand that all material collected will be protected to ensure confidentiality.

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and clarify concerns regarding this exploration. I am aware that my participation in this exploration is completely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the research at any time without consequences. Should I withdraw from the study, I understand that any data that has been collected up until that point will only be used upon my consent. I understand that I have the option to withdraw all data regarding my participation any time before June 1, 2016.

_____

Name (Please Print)

_____

(Signature)

_____

(Date)

# Appendix G

## Letter of Consent for Teachers and informed letter of Consent for Aboriginal Studies 30 Teacher Participants

My name is_____. I agree to participate in the research study entitled "Wisdom-Guided Sacred Ecology and Ethical Relationality: The Curricular and Pedagogical Task of Reconsidering Difference". I understand that this research will be carried out by Zahra Kasamali, a PhD Candidate from the University of Alberta.

I have been informed that Zahra will write field notes describing her participation with me and that on one occasion we will partake in a digitally recorded conversation with my Aboriginal Studies 30 colleague. I understand that the purpose of this conversation is to share my conceptualizations of difference and reflections of teaching Aboriginal Studies 30. Zahra will abide by the University of Alberta Standards for Protection of Human Research Participants (https://www.registrar.ualberta.ca/calendar/Regulations-and-Information/General-U-Policies/20.7.html0)

I am aware that writing based on this exploration will be shared during local, national and international conferences and also will be submitted for publication in journals. I have been informed that my anonymity will be respected. I understand that all material collected will be protected to ensure confidentiality.

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and clarify concerns regarding this exploration. I am aware that my participation in this exploration is completely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the research at any time without consequences. Should I withdraw from the study, I understand that any data that has been collected up until that point will only be used upon my consent. I understand that I have the option to withdraw all data regarding my participation at any time before June 1, 2016.

_____
Name (Please Print)

_____
(Signature)

_____
(Date)

# Appendix H
## Sample Guiding Questions for Students

1. How might the four directions teachings as Elder Cardinal explained them inform our understandings of respectful relationships in the place of Edmonton?

2. In what ways does the land teach us about who we are in relation to each other?

3. How do we understand (or come to terms with) who we are in the place of Edmonton?

4. In what ways might place inform who we think we are?

5. What were your experiences with making Winter Count symbols? How did this process make you feel? Was creating Winter Counts different from writing about your experiences at the Royal Alberta Museum?

6. What does equality mean to you?

# Appendix I
## Sample Guiding Questions for Teachers

1. What were your experiences with teaching Aboriginal Studies 30?

2. What ideologies and sensibilities guide your understandings of difference?

3. How do you feel Aboriginal Studies 30 approaches difference?

4. How have students responded to learning from traditional teachings? Has this been different to the ways in which they respond to learning from theoretical concepts?

5. What has surprised you about teaching the course?

6. How do you feel opportunities for students to reconnect with nature during the course have influenced students to re-evaluate who they are as people and their relationships with each other?

7. Does Aboriginal Studies 30 attend to the ideologies of liberal Multiculturalism? If so, how is this explored with students