

Sacred Cosmic Navels: Illuminating Indigenous Wisdom and Spiritual Interconnectedness

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Abstract

This study investigates the multifaceted symbolism of the belly button across diverse cultures worldwide and its implications for the realm of culturally responsive education. At the heart of this inquiry lies a thorough examination and synthesis of insights from both Indigenous knowledge systems and Western scholarly discourse, aimed at unraveling the belly button's significance as a universal emblem of human interconnectedness. Serving as a focal point of individual identity, ancestral wisdom, and cosmic unity, the belly button transcends temporal and spatial boundaries, offering a tangible conduit for understanding cultural continuity and fostering wholistic well-being among individuals and communities. Through an extensive review of literature, this study illuminates how the enigmatic symbolism of the belly button shapes cultural narratives and informs educational paradigms. Moreover, this study advocates for the integration of Indigenous perspectives into educational frameworks, underscoring the critical importance of acknowledging and honouring diverse cultural identities in educational contexts. By offering actionable insights and guidance for educators and policymakers, this scholarly exploration aims to spark transformative dialogues and collaborations across diverse knowledge systems, ultimately striving to cultivate a more interconnected, equitable, and harmonious educational ethos. This abstract serves as a gateway to the rich insights and implications explored within this study, inviting readers on a journey of discovery into the profound significance of the belly button and its transformative potential in education.

Keywords: Indigenous knowledge, ancestral wisdom, spiritual interconnectedness, cosmology, belly button symbolism, cultural heritage, wholistic education, cultural responsiveness, two-eyed seeing, identity formation, spirituality, cultural sensitive education, inclusive education.

Sacred Cosmic Navels: Illuminating Indigenous Wisdom and Spiritual Interconnectedness

In the sacred web of my being, resonating with the teachings of my Indigenous ancestors and guided by the wisdom passed down from my beloved grandfather and all my relations, I embark on a journey of self-discovery, healing, and spiritual interconnectedness through my research. As a Métis individual, standing at the crossroads of multiple heritages, I draw strength from the rich fusion of my ancestry. This exploration delves into the depths of my identity and the connections to my ancestors, rooted in the wisdom of the land and sky, shaping the path of my inquiry.

Tante ohci kiya To whom are you connected? This question serves as a guiding star amidst the vastness of my Métis heritage and the myriad cultural influences that shape my perspective. At its core lies the concept of the *ohtisiy*, which is the humble belly button – a tangible reminder of the connection to my ancestors, community, and the lands that cradle our shared legacy (Personal Communication, J. Crier, 2023). Honouring my *nêhiyaw* ancestors and *nêhiyaw ohtisiy* teachings, my *ohtisiy* comes from my mother and my mother's mother, which connects me to my great-grandmothers (Sage & Sweetgrass, 2017). This realization captures the essence of interconnectedness and relationality, which are both central concepts in Indigenous worldviews, prompting individuals to reflect on their relationships with their ancestors, their place, and the land, highlighting the importance of understanding one's place within the broader web of life.

My journey into the heart of *ohtisiy* began with a realization of its significance as a physical and spiritual link to ancestry, community, knowledge and the land. Such teachings, passed down through generations, weave together healing, hope, and resilience, illuminating the sacredness of this connection (Crier, 2023). Through these stories, I am transported across time

and space, journeying alongside my ancestors as they traverse the sacred pathways of my *ohtisiy*. With each story, I feel their hopes and dreams, whispered into the winds, carrying the legacy of generations past, present, and yet to come. Through Elder John Crier's teachings, I have come to understand that our belly buttons are not mere remnants of birth but vessels of possibility, carrying the dreams and aspirations of those who came before us.

My great-grandmother, "Marie-Anne Lagimodière, was first cousins with Louis Riel and is a significant figure in our family's history," as recounted by my grandfather. Though I never had the chance to explore the fields with Marie-Anne, as she was gone before I was born, her presence resonates through the stories passed down through generations, connecting me to her and the ancestral knowledge she carried. Alongside my family, I absorbed these teachings and heritage, woven into the fabric of our beings and ancestral lands.

The memories I cherish most are those spent with my family, particularly my grandfather, a man whose wisdom transcended generations. With each step, he imparted not only practical knowledge such as card game rules, barn safety, driving, and the sacred knowledge of the land but also invaluable life lessons that remain with me today. He even gave me a special name, *ma pchi fee*, whispered softly like a cherished secret, symbolizing the depth of his love and guidance. Through his teachings, he instilled timeless values of kindness, empathy, and respect for all beings, embodying what could be considered the golden rule from an Indigenous perspective. He emphasized the importance of never judging anyone by their appearance or material wealth, treating others with the same dignity and kindness we wish to receive. These lessons have always served as a guiding light, continuing to illuminate my path and anchoring me to the core of my being, especially during challenging times.

Through these teachings, deeply ingrained within my essence, I began to comprehend the interconnectedness of all facets of existence. However, it wasn't until my return to academia that I encountered the concept of diverse epistemologies, shedding light on the reasons behind my unique perception of the world. Under the guidance of Professor Rebecca Sockbeson, I delved into Indigenous epistemologies, exploring works like Little Bear's *Naturalizing Indigenous Knowledge* and Ermine's exploration of *Aboriginal Epistemology*. These resources, coupled with my studies in *Indigenous Research Methodologies*, enriched my appreciation of Indigenous ways of knowing. Couture (2013) discusses the Indigenous perspective as a journey of self-discovery and personal responsibility, emphasizing the importance of being fully accountable for one's actions. He further highlights the Indigenous relationship with the cosmos and Mother Earth, stressing the significance of understanding one's connection to the natural world. Leroy Little Bear (2009) echoes this sentiment, underscoring the importance of knowing one's roots to navigate life's journey. Ermine (1995) suggests that knowledge is rooted within oneself and emphasizes introspection and personal experience in understanding the universe. These perspectives offer a wholistic approach to knowledge acquisition that transcends conventional boundaries, sparking a transformative journey of self-awareness and cultural understanding, fundamentally reshaping my understanding.

For the first time, I found myself among scholars, professors, and peers who understood the unique challenges and perspectives of Indigenous educators like myself. Their stories and teachings resonated with me, as if I were rediscovering who I was, and why I am who I am. Then, as I delved into studying the meanings and structures of Cree languages with Dr. Cora Weber-Pillwax, all the teachings fell into place and I had a deeper sense of my being. Immersing myself in Cree knowledge, I felt a sense of recognition, as if these teachings had been patiently

waiting within me, eager to be remembered and embraced, beckoning me home. In the presence of my peers and professors, I found myself proclaiming, almost instinctively, *nīsohkamikosān, nītohtēm*, meaning I am not sure how I know the things I do, but I just do. It was a moment of revelation, a recognition of the truth encapsulated in the concept of blood memory (Holmes, 2000; Cardinal, 2001), Abolson & Willett, 2005, Weber-Pillwax, 2021). For in that moment, I realized that the umbilical cord is not just a physical tether connecting us to our mothers, but a conduit of knowledge, a vessel through which the wisdom of our ancestors flows from one generation to the next.

Dr. Pillwax's research explores the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples, shedding light on the enduring impact of colonial policies that criminalized Indigenous land use activities. This led to a disconnection from traditional practices and a loss of cultural knowledge and spiritual identity (Pillwax, 2021). Reflecting on Pillwax's research, I realized the significance of lived experience and blood memory in shaping Indigenous identities and worldviews. The concept goes beyond biological inheritance, encompassing the collective wisdom and experiences of past generations passed down through oral tradition and lived practice. The umbilical cord, once seen as a physical tether, becomes a symbolic link to ancestral knowledge, a conduit through which the wisdom of our forebears flows into our consciousness. Sy (2017) encapsulates the symbolism of the umbilical cord which binds one to their identity, anchoring them to the land, traditions, and stories passed down through generations, "Home is a map, trails, and seasonal camps; map, trails, and seasonal camps, my umbilical cord." (p.13). This symbolic representation underscores the significance Indigenous cultures attribute to the umbilical cord, viewing it as a bridge between past and present, human and divine.

As I stand at the threshold of understanding, I am filled with reverence for the journey that has brought me here; a journey of rediscovery, of reclaiming lost truths, and honouring the legacy of those who came before me. As I journey forward, I carry with me the wisdom of my ancestors, the teachings of my elders and knowledge keepers, and the unshakeable knowledge that within me beats the heart of generations past, guiding me ever onward in the pursuit of truth and meaning.

The Sacred Knot: A Belly Button's Tale

By: Cindy GillisChartrand

In the sacred tapestry of my being,
My belly button emerges as a timeless thread,
An *ohtisiy* binding me to ancestors past,
Their heartbeat echoing through the ages.

It whispers softly of my mother's touch,
A caress transcending time and space,
A gentle reminder of her boundless love,
Her essence woven into the fabric of my being.

With every pulse, it reverberates,
An *ohtisiy* of maternal bonds,
A bridge to the past, a promise for the future,
A testament to the enduring strength of lineage.

As I trace its curves with reverence,
I am reminded of the unbroken chain,
Of the countless hands that shaped my path,
Each leaving an indelible mark upon my soul.

For within this humble navel,
Lies the essence of my existence,
A silent witness to the eternal dance,
In the timeless saga of family and *ki*.

Introduction to the Study

The belly button, often overlooked in its symbolic depth, holds profound significance across diverse cultures, embodying universal themes of identity, spirituality, and cosmic connection. This literature review embarks on a comprehensive exploration of the rich symbolism and cultural practices surrounding the belly button, drawing on insights from ancient beliefs, Indigenous epistemologies, and cosmologies. Through an interdisciplinary lens, the review aims to unveil the timeless symbolism of the belly button and its transformative potential for education, identity, and wholistic well-being.

In the vast expanse of human existence, Indigenous cosmologies stand as ancient repositories of wisdom, offering insights into the interconnectedness of all life forms and the spiritual essence that permeates the universe (Little Bear, 2016; Cajete, 2016). Rooted in oral traditions, ceremonies, and ancestral wisdom passed down through generations, Indigenous knowledge provides understanding of humanity's place within the natural world and the cosmos. Central to Indigenous cosmologies is the symbolism of the umbilical cord, a tangible link between the physical and spiritual realms, serving as a conduit between earthly existence and cosmic connection (Laplante, 2020). Indigenous cosmological beliefs shape cultural identity and understanding of spirituality, nurturing wholistic well-being and resilience among Indigenous learners (Cajete, 2016).

The recent advancements in genetic research, such as the DNA analysis conducted on an early modern human from Tianyuan Cave, China, have illuminated the ways in which our DNA carries not only genetic information but also ancestral instructions that influence our behavior and cultural practices (Fu et al., 2013). Furthermore, the study of epigenetic modifications adds depth to our understanding of the relationship between biology and culture. In the context of Indigenous cosmologies, the convergence of traditional wisdom and contemporary scientific

insights offers a wholistic framework for understanding the significance of the belly button (Couture, 2013). By recognizing the belly button, we acknowledge the richness of our ancestral heritage and embrace a more inclusive and spiritually attuned vision of the future.

This project aims to explore the untapped potential of recognizing the belly button as more than a mere physical remnant but as a profound symbol of identity, ancestral wisdom, and cosmic connection. Through an interdisciplinary lens drawing upon literature from Indigenous studies, education, anthropology, cosmology, and spirituality, this research seeks to uncover the transformative potential of Indigenous perspectives into educational settings, contributing to a more equitable and spiritually attuned future for learners of all backgrounds.

Context and Rationale

Returning to academia, specifically in Educational Policy Studies: Indigenous Peoples Education, stemmed from observing the persistent marginalization of Indigenous communities within the education system (Martineau, 2018). Martineau's insights underscore the enduring trauma inflicted by the education system on Indigenous students, serving as a reminder of the urgent need for transformative change. This recognition of systemic barriers and the disregard for Indigenous cultural identities fueled my determination to contribute to meaningful advocacy for equity and reconciliation in education. Prete's (2021) study further reinforces this imperative, highlighting the ongoing prevalence of racism within educational settings and emphasizing the urgent need for antiracist education to bridge the gap in understanding regarding race and racialization among students.

The legacy of residential schools continues to perpetuate intergenerational trauma and cultural loss among Indigenous communities, as documented by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015). Despite efforts towards reconciliation, Indigenous students continue to

grapple with racism, cultural insensitivity, and low expectations, exacerbating feelings of alienation. Initiatives like the First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education (FNMI) Policy Framework in Alberta strive to incorporate Indigenous perspectives; however, the influence of colonial education persists, further alienating Indigenous youth from their cultural heritage (Alberta Education, 2010).

Furthermore, a lack of awareness and understanding of Indigenous peoples among first-year university students underscores the urgent need for educational interventions prioritizing the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in academic curricula (Schafeli et al., 2018). Scott and Gani's (2018) research sheds light on the challenges faced by social studies teachers in Alberta when integrating Aboriginal perspectives into their teaching practices. Their findings underscore the importance of nuanced approaches to professional development, which must acknowledge and address teachers' resistances and biases. Through fostering meaningful engagement with Indigenous knowledge and perspectives, educators can play a pivotal role in dismantling systemic barriers and cultivating a more inclusive learning environment.

These studies collectively highlight the imperative to confront the legacy of colonialism and its impact on Indigenous communities within educational landscapes. Practical applications of these insights include advocating for policy changes that prioritize Indigenous perspectives in curricula and investing in professional development programs that equip educators with the necessary tools to integrate Indigenous knowledge into their teaching practices. Future research should focus on evaluating the effectiveness of these interventions and exploring additional strategies for advancing equity and inclusivity in education. By foregrounding the symbolism of the belly button and its implications for wholistic, culturally responsive education, this research

endeavors to contribute to a more equitable and spiritually attuned future for learners of all backgrounds.

Research Question:

Building upon the foundation laid by Alberta's First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Framework (2010) and the imperative outlined by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015), this study seeks to delve deeper into the intersection of identity, spirituality, and education. The overarching question guiding this study is twofold: What untapped potential lies within recognizing the belly button as more than a mere physical remnant but rather as a symbol of identity, ancestral wisdom, and cosmic connection? How might harnessing this symbolism inform innovative pedagogical approaches that foster wholistic, culturally responsive education?

Theoretical Framework

Grounded in the educational context of Alberta, this study draws upon Kincheloe's (2011) exploration of critical ontology and Indigenous ways of Being to frame its theoretical approach. Critical ontology challenges us to question not only our knowledge but also our identities, ethics, and politics, providing a lens through which to analyze the complexities of Indigenous education. This framework encourages a nuanced understanding of the dynamics at play within educational systems, particularly concerning Indigenous perspectives and knowledge systems.

The symbolism of the belly button emerges as a central motif in understanding human existence and spirituality, transcending cultural boundaries. Beier (2022) contends that this symbolism serves as a bridge between Indigenous knowledge systems and mainstream educational frameworks, offering insights into innovative pedagogical practices. By acknowledging the belly button's significance across cultures, educators can develop inclusive curricula that honour diverse worldviews and promote cultural sensitivity.

Across diverse cultures, celestial narratives have guided humanity, shaping knowledge systems and spiritual understandings. Laplante's (2020) Connective Stones Theory illuminates the interrelation between physical and spiritual realms, enriching our comprehension of Indigenous cosmologies and their implications for education. This perspective highlights the interconnectedness of all life forms and emphasizes the importance of wholistic approaches to teaching and learning.

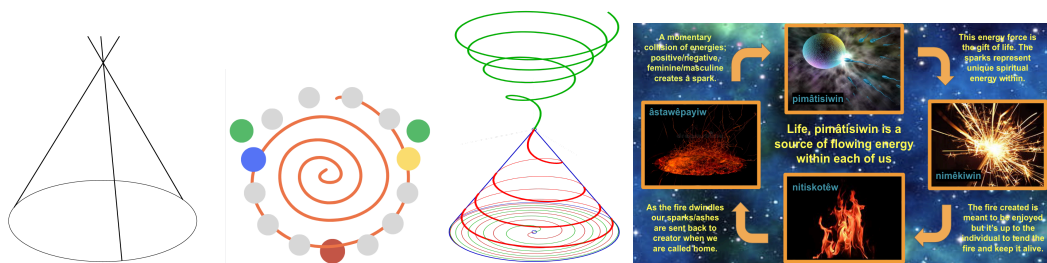
Blackstock's Breath of Life (BOL) theory emphasizes the wholistic nature of human well-being from an Indigenous perspective, underscoring the importance of integrating Indigenous teachings into educational practices (Blackstock, 2009). This integration expands our understanding of human flourishing and fosters a deeper connection to self, community, and the natural world. By incorporating Indigenous perspectives into pedagogical approaches, educators can create learning environments that support students' wholistic development and cultural identity.

By synthesizing Laplante's and Blackstock's theories, we develop a rich and multifaceted understanding of the belly button's symbolism as a conduit between earthly and cosmic realms. This perspective underscores the interconnectedness of humanity and the cosmos, offering insights into Indigenous spirituality and its relevance to education. Recognizing the belly button as a symbol of ancestral wisdom and cosmic connection invites students to explore their identities and spiritual essence within the context of Indigenous teachings.

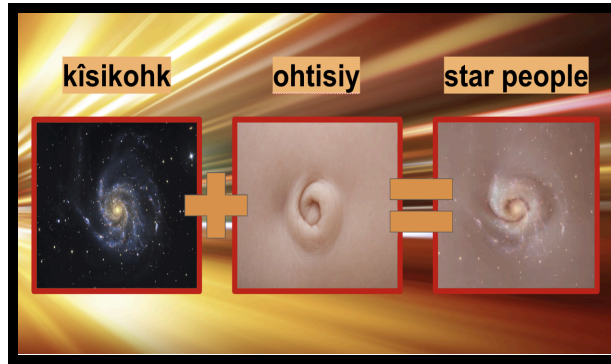
Incorporating Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (2012) work on Indigenous research methodologies ensures a culturally sensitive approach to educational inquiry, centering Indigenous perspectives and knowledge systems in the research process. This methodological framework emphasizes the importance of reciprocal relationships and ethical engagement with Indigenous communities,

promoting collaboration and mutual respect in research endeavors. Through a rigorous application of Indigenous research methodologies, this study seeks to honour Indigenous ways of knowing and contribute to the advancement of Indigenous education scholarship.

Furthermore, Knudsen's (2004) reflection on the symbolism of the circle as a spiral deepens our understanding of existence and spirituality, highlighting the cyclical nature of human experience and the interconnectedness of all life forms. This wholistic perspective encourages us to consider the broader context of our educational endeavors, recognizing the impact of our actions on future generations and the natural world. By embracing the spiral of knowledge and wisdom, educators can cultivate a learning environment that fosters curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking skills.



In considering ourselves as spiritual entities inhabiting physical forms, we find resonance with Indigenous cosmologies that interpret the belly button not merely as a physical remnant but as a symbol of our spiritual essence. Linking the imagery of the belly button to the cosmic expanse of the Milky Way serves as a poignant reminder of our intrinsic connection to the universe and the cosmic odyssey we undertake in our physical existence. This symbolic representation encourages reflection on our position within the expansive tapestry of creation, acknowledging the inherent sanctity of our being and the perpetual interplay between spirit and substance.



Embracing Indigenous perspectives in educational frameworks celebrates the interconnectedness of all life and embraces the wisdom inherent in cosmic order, offering learners an opportunity to thrive within the interconnected web of existence. Recognizing the belly button as a conduit for ancestral wisdom and cosmic connectivity invites students to explore the depths of their identity and spiritual essence. Grounded in Indigenous traditions and teachings, this journey of self-discovery facilitates a comprehension of one's role within the interconnected fabric of life. By nurturing the spirit and venerating the sacred significance of the belly button as a bridge between earthly and cosmic realms, education transcends conventional limitations, becoming a transformative voyage that instills a sense of purpose and belonging.

Methodology

Grounded in Indigenous research principles, this study is guided by a steadfast commitment to contextual relevance, cultural sensitivity, and ethical engagement (Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008; Kovach, 2009). These principles align with the research objectives by ensuring an authentic and respectful exploration of Indigenous ways of knowing and being. Adopting Indigenous methodologies acknowledges the importance of context, purpose, and cultural identity throughout the research process, promoting a wholistic understanding of Indigenous spirituality and education.

Central to the methodology is the concept of Mi'kmaq Elder Albert Marshall's two-eyed seeing, which acknowledges the value of both Indigenous knowledge systems and Western academic frameworks (Bartlett et al., 2012). This approach aims to integrate diverse perspectives, recognizing the strengths and limitations of different knowledge traditions. By engaging in a dialogue between Indigenous and Western epistemologies, the study seeks to bridge the gap between academic scholarship and Indigenous ways of knowing.

The literature review process begins with a systematic search across various scholarly databases, including ERIC, PsycINFO, JSTOR, and Google Scholar. Using keywords such as spirit-centric education, Indigenous spirituality, umbilical cord*, and cosmos, relevant articles, books, and resources are identified. This rigorous approach ensures a comprehensive exploration of Indigenous cosmologies and spiritual perspectives in education, facilitating a nuanced understanding of the subject matter.

A ceremonial approach to research is adopted, guided by principles of respect, reciprocity, and relationality (Wilson, 2008). Each citation is treated as a sacred offering, acknowledging the wisdom and contributions of Indigenous scholars and knowledge keepers. By centering Indigenous voices and perspectives, the study creates a space for dialogue and mutual learning, honouring the diverse ways of knowing that enrich collective understanding. Ceremonies, such as smudging or offering tobacco, are conducted to honour Indigenous protocols and establish respectful relationships with the knowledge shared.

Reflexivity regarding the researcher's positionality as a Métis individual and the ethical responsibilities inherent in Indigenous research is central to this methodology (Kovach, 2009). Each text is approached with humility and openness, recognizing the evolving nature of knowledge and the need for ethical engagement with Indigenous communities. By

acknowledging positionality and ethical considerations, the research upholds integrity and accountability throughout the process, fostering trust and reciprocity with Indigenous communities.

Throughout the methodology, Indigenous voices and insights are integrated, enriching the research process. Many elders and knowledge keepers, including My Indigenous Auntie from Maskwacis, provide rich teachings that offer insight into the significance of family, community, and ancestors in shaping Indigenous identity and education. Their contributions deepen the understanding of the transformative potential of spirit-centric education (Battiste, 2013).

The methodology concludes with an invitation to transcend conventional education and explore the infinite horizons of the cosmos. By empowering Indigenous communities and fostering a more harmonious and spiritually attuned world, the study endeavors to create positive change for generations to come. Through ongoing reflection and dialogue with Indigenous communities, the research aims to refine and enrich its methodology, ensuring its relevance and effectiveness in addressing contemporary educational challenges.

Literature Review

The belly button, often overlooked in its symbolic depth, has intrigued scholars across various disciplines and cultural landscapes, prompting diverse interpretations and reflections. This literature review embarks on a thorough examination of the symbolism and cultural significance surrounding the belly button, drawing insights from a wide array of disciplines. Through this interdisciplinary lens, the review endeavors to reveal the enduring importance of the belly button as a focal point for identity, spirituality, and cosmic interconnectedness.

Ancient civilizations, including Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Mesoamerica, revered the belly button as a sacred emblem infused with profound meaning. Within Egyptian cosmology, it

symbolized the point of creation and the genesis of life (Assmann, 2011). In certain belief systems, humans are regarded as the axis mundi, positioned between heaven and earth (Jordan, 2008). Similarly, Maya cosmology perceived the belly button as the axis mundi, forging a link between the celestial and terrestrial realms (Miller & Taube, 1993). These narratives emphasize the belly button's function as a channel for divine energy and spiritual connectivity.

Indigenous perspectives further enrich our comprehension of the belly button's symbolism, underscoring its role as a sacred conduit between individuals, their ancestors, and the cosmos. Laplante (2020) illuminates Indigenous viewpoints, spotlighting the belly button's significance in the rituals and ceremonies of Indigenous communities. These cultural practices serve to honour ancestral wisdom, fortify communal bonds, and reaffirm cultural identities, thereby deepening our appreciation of the belly button's symbolism within Indigenous epistemologies.

Indigenous Cosmologies: Wisdom of the Ages

Indigenous cosmologies serve as reservoirs of ancient wisdom, transcending temporal and spatial boundaries to provide insights into the interconnectedness of existence (Deloria Jr., 1973; Little Bear, 2009; Cajete, 2000). Gregory Cajete's exploration of Indigenous science, for example, illuminates the ecological wisdom inherent in these cosmologies, emphasizing the intimate relationship between Indigenous peoples and the land (Cajete, 2000). Cajete's insights underscore the importance of sustainable practices and environmental stewardship, urging a reconsideration of humanity's relationship with the environment.

Little Bear, a distinguished member of the Blood Tribe of the Blackfoot Confederacy, further explains the wholistic nature of Indigenous knowledge systems, portraying the universe as a dynamic, interconnected entity pulsating with spiritual energy (Little Bear, 2009). His

perspective challenges conventional scientific paradigms, emphasizing the spiritual and philosophical dimensions of Indigenous cosmologies. This wholistic view offers an understanding of human existence beyond materialistic interpretations.

Wilfred Buck, a respected Cree educator and amateur astronomer, integrates Indigenous cosmologies with contemporary scientific understanding, shedding light on the spiritual significance of celestial bodies (Buck, 2018). Drawing from his Cree heritage, Buck reveals how traditional Indigenous perspectives offer unique insights into the cosmos, emphasizing the stars as spiritual guides and symbols of interconnectedness. His work bridges Indigenous wisdom with modern scientific inquiry, enriching both fields with a deeper understanding of the universe.

Annette Lee, a Dakota astronomer, enriches our understanding by exploring Indigenous sky knowledge, highlighting its cultural significance beyond scientific observation (Lee, 2018). Lee demonstrates how Indigenous peoples utilize the stars not only for navigation but also as markers of time, seasonal changes, and spiritual significance. By integrating Indigenous perspectives into scientific discourse, Lee's research fosters a more comprehensive understanding of celestial phenomena and their cultural significance.

Scholarly contributions by Vine Deloria Jr., Shawn Atleo, and Tháthánka Íyotake underscore the intricate web of relationships embedded within Indigenous cosmologies (Deloria, 1973, 1969; Atleo, 2011; McLaughlin, 1980). These works offer valuable insights into Indigenous spiritual cosmologies and advocate for a return to Indigenous ways of knowing as a pathway to sustainability and harmony. Their research highlights the need for mutual respect and collaboration between Indigenous knowledge systems and Western scientific paradigms.

Indigenous oral traditions encode complex astronomical knowledge within cultural narratives, bridging scientific understanding with cultural interpretation (Hamacher &

Visuvanathan, 2018). This synthesis of diverse perspectives fosters cultural continuity and reinforces the interconnectedness of humanity with the celestial realm. By recognizing the significance of Indigenous oral traditions, contemporary society can gain a deeper appreciation for the interconnectedness of all life forms and the wisdom embedded in Indigenous cosmologies.

In conclusion, Indigenous cosmologies offer wholistic frameworks that transcend disciplinary boundaries, encompassing spiritual, ecological, and philosophical dimensions. As we navigate the complexities of the modern world, the insights gleaned from Indigenous cosmologies guide us toward harmony, sustainability, and interconnectedness with all life forms. Embracing Indigenous perspectives fosters a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of the universe and our place within it.

Symbolism of the Umbilical Cord

In various cultures worldwide, the navel and umbilical cord hold deep symbolic significance beyond their physical attributes, representing spiritual interconnectedness, ancestral wisdom, and cosmic origins. This symbolism extends beyond the individual to encompass broader connections within the universe. As Ilich Lee aptly puts it, every human being has a belly button, signifying our shared origin and interconnectedness (Lee, 2016). This sentiment echoes across cultural contexts, as expressed by Bell, who speaks of the umbilical cord as the tether that connects individuals to their birth and life's journey (Bell, 2014). Buck's narrative of Kisikookuk, or Star Woman, descending to Earth via an umbilical cord woven by Kokminow, the first grandmother, further illustrates the symbolic significance of the umbilical cord in Indigenous cosmologies (Buck, 2018).

Within Indigenous cultures, the navel serves as a conduit between earthly and cosmic realms, embodying the interconnectedness of all creation and the potential for spiritual transcendence. Scholars such as Beier (2022) underscore the implications of the navel's symbolism, highlighting its role as a powerful metaphor for bridging Indigenous knowledge systems with mainstream frameworks. Couture (2013) further emphasizes that in Indigenous cosmologies, there exists a wholistic understanding of existence, devoid of separation.

In Indian culture, particularly within the context of yoga philosophy, the navel holds significant symbolic importance as the center of the body's energy and vitality. The Chakra, associated with the navel center, is believed to be the source of personal power, self-esteem, and willpower. It is considered the seat of Agni, the fire element, which governs transformation, both physically and spiritually (Yoga Journal, 2020).

Annette Lee's description of Indigenous rituals surrounding the umbilical cord illuminates the symbolic return to the stars after birth, highlighting the spiritual connection between individuals and celestial realms (Lee, 2018). This sentiment is echoed by Métis doula Candace Neumann, who teaches workshops on making pouches to hold umbilical cord stumps, highlighting the connection these stumps symbolize to parents, ancestors, and the land (Lilley, 2021). Traditional practices such as these, as Muir, a Cree Métis mom, explains, imbue children with a sense of purpose and place in the world, reinforcing the significance of the umbilical cord beyond its physiological function (Lilley, 2021).

Additionally, the article by Szmigielska explores how the landscape is a symbolic and spiritual entity that shapes the identity of the Uriankhai nomads, likening their connection to the Altai Mountains to being bound by an umbilical cord (Szmigielska, 2015). Dr. Makare Stewart-Harawira's teachings about the umbilical cord, referred to as *pito*, and the placenta,

known as whenua, further emphasize the cultural significance of the umbilical cord as a symbol of connection to land, ancestors, and the cosmos (Personal communication, M. Stewart-Harawira, 2024). She evokes the belly button as not only the physical center of emotions but also as a portal to the stars and the beginning of time itself. This emotional resonance adds another layer of depth to our understanding, highlighting the deeply felt connection that individuals in various cultures have with these symbols of origin and continuity.

Nomalanga Mkhize and Mathe Ntšekhe's work on *Ukuzwa ngenkaba: connecting with African ways of knowing through the umbilical cord* (2023) illuminate the significance of the umbilical cord in African cultures, while Bell's exploration of *Ngarrindjeri wurruwarrin: A world that is, was, and will be* (Bell, 2014) offers insights into the Indigenous cosmology of the Ngarrindjeri people. Additionally, teachings from the Navajo, South American, and Ural Mountains cultures emphasize the universal symbolism of the umbilical cord as a nexus of spiritual and cultural connection.

Furthermore, Laplante's scholarship delves into the Connective Stones Theory, offering insights into Indigenous cosmologies and the symbolism surrounding the human body. Laplante's work enriches our understanding by emphasizing the significance of the naval as a conduit between earthly and cosmic realms within Indigenous cosmologies. This theory highlights the symbolic significance of Earth-Sky relationships, offering a framework for understanding human existence within the broader context of the cosmos (Laplante, 2020).

Santoro's article, *Liminal Biopolitics: Towards a Political Anthropology of the Umbilical Cord and the Placenta*, investigate the political and anthropological dimensions of the umbilical cord, adding a layer of understanding to its cultural significance (Santoro, 2011). By exploring the political implications of bodily processes like birth and the role of the umbilical cord in

shaping social and cultural frameworks, Santoro's work contributes to a deeper comprehension of Indigenous perspectives on interconnectedness and identity.

In conclusion, these perspectives highlight the umbilical cord's symbolism in shaping cultural identity, spirituality, and interconnectedness. The symbolism of the navel and umbilical cord in Indigenous cultures encapsulates millennia of wisdom, spiritual insight, and cultural continuity. Indigenous peoples reaffirm their interconnectedness with the natural world and the wisdom of their ancestors through prayer, ceremonies, and cultural practices, reminding us to honour the sacred interconnectedness of all life.

Spirituality, Identity, and Wholistic Well-being: Nurturing Connection and Balance

Spirituality serves as a guiding force within Indigenous cultures, shaping individuals' understanding of the world and fostering a sense of connection and identity within communities. Marie Battiste's insights into Indigenous knowledge systems highlight the continuous learning process embedded within spirituality, suggesting that individuals are born into a world guided by spiritual forces that shape their sense of purpose and identity (Battiste, 2002). This perspective underscores that spirituality is not merely a set of beliefs but a dynamic force that informs individuals' relationships with themselves, their communities, and the cosmos.

Indigenous spiritual practices, such as ceremonies, rituals, and storytelling, play a vital role in transmitting cultural knowledge and fostering a sense of belonging within communities. Leroy Little Bear (2009) emphasizes the transformative power of ceremonies, illuminating their role in reaffirming cultural identities and honouring ancestral teachings. These practices serve as conduits for connecting individuals to their cultural heritage, fostering a sense of continuity and belonging that strengthens collective identity.

Couture's exploration of Indigenous spirituality as inherently wholistic highlights its interconnectedness with mind, body, and spirit (Couture, 2013). This perspective suggests that spirituality not only nurtures individual well-being but also fosters a deep sense of emotional and psychological balance. By acknowledging the interconnectedness of all dimensions of existence, Indigenous spirituality offers a wholistic framework for understanding identity as fluid and multifaceted, encompassing spiritual, mental, and physical dimensions.

Moreover, Indigenous spirituality serves as a source of solace and healing during times of adversity, offering pathways towards individual and collective well-being. Vine Deloria Jr.'s writings inquire into the spiritual dimensions of Indigenous worldviews, emphasizing their role in promoting individual and collective wellness (Deloria, 1979). Deloria challenges Western notions of health by emphasizing the interconnectedness of spiritual, mental, and physical aspects of well-being, inviting critical examination of how Indigenous spiritual practices contribute to a wholistic understanding of identity and well-being.

Stan Wilson's emphasis on the spiritual significance of land within Indigenous cosmologies further deepens our understanding of Indigenous identity. The land is not merely a physical landscape but a sacred entity imbued with spiritual energy and meaning. Indigenous relationships with the land serve as foundational aspects of identity, fostering a sense of connection and belonging to place (Wilson, 1998). Wilson's insights prompt critical reflection on how Indigenous connections to the land shape individual and collective identities, grounding communities in a sense of rootedness and continuity.

Finally, the symbolism of the umbilical cord within Indigenous spiritual traditions underscores the interconnectedness of all life forms and the continuity of existence across generations. Through ceremonies and rituals surrounding birth and the umbilical cord,

Indigenous communities reaffirm their spiritual connection to the land and their cultural heritage. Santoro's exploration of the umbilical cord as a symbol of spiritual connection invites critical reflection on how Indigenous spiritual practices contribute to a sense of identity rooted in intergenerational wisdom and continuity (Santoro, 2011).

In conclusion, spirituality, identity, and wholistic well-being are deeply intertwined within Indigenous cultures, shaping individuals' sense of belonging, purpose, and connection to the natural world. By honouring Indigenous knowledge systems and spiritual practices, we can learn valuable lessons about fostering harmony, resilience, and interconnectedness within ourselves and the broader community. As we navigate the complexities of the modern world, these insights offer a guiding light for promoting healing, balance, and wholeness for future generations.

Intersectionality of Indigenous Cosmologies and Western Science

The intersection of Indigenous cosmologies with contemporary scientific paradigms represents a meeting point of diverse epistemologies, offering insights into the fundamental nature of the universe. This convergence challenges traditional disciplinary boundaries, inviting critical analysis and deeper exploration into the interconnectedness of Indigenous knowledge systems and Western scientific frameworks.

Indigenous scholars such as Gregory Cajete and Vine Deloria Jr. have played pivotal roles in fostering dialogue between Indigenous cosmologies and Western science. For instance, Cajete's work on American Indian Epistemologies advocates for recognizing Indigenous knowledge as inherently wholistic and spiritually grounded (Cajete, 2005). He emphasizes the interconnectedness of all phenomena within Indigenous worldviews, contrasting sharply with the reductionist approach often seen in Western scientific inquiry. Similarly, Deloria Jr.'s writings

critique the limitations of Western scientific paradigms in capturing the depth and complexity of Indigenous cosmologies, urging a reevaluation of Indigenous perspectives that emphasize reciprocal relationships and interconnectedness (Deloria Jr., 2006).

Dr. Sawicki, an astrophysicist working on the James Webb Space Telescope, provides valuable insights into the convergence of Indigenous and scientific worldviews. Their research underscores the shared understanding of cosmic interconnectedness, as evidenced by the elemental composition of the universe. Dr. Sawicki's assertion that "We would not exist without the very first generation of stars that formed after the Big Bang" highlights the parallel between scientific discoveries and Indigenous teachings on the origins of life (MacLean, 2022). This convergence challenges Western science to acknowledge Indigenous contributions to understanding the cosmos and to critically evaluate its own epistemological frameworks.

Annette Lee's exploration of Indigenous sky knowledge offers insights into the cultural significance of celestial phenomena. Lee's research demonstrates how Indigenous peoples have long viewed the stars not merely as astronomical entities but as spiritual guides and markers of time (Lee, 2018). This perspective aligns with contemporary scientific understandings of stellar evolution while emphasizing the spiritual dimensions often overlooked in Western scientific discourse.

Buck's research on celestial calendar paintings and digital storytelling illustrates the integration of Indigenous knowledge into STEM education, challenging traditional Eurocentric perspectives (Buck, 2018). Laplante's exploration of the Plains Cree Connective Stones Theory further deepens our understanding of Indigenous cosmologies and their integration with Western scientific concepts (Laplante, 2020). However, significant challenges persist, including colonial

legacies and power imbalances within academic institutions, hindering genuine collaboration and mutual respect.

In conclusion, the intersectionality of Indigenous cosmologies and Western science presents an opportunity for interdisciplinary dialogue and mutual learning. By critically engaging with Indigenous perspectives within scientific discourse, we can enrich our understanding of the universe and foster greater cultural diversity and respect. This convergence invites us to transcend disciplinary boundaries and embrace the wisdom embedded in Indigenous cosmologies, leading to a more inclusive and wholistic approach to scientific inquiry and education.

Findings and Discussion:

Synthesis: The Belly Button as a Nexus of Identity and Indigenous Wisdom

Exploring the symbolic significance of the belly button across cultures unveils a convergence point where personal identity, ancestral wisdom, and cosmic connection intersect. In Indigenous cosmologies, the belly button transcends its physicality, embodying a tangible link to the past and a conduit for spiritual energy that transcends temporal and spatial boundaries (Lee, 2018). This symbolism underscores the interconnectedness of individuals with their cultural heritage and the wider universe.

Identity Formation and Cultural Continuity:

At the core of Indigenous cosmologies lies a profound reverence for interconnectedness, where individuals are deeply intertwined with their community, ancestors, and the natural world. The belly button symbolizes this interconnectedness, signifying the continuity of cultural identity across generations. Rituals, stories, and teachings surrounding the umbilical cord reaffirm Indigenous peoples' connections to ancestral lands, kinship networks, and spiritual realms

(Neumann, 2021; Lee, 2018). Annette Lee's research highlights Indigenous rituals associated with the umbilical cord, emphasizing its symbolic return to the stars after birth and its spiritual significance (2018). Additionally, Métis doula Candace Neumann's workshops delve into the profound meaning of umbilical cord stumps to parents, ancestors, and the land (2021).

Pedagogy and Resilience:

Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing encompass wholistic perspectives that acknowledge the interconnectedness of all aspects of life. Recognizing the belly button as a symbol of identity and ancestral connection informs culturally responsive pedagogical approaches, empowering students to embrace their heritage with pride. Through storytelling, experiential learning, and engagement with Indigenous elders, educators foster resilience, pride, and a sense of belonging.

Drawing upon the insights of scholars like Cajete, educators integrate Indigenous cosmologies into the curriculum, providing a comprehensive understanding of the world (Cajete, 2000). Cajete's emphasis on interconnectedness resonates with Indigenous teachings, offering a transformative educational framework. Incorporating Indigenous sky stories and traditional knowledge into science education, as demonstrated by Wilfred Buck's research on celestial calendar paintings, validates Indigenous ways of knowing and fosters inclusivity (Buck, 2019).

Wholistic Well-being and Spiritual Fulfillment:

Spirituality occupies a central role in Indigenous cosmologies, offering insights into the human condition and our relationship with the natural world. Couture (2013) emphasizes that within Indigenous cultures, spirituality is not merely a set of beliefs but a way of life deeply intertwined with cultural practices and values. Battiste (2002) provides insights into Indigenous knowledge systems, highlighting their continuous learning process and the spiritual forces that

shape individuals' sense of purpose and identity. Ermine (1995) further illuminates the importance of prioritizing community and familial connections in education, laying the groundwork for students' wholistic development and engagement.

The symbolism of the belly button serves as a potent reminder of our spiritual interconnectedness, symbolizing the link between the physical and spiritual realms and connecting us to celestial realms and the wisdom of our ancestors (Lee, 2018). Ceremonies, teachings, and practices rooted in Indigenous spirituality nurture spiritual well-being by fostering a deep sense of connection to the land, community, and cosmic forces (Personal Communication, Elder J. Crier, 2023). These spiritual practices provide individuals with the wisdom and resilience needed to navigate life's challenges with wisdom and grace.

Elder John's Crier's teachings highlight the spiritual and cultural significance of the umbilical cord as a bridge between mother and child, land, ancestors, and celestial beings (John, Personal Communication, 2023). His insights, passed down through generations, transcend academic discourse, resonating deeply with Indigenous spirituality and affirming the interconnectedness of all life. Furthermore, Szmigielska's exploration of the landscape as a symbolic entity shaping identity underscores the cultural significance of the umbilical cord, weaving together tradition and contemporary understanding (Szmigielska, 2015). Through these teachings and explorations, individuals are guided to understand their place within the intricate web of existence, fostering spiritual fulfillment and a deep sense of purpose.

Discussion:

Exploring the symbolism of the belly button and its implications for education reveals a wealth of insights drawn from scholarly inquiry and Indigenous wisdom. This discussion navigates various dimensions of education, delving into the nuanced development of individual

identity, cultivation of critical thinking skills, nurturing of spirituality, integration of Indigenous knowledge, reevaluation of institutional norms, celebration of familial and communal bonds, and exploration of cosmic interconnectedness.

At the heart of educational endeavors resides the imperative to foster the unique identity of each learner, a process intricately entwined with their cultural heritage, personal narratives, and social contexts (Battiste, 2002). Embracing culturally resonant literature, art, and music within the curriculum validates students' diverse cultural identities, nurturing a sense of belonging and pride (Little Bear, 2000). Additionally, Alberta Education underscores the pivotal role of creating inclusive and supportive learning environments that cater to the diverse needs of students, thereby promoting positive mental health and collaborative relationships within the educational community (Alberta Education, 2010).

Challenging the prevailing educational paradigms, educators must prioritize the cultivation of robust knowledge frameworks and critical thinking abilities over mere memorization. Battiste (2002) emphasizes the importance of nourishing the learning spirit, suggesting that true learning emerges from within, fueled by natural curiosity and experiential exploration. Inspired by Indigenous pedagogies, educators are encouraged to foster critical inquiry by prompting students to challenge assumptions and engage in meaningful discourse (Couture, 2013). Exposure to diverse perspectives not only cultivates critical thinking but also nurtures empathy, equipping students to navigate an increasingly interconnected world as informed global citizens.

While spirituality often remains marginalized within educational discourse, its significance cannot be overstated. Integrating land-based practices, mindfulness, and reflective activities into the curriculum empowers students with tools for self-awareness and emotional

regulation, drawing from the profound insights of Indigenous scholars (Battiste, 2002; Little Bear, 2000). This wholistic approach to spiritual development fosters a sense of purpose and connection to self, community, and the natural world.

Indigenous knowledge systems offer invaluable perspectives on humanity's interconnectedness with the land, community, and cosmos (Cajete, 2000). Collaborating with Indigenous elders and infusing Indigenous perspectives into curricula enriches students' learning experiences, fostering intercultural understanding and respect (Little Bear, 2000). Initiatives such as the Indigenous Knowledge Systems Project seek to bridge Western scientific paradigms with Indigenous wisdom, thereby promoting a more wholistic approach to education (IKSP, 2015).

The institutionalization of education often hampers students' wholistic development and autonomy (Battiste, 2002). Advocating for policies grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing and flexible learning pathways empowers students to actively shape their educational trajectories (Ermine, 1995). Prioritizing community and familial connections before formal schooling is crucial for laying the groundwork for students' wholistic development and engagement with their cultural heritage (Cajete, 2005). This emphasizes the importance of building strong relationships within the community and family context prior to students' formal education. By doing so, educators create a foundation for students to develop a strong sense of identity, belonging, and understanding of their cultural background, which is essential for their overall growth and academic success.

Family and community involvement are foundational elements of a comprehensive educational approach, providing students with essential support and stability for their growth (Battiste, 2002; Little Bear, 2000). Educators play a pivotal role in fostering meaningful connections between students, families, and communities, ensuring that each student's

educational journey is firmly rooted in their cultural heritage and community ties. By prioritizing these connections, educators create an environment that nurtures students' wholistic development and strengthens their sense of belonging and identity.

Interdisciplinary studies play a crucial role in enhancing students' comprehension of existence and consciousness (Cajete, 2000). By integrating Indigenous perspectives into STEM education, educators promote cultural diversity and facilitate a more nuanced understanding of scientific concepts. Additionally, contemplative educational practices, as advocated by scholars like Couture (2013) and Little Bear (2009), encourage students to engage with existential inquiries and develop an appreciation for their place within the cosmos

In essence, the integration of the belly button's symbolism into education holds transformative potential. By prioritizing the wholistic development of individual identity, fostering critical thinking skills, nurturing spirituality, prioritizing Indigenous knowledge, reevaluating institutional norms, celebrating familial and communal bonds, and exploring cosmic interconnectedness, educators can create inclusive learning environments that empower students to thrive academically, emotionally, and spiritually. This journey is underpinned by a passion for wholistic education that honours diverse perspectives and cultivates deep connections between learners, their communities, and the wider universe.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has explored the symbolic significance of the belly button across diverse cultures, illuminating its transformative implications for education. By acknowledging the belly button as a potent symbol of identity, ancestral wisdom, and cosmic connection, we unlock invaluable insights that inspire innovative pedagogical approaches. Drawing from the foundational frameworks established by Alberta's First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Framework

(2010) and the imperative set forth by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015), this study underscores the pivotal role of Indigenous perspectives into educational paradigms.

Through the cultivation of wholistic, culturally responsive education, the objective is to promote greater cultural understanding, equity, and interconnectedness in learning environments.

Fostering meaningful dialogue and collaboration between diverse knowledge systems aims to contribute to the cultivation of a more inclusive and harmonious educational ethos, grounded in respect for cultural heritage and the interconnectedness of all beings. Ultimately, this exploration of the belly button's symbolism prompts the embrace of collective action and mutual respect.

Educators and policymakers alike can harness its transformative potential to catalyze positive change resonating across generations and cultures. As spiritual beings experiencing the physical realm, nurturing our inner flame becomes imperative, illuminating the path toward a more inclusive, equitable, and compassionate educational landscape - one that celebrates diverse perspectives and fosters connections between learners, communities, and the vast universe.

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