

**The Mountains Separate Us But the Land Connects Us: How nehiyaw Can Make  
Connections with Secwepemc and Salish Knowledge**

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# The Mountains Separate Us But the Land Connects Us: How nehiyaw Can Make Connections with Secwepemc and Salish Knowledge

## Abstract:

Reviewing literature that discusses traditional nehiyaw and Secwepemc ways of knowing, this project examines how understandings of holism and traditional wisdom from the two ways of knowing can be brought together to guide us as educators.

## Keywords:

Nehiyaw, Secwepemc, holism, wisdom, traditional knowledge, relation to land, identity, wahkohtowin, wicihtowin, four directions, balance.

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### Dedication

This paper is dedicated to my daughter, Amelia Eileen, and my son, Augustine Francis. I hope that when you read this you can find a piece of who you are as nehiyaw and Secwepemc people and this will guide you to further that understanding. Thank you for showing me what true love and patience are and for always waiting for daddy to finish his homework. I love you both very much!

To my wife, Melanie, you are my rock and I am so grateful that you came into my life. Your support has guided me to where I am today and if it wasn't for your love, guidance, and support I would have quit school a hundred times over. Nanaskamaw, nicimos.

To Dwayne and Bob, thank you for taking the time to walk with and guide a naive young man to reach this point. I am grateful that I have met you two and have been able to work alongside each of you. I will forever have gratitude for the experiences I have shared with you two.

Thank you to all of my Graduate Studies professors: Dr. Sean Lessard, Dr. Jean Clandinin, Dr. Cathryn Van Kessel, Dr. Jason Wallin, Dr. Trudy Cardinal, and Dr. Rebecca Sockbeson, and Dr. Norma Nocente. I hope that all that you have taught me can be shared and honoured here in a good way. Aiy hiy!

As well, thank you to my parents, LaVerne and Virginia, who have always done their best, -no matter the circumstance- to take care of our family. I hope that I can honour what you have given me all of my life. I love you both very much!

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## Chapter One: Introduction

*Ahaw, nitotemtek. Naim Cardinal nitisiykason. Kiwetinohk ohci. Ninikikwak Virginia ekwa LaVerne Cardinal. Niya nehiyaw.*

It is always customary as a nehiyaw (Cree; four part person) to introduce myself in a way that will allow myself to acknowledge the land where I come from and my parents. This will provide you with a better understanding of who I am and where I come from. It is important for me as a nehiyaw to honour my ancestors and the relations I have with all the beings of this earth. I am hoping that what I share with you today can honour those who have walked this earth before me but, also those who I continue to walk alongside today and also in the future. I am grateful for this day and would like to acknowledge the Creator first and foremost for the blessings that have been bestowed upon us that have given us life since time immemorial. Aiy Hiy! Nanaskamaw Kisemanito!

I am a father, an educator, and a student but, before identifying myself using any of these nouns, I always identify myself as a nehiyaw (Cree) person first and foremost. I acknowledge that I am nehiyaw first because if I do not understand who I am as a nehiyaw, then I do not know who I am in any of those other roles. As a nehiyaw person I do my best to follow traditional nehiyaw teachings in all aspects of my life and bring that knowledge into my life in various ways. Thus, I begin this as a way of sharing how I understand who I am as a nehiyaw and not as a way of providing any type of teachings or a sharing of traditional knowledge as I realize I have not earned the right to do so. Moreover, I understand who I am based on oral history and

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teachings that have been passed down from generation to generation since time immemorial. For the purposes of this paper, I will be referring to First Nations, Metis, and Inuit people as Indigenous, Native, Aboriginal or Indian. Additionally, when referring to myself, I may use the words nehiyaw or Cree.

For nehiyaw people, the eagle that provides us with an overall guiding vision in our lives, and for myself, that includes work that I do as a teacher educator. (Bob Cardinal, personal communication, 2017). The eagle is always overhead watching with great vision and contemplating ways to look for balance in our lives. I rely on the eagle to be my guide and to provide me with the vision I need to be a nehiyaw in the best way possible. The eagle has guided me to the teachings of the four directions which teaches us how to lead balanced lives and is also seen as a guide for health. These teachings honour the four parts of ourselves that make us nehiyaw: physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional and are found in each direction of the world-north, south, east, and west. After taking some time to think about my identity as a nehiyaw, I have come to understand that it is the four directions which helps me understand my identity as a nehiyaw person. Moreover, I cannot separate these things from who I am or anything I do and I understand that as a person who follows the teachings of the four directions can find that balance they need in their lives. Thus, this capping paper will be separated into four parts which will honour the natural process of life from a nehiyaw perspective: East, South, West, and North. Chapter Two: The East will share my story of my life and journey as a person and educator to the present. Chapter Three: the South will provide an understanding of what is missing in education from a nehiyaw perspective. Chapter Four: The West will provide my personal connections with nehiyaw ways of knowing and what I have learned from these

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perspectives during my journey as an educator and student. Chapter Five: The North will provide my research question which is what can a nehiyaw man learn from BC traditions? As this will explore Secwepemc ways of knowing and how I can connect this knowledge to what I have learned as a nehiyaw person and an educator. Moreover, I am hoping that this knowledge can also be brought into my own life as I have married a Secwepemc woman and we have children who are both Secwepemc and nehiyaw. Their identity is important to me as well as my own relations with Secwepemc people and I am writing this as a way of bringing our worlds together in spirit of good relations.

### **Chapter Two: The East - My personal and educational journey**

I will begin sharing the part of my journey in the East direction. In the east sits the bear who teaches us awareness of emotions and how to use our feelings appropriately. As well, here, we understand how to manage our fear, grief, anger, and loneliness (Bob Cardinal, personal communication, 2017). The sun rises everyday in the east and provides us with life-this is how each day of life begins (Bob Cardinal, personal communication, 2018). Bob Cardinal, who is nehiyaw from Enoch Cree Nation, has been a guide and mentor for me since 2012 and I rely on him for so much in my life. He has taught me and shared so much nehiyaw knowledge for many years which has provided me with a space to re-connect with my nehiyaw identity. However, it was not always this way as growing up I was very disconnected from who I was as a nehiyaw person. I often struggled accepting that I was a First Nation person and tried many ways to hide my true identity. When speaking with friends, I would tell them that in my ancestry there were many Europeans in my background who changed my blood quantum to be less Native than it

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actually was. I just could not find any positivity in being a First Nations person as everywhere I looked we were seen in a negative light. Fortunately, later in my teens I found ways to slowly learn about Cree culture and find some pride in being an Indigenous person.

### **Methodology**

To understand who I am, where I came from, and how I got to where I am today, I believe it is best to start by providing details of my journey from the time I was a child until now.

Absolon (2010) shares

“We speak from our location and announce who we are, where we come from and what our intentions are. In doing so, we are also announcing who we are not and where we do not speak from. Accountability and ethics of oral tradition is thus established and the people now have the power and choice to receive your words or actions. Within this specific doorway [the east] Indigenous wholism implies that we attend to our positionality and locate ourselves (Absolon & Willett, 2005; Monture-Angus, 1995 in Absolon, 2010).

Throughout the next section I will provide several critical experiences on my personal and educational journey that have shaped me to be who I have become today. There were many times when I was marginalized by education and other aspects of society which have led me to where I am today. To effectively provide the reader with an understanding of my experiences, I will draw upon narrative inquiry as methodology to explain how I got to where I am in the present day. I have chosen narrative inquiry because Swanson (2014) explains that “narrative inquiry recognizes and honors the complexities of human experiences and the contexts, which are shaped



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through the past, present, and future via the stories we live and tell.” (Swanson 2014, p. 300). I believe that much of my past has shaped my identity and beliefs in the present and will also have an effect on where I go in the future. I have experienced so much negativity in the past in relation to who I am as an Indigenous person and today I have been able to move past that and find pride in who I am. Moreover, I strongly agree with Lessard (2015) when he states that “working within the three dimensional narrative inquiry space, with the dimensions of temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000 as cited in Lessard 2015), we, [my partners] and I, learned to tell stories of our lives.” (Lessard 2015, p. 4). I am a living testament to my past, present, and future and my views on the world have been guided by my past and will direct me into where I need to go into the future. Further to this, Lessard explains that “we learn by telling our stories in the relational spaces of narrative inquiry.” (p. 4). I believe that the utilization of narrative inquiry allows us to share our stories in a way that provides us with a space to engage with each other through shared thought and feelings.

It is my belief that as someone is able to hear my stories they will gain a better understanding of me as well as providing myself with the ability to think about how impactful my past has been on my life today and the direction I would like it to go. Clandinin & Connelly (2006) explain,

“People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as

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story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study.” (Clandinin & Connelly 2006, p. 375)

Lessard (2014) also reminds us that utilizing narrative inquiry provides a way of looking within and moving in an ethical manner. I am hoping that by sharing my stories, they can provide an understanding of where I come from and can locate my perspectives in a way that the reader can have understanding and perhaps some empathy for my current views on education as I did not have the most positive experience in school. I often struggled in educational spaces in primary, secondary, and post-secondary as I was unable to find connection with curriculum or learning. As Clandinin et al. explain “a key aspect of attending Research Issues is the importance of responding to the stories told in ways that open up possibilities for retelling and reliving stories of experience. This responsibility to respond in these ways requires continuous wakefulness to thinking narratively.” (p. 27). Additionally, I feel that narrative inquiry provides a strong connection to traditional Indigenous ways of knowing as many nations share their history through story and song.

*Kiwetinohk ochi niya - I am from the north*

I was born and raised in Fort Vermilion, AB. and I am a member of the Tallcree First Nation. My parents are LaVerne and Virginia Cardinal (Bow-Noskiye) and their parents are William and Suzette Cardinal (Auger) and Francis and Sarah (Alook). I have three brothers, two sisters, and a cousin whom my parents raised and we accepted as another brother. Both of my

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parents did not complete high school as my mother only completed grade 9 and my father reached the 7th grade. However, they both later returned to school as adults to upgrade coursework for post-secondary programs. My mother, Virginia, attended residential school in Fort Vermilion at the St. Henri's Indian Residential School until it closed in 1968 when she was ten years old. I cannot speak to her experience as she rarely brings it up and I will not ask her about it as I am aware it was not a positive experience for her and thousands of other children. My father, on the other hand, did not have to attend residential school as he was not Status Indian at the time and was only required to attend day school. At day school he was provided with the same education as residential schools but was allowed to go home at the end of the school day. Despite their lack of education, my parents did their best to provide for us and although we grew up in poverty, we never did go hungry. My father was very much connected to the land and would hunt and trap to provide for us. I remember many times going to the bush on hunting trips with my family to look for a moose or some other wild game such as rabbits, ducks, or geese just so we could eat.

Being poor was difficult for me to understand as a child and would often be reminded of it through school. I was an avid reader growing up and my mother signed me up for the Weekly Reader Club for a year and, although I do not know how she paid for it, I was receiving books in the mail almost weekly. Receiving books through the Weekly Read Club for a year was the only way for me to get new books during that year and it made me very happy. However, when the school book fair would arise in the library I was reminded semi-annually about how poor we were. My friends would be buying several books and, despite my continual hopes of being able to buy even one book, I would always be shut down due to the fact that we could not afford it. I

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remember looking at the catalogue to pick out books and then feeling sad and also mad that we were poor. I grew to hate the school book fairs because of my inability to purchase anything at all and the constant reminder school was giving me about our financial situation.

Due to my mother's experience in the Catholic-led Indian Residential School and my father's homelife, we were raised in a way that was guided by the Catholic Church. Soon after I was born I was baptized into the church and later in my life, I attended Catholic School until age 7, took my first communion, and became an Altar Server during church service from age eight until age 10. According to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

*“Servers carry the cross, the processional candles, hold the book for the priest celebrant when he is not at the altar, carry the incense and censer, present the bread, wine, and water to the priest during the preparation of the gifts or assist him when he receives the gifts from the people, wash the hands of the priest, assist the priest celebrant and deacon as necessary.”* (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops website, 2019)

However, prior to becoming an Altar Server, I had to receive my First Communion and at age 8 I attended Sunday School classes at church for several weeks before I was able to accept the “holy bread” in church.

As well, I recall that when I was a child, I looked forward to the time I could become an Altar Server as both of my older brothers, my sister, and many of my older cousins were all Altar Servers. It seemed as though it was a rite of passage for me to take on this role in the church. Furthermore, as a child, I was a very committed Catholic who attended church every

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Sunday-even if I had to go alone. I remember walking by myself from our house to the church soon after waking up on a Sunday to go pray because I felt that it was what I needed to do. As well, it was an opportunity to leave the house by myself as I was never allowed to go alone anywhere else other than church. Around the age of 10, with the blessing of my parents, I stopped being an Altar Server because I felt as though the lady who volunteered to organize the Altar Servers was being too harsh on us and I soon stopped attending church regularly. Following my falling out with her, I only attended church on special occasions such as Christmas, Palm Sunday, and Easter with my family-church just did not feel like the place for me anymore. At the time, my experiences in the Catholic Church had a negative effect on my identity as I was only connected to the church and I knew nothing about being nehiyaw. I do not have ill feelings toward the church and acknowledge the fact that the beliefs that were bestowed upon me took the place of my own nehiyaw beliefs which helped me get through the younger years of my life.

When I reached the age of 15 I was searching for something missing in my life and soon found myself attending a Christian youth group. This group was run by a First Nations man from my community and his wife who was Caucasian. The youth group was held every Friday at their house and although I remember having many positive experiences during the activities, I always felt that when it came time for the bible study portion that there was much fear brought into my life. The youth group leaders would always share prophecies with us from the bible and I always had the feeling that I could never live my life in a way that was good enough for this religion. Additionally, I remember another time being told that Native culture was “the work of the devil” and that smudging and ceremony was a sin. Before that time I had never smudged nor had I been

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to any type of First Nations ceremonies but, felt as though if I did then I would be doing something wrong and would be in need of forgiveness. I remember this experience was pretty damaging and made me feel ashamed of being a First Nations person and that anyone who participated in such things was living their life in a sinful way. People often do not consider the power of words and on this occasion these words were powerful to the point that it caused me to further hate the fact that I was First Nations.

I never recalled school to be a place that I really fit into-other than playing sports or spending time with my friends. Whether I was in Catholic School or the Public School, I never found the educational space of school to be a place that was made for me. As I mentioned earlier, I really struggled with the fact that I was an Indigenous person and never really felt good when our teachers talked about First Nations or Metis people which was almost never and when they did, it was not in good context. I remember when I was in 5th grade Social Studies class and we were talking about Metis people, our teacher referred to Louis Riel as a “mad man” and discussed him as though he was an enemy to Canada. I knew I was not Metis but, I knew that being Metis meant that you were an Indigenous person and I did not feel good about being Indigenous. Indians were seen as a problem to society as they were drunks, lazy, stinky, and I did not want to be any of that.

When I got to High School I struggled to pay attention in class and at one point I was only motivated by basketball to attend. I recall a time when I was in grade 12 English class talking to my friends and laughing very loudly while my teacher walked up to our group to tell us “all you are is a group of nothings and all you will ever be is nothing!” I am sure he was

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frustrated with us but, when I first enrolled in school I never imagined that my teacher would tell me that I was merely “nothing.” At the time I laughed it off but, deep down it was damaging to who I was because he was my teacher and I did not want more people to have a negative view of me in addition to myself. I also knew he was unhappy with me because of the frequent occasions he would catch me in the gym playing basketball when I was supposed to be in the classroom working on English. In addition to these frustrations with me, earlier that year I chose to enroll in English 33 instead of English 30 despite completing English 10 and 20 in the years prior and he told me that I was taking the easy way out (in those days we did not have 30-1 or 30-2 classes in Alberta curriculum). If any of my teachers or counsellors had explained to me that I would not get into university without English 30, I may have made a different decision but, at the time I just wanted to get out of high school.

Following High School, I attended Concordia University College of Alberta (now Concordia University of Edmonton). I was able to gain entry through the “Unclassified Program” which allowed me to take one entry level university course for my first semester of school in an attempt to prove I could be a university student. As well, I would not be able to declare a Faculty or a Major until I successfully completed 24 credits. After obtaining the grade I needed during that first semester, I enrolled in the Winter Term as a full-time student. However, despite my ability to gain the minimal mark I needed to be admitted as a full-time student, I soon found myself floundering and failed one course while barely passing the other two. I was then placed on Academic Probation and was only permitted to take one course again until I could prove myself as a successful post-secondary student. I soon realized that this happened because I did not have the skills or knowledge of a post-secondary student. The behaviours that I had in High

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School were now following me in university and my inability to study, write, or appropriately manage my time was affecting me.

The following year, I decided not to return to school and found myself struggling to find a job as I went through battles with depression and abusing alcohol. I would drink alcohol to kill time while hanging out with my friends and also to try not to think about the fact that I was continuing to see myself negatively due to failing out of school and being unemployed. Finally, after six months of not finding any work, I was able to find a job doing highway maintenance where my main job was as a crack sealer. Day after day I would walk up and down the highway and would pour hot tar into the cracked pavement to slow the process of the pavement cracking. The job helped me pay the bills and gave me a small sense of self-worth because now I was able to pay my own bills and buy things for myself; however, I was very unfulfilled and I recognized that soon after starting with the company. I decided that it was probably in my best interests to return to school despite my supervisors pleading with me to stay on with the company into the Fall season with a pay raise. I greatly appreciated the offer but realized that if I did not go continue with my education that I would continue to work in jobs that were unfulfilling for me and did not provide any long-term stability. Thus, that Fall I returned to Concordia and, although I struggled in my first year back, I was able to obtain the grades I needed to stay in my program. Four years later, although there were plenty of struggles, I became the first person in my immediate and extended family to earn a Bachelor's Degree as I graduated with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Sociology.



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After I graduated from Concordia, I found myself working at Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society (Bent Arrow) and I believe that this was very fundamental to me connecting to my identity as a nehiyaw person. While employed there I was able to connect directly to First Nations Elders who were either Cree or Nakota Sioux and I felt I was learning so much about my culture-I attended my first sweat and learned about so many traditional teachings. Years later, I began working at Centre High Campus in downtown Edmonton, AB. as a First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Liaison. There I was able to work directly with First Nations youth in an educational environment as an academic guide and personal support. Furthermore, the school just started an Aboriginal Studies program and was able to assist in building the course and its curriculum. This really motivated me about being an educator and I decided to return to school at the University of Alberta to become a teacher.

### *Finding Holism*

In October 2012 as I was completing my undergrad, I was enrolled in the EDES 409 “Aboriginal Curriculum Perspectives” course with Dr. Dwayne Donald at the University of Alberta. A component of this class includes teachings of traditional nehiyaw (Cree) wisdom traditions with Bob Cardinal in addition to finding ways of utilizing this type of knowledge in our classroom teaching. Following completion of the course I was able to keep in touch with Dwayne and Bob and was exposed to a different way of living than I was used to prior to our initial engagement. As I mentioned earlier, I felt I was learning so much about nehiyaw culture at my previous job with Bent Arrow; however, after spending time with Bob I realized there was so

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much I was missing. Prior to meeting Bob I was never given the opportunity by anyone to help at ceremony or to attend traditional ceremonies regularly-I really enjoyed it and felt fulfilled.

After graduating in 2015, I continued to work at Centre High Campus in my usual role as First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Liaison. There were opportunities provided to me to apply for teaching positions but I chose not to take them as I felt I was not ready to work as a teacher. I did not feel I was ready because when I completed the AFX practicum for the Secondary Education program, I felt as though I was leading an imbalanced life as I tried to complete my degree. When I speak of balance, I refer to it in nehiyaw terms of being able to meet the needs of all the parts of a human that makes them human-physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental. Being a teacher did not allow much time to be able to attend to much more than the mental part of my life as I was consumed by lesson planning and marking.

The next year I applied to the University of Alberta for graduate studies and was accepted into the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for a Masters in Secondary Education. Applying to graduate studies had never even been a thought of mine when I was in high school or when I was completing my first undergrad. Nobody in my immediate or extended family has ever completed a Master's degree nor have they been enrolled in graduate studies. Thus, looking back, I now realize what a huge move this was in my family. Sometimes I still cannot believe that I am here in Graduate School.

As I entered the first year of the Secondary Education Graduate Studies Program, I was enrolled in a course called EDSE 601 Holistic Approaches to Life and Living. This course was offered over a full year at the University of Alberta and was co-instructed by Elder Bob Cardinal,

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Dr. Dwayne Donald, and Dr. Christine Stewart. As mentioned earlier, I identify as a nehiyaw which I have learned means “four-part person” (Donald, personal communication; 2016) and is used as a way of acknowledging every part that makes up a human being: the emotional, the spiritual, the mental, and the physical. It is important that I acknowledge all of what makes us human in everything we do-including education-and I have come to learn that we do not always do this in our practice.

In the past, I have been fortunate enough to attend ceremonies, act as *oskapewos* (Elders Helper), and take university courses about First Nations experience and history. Furthermore, growing up, my identity as an Indigenous person was never really strong as my educational and personal life experiences were all led by western values. There were times of my life where I felt much more connected with Catholicism and Christianity as I was raised in a Catholic household and later became a Christian as a teenager. However, it was not until later in my life that I was able to connect with culture, spirituality, knowledge, and identity. Once I was immersed in the EDSE 601 course which included a year round study of the moon, land, and of my ecological surroundings-I felt as though my spirit as a nehiyaw person was truly awoken.

I had never taken a course before that was year round and focused on First Nations knowledge and experience beyond academia. The course description states:

*“The intention of the course is to engage with the wisdom teachings of holism for the duration of the four-season cycle which shapes and characterizes the patterns of life and living that have been followed in the northern plains region for millennia. The unique character of the course is that it will combine creative*

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*scholarly explorations on the significance of holism with opportunities to engage in ceremonial and spiritual practices led by the Elder.” (EDSE 601 Holistic Approaches to Life and Living syllabus, 2016).*

The particularities of what was being said about holism, colonial logics, and history by those who worked in research was discussed and strongly considered; however, this was not as important as the process of learning taken on by the students. Our attention was paid to what was taking place as we brought our experiences in the course together with education. The spirit and intent of this course was not to say that academic perspectives are wrong or to undermine them; rather, it was as Elder Bob Cardinal said “the best way of bringing the two worlds together.” (personal communication, 2016). We were always considering ways of how we could enhance current education with what we were learning through traditional nehiyaw holistic practices. For example, we were given the task of taking the mission statement of a post-secondary institution to bring back the “spirit” to it. By referring to the “spirit” we were examining ways of bringing the documents to life. In the worldview of aboriginal peoples, everything from people, animals, trees, stones, minerals, and the natural world is imbued with spirit. Every aspect of nature and life is linked to everything else in some way-everything is one. (Preston; 2016).

Moreover, another intention was to ‘slow down’ our own lives to reflect on what was missing-kikway e-patahenow oma-in our lives and practice as educators. By slowing down, it meant that we would create opportunities for ourselves to put aside our responsibilities of being a student, educator, our employment, and any other obligations we might have to sit and observe what was taking place around us. As well, to see how we can find learning and connection to the

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ecological relationships in our world. Ecological relationships is the understanding that we are all related to each other and the various other entities that inhabit this world. When we are able to bring this understanding into our lives then it becomes easier to be grateful for all that allows us to sustain our lives on this earth (Donald, 2012).

This was so important for us to consider because many of us do not take the time to reflect as we are often caught up with our daily duties as educators, the struggles we often experience with life, and other obligations. When we were able to “slow down” and think, it was easier to appreciate the gifts we were given each day in life. The gifts I am referring to include what is provided for us by the earth and gives us life: the sun, water, the air, animals, the land, etc. Additionally, what many of us found was that a big part of what was missing in our lives was paying attention to what gives us life as human beings and reflecting on *miyo-wahkohtowin* which “teaches that, as human beings, we are enmeshed in series of relationships (human and more-than-human) that gives us life.” (Donald, in Press, p. 11). Additionally, (O’Reilly et al, 2004; Benson et al, 2012) add that ‘wahkohtowin’ is a nehiyaw (Cree) wisdom tradition and a guiding principle for life. This word means “everything is related” and is used to enhance and understand relationships between human beings and every other being on this earth. As well, from my own experiences, I have learned that this principle can be described as a feeling that you are always aware and recognize that you are grateful for what those relationships provide-life.

Reflecting on how we are related to all that surrounds us ecologically provided us with a way of bringing life into pedagogy and providing a better understanding of how our relationships

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with our world and each other could improve. Historically, Canadians and Indigenous people have not always got along and the relationship has typically been one-sided with Canadians dominating this relationship. From the perspective provided by nehiyaw wisdom traditions, it is believed that when we are able to recognize each other as relatives then ultimately our relationships will also improve. As mentioned earlier, for nehiyaw people this is known as *miyo-wicihtowin* which refers to “a healing energy or medicine that is generated when we are actively together with the intention of honouring and respecting the relationships that are enmeshed within.” (Donald & Glanfield, 2011, p. 80). Ermine (2007) acknowledges notion this as an “ethical space” and adds that this space highlights the difference of others while not specifically focusing on it and recognizes that no one way of knowing is better than the other. (Ermine, 2007, p. 194).

Having the opportunity to learn this knowledge from the Elders, Instructors, and the land has been so inspirational and fulfilling for me. I have never left a course feeling as in balance (from a nehiyaw perspective) than this course. I felt as though all the aspects of my life-physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental-had been considered more than ever and caused my spirit to be uplifted. Additionally, EDSE 601 was probably the course that I learned the most from than any other in the past-which is not meant as offense to any instructors I have had as they have all brought knowledge into my life. My experiences in this course have continued to guide me in life and in educational spaces. I have learned much about my relationships with others (human and other beings on this earth), humility, and, for myself, what it means to be a human being in relation to everything else from this knowledge. Much of the wisdom we learn as nehiyaw comes from the places where we spend our time which was shared in our EDSE 601 course and in other

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experiences I had in the past. Our relationships with these places and the acknowledgement that we are relatives (*wahkohtowin*) guides the knowledge we share with each other. I feel strongly that what I have experienced and learned has guided my career as an educator and can be utilized by others if used in the right way. This knowledge and way of knowing is meant for the betterment of the community, never used for personal gain and I feel as though that philosophy of humility is important when it comes to our relationships with others.

### **Chapter Three: The South - Problem or Puzzle?**

In the south sits grandmother mouse who is humble and teaches us to be kind and generous toward others (Bob Cardinal, personal communication, 2017). My teacher, Bob Cardinal, tells us that we cannot separate spirituality from anything we do in our lives as all aspects of life are directly connected back to spirituality. Spirituality is included in the way we walk, talk, think, and interact with others every day of our lives. (Bob Cardinal, personal communication, 2017). In doing so we should approach life and our work in such a way that it is seen and carried out as a ceremony. When things are done in this way you are able to put your love and good intentions into everything a person does. It is ceremony and spirituality that guides me and shows me the way to interact with other people everyday. According to Absolon (2010),

“Each and every being is a spirit being and acknowledging one’s spirit beings with acknowledging oneself. Spiritual knowledge entails awareness and understanding of Aboriginal epistemology and a respectful consciousness or the sacred world to Indigenous peoples. Indigenous wholism implies a balance within all aspects and elements of the whole, which is achieved through

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interconnections, interdependence and interrelationships.” (p. 78) Absolon, K.

(2010)

The central idea of spirituality is the respect of all things and others way of knowing, honour emotional experience and expression, to identify harmful thoughts and put them aside, and to reflect on internal development unalienated from oneself (LaFever, 2016). These ideas are currently missing in western education. (LaFever, 2016). Furthermore, spirituality is a significant aspect of life from an indigenous worldview; neglecting this or any other aspect of your life has significant consequences and will cause imbalance in a person’s life (O'Reilly-Scanlon, K., Crowe, C., & Weenie, A., 2004). The combination of ceremony, spirituality, and traditional teachings that guide us on how to treat one another, maintain balance, and to have miyo-wahkotowin-an understanding that all things are related to each other on earth and must be loved and respected equally (O'Reilly-Scanlon, K., Crowe, C., & Weenie, A., 2004). Unfortunately, according to LaFever (2016), spirituality is often shied away from in schools as many connect spirituality with religion. Despite a part of this being true, it is not completely accurate as spirituality to indigenous people means more than simply prayer. Spirituality is a guide for living daily life and provides moral rules and practices for relationships with others. LaFever (2016) continues by adding that a part of the reason that many shy away from spirituality is because the Oxford dictionary definition of spirituality conveys a worldview that human self-development is separate and disconnected from material circumstances. However, from an indigenous perspective, spirituality is woven into everyday life and cannot be disconnected (LaFever, 2016).



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*A new way to understand the world - Secwepemc*

In 2013, I met my wife, Melanie, who is also a Teacher and completed her degree at the University of British Columbia (UBC) in the NITEP Indigenous Teacher Education Program. Soon after completion of her studies, she moved from Maple Ridge, B.C. to live with me in Edmonton, AB. Her family comes from the Canoe Cree Indian Band located in the interior of British Columbia and her First Nations background is Secwepemc (Shuswap). Living here was really foreign to her as she had a strong connection with the land in B.C.-particularly the water and mountains. Living in Edmonton was a huge change for her and the transition for her was a bit challenging as she took some time to begin to understand nehiyaw customs. While she was living in Vancouver and Maple Ridge she was surrounded by mostly Coast Salish traditions and was beginning to learn more about Secwepemc people-which are both different than the Cree. However, I was hoping she could find something from nehiyaw culture she could connect with while she lived here. She has been finding her way at nehiyaw ceremonies, working in the community, and learning from others but something was always missing.

Today we have two beautiful children named Amelia and Augustine who were both named in ceremony shortly after they were born. Amelia's name is *kihew iskwesis* which means "Eagle Girl" and Augustine's name is *paskwaw mostos awasis* which means "Buffalo Child." Naming children in nehiyaw traditions are key to those children connecting to their ancestry and identity. Pazderka et al, share that "there are names given through ceremony that become a child's spirit name. These names help them connect to their spirit and the spirit world. They have great meaning, and often follow the child throughout his or her lifetime." (Pazderaka et al., 2014,

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p. 59). Naming my children was very emotional and life changing for us as both my wife and I do not have any immediate family members who were named in ceremony-nor were we. This is one example of the ways that my wife and I have been disconnected from our culture and there has been so much we have had to think about since the naming our children. During this time, I often thought about what was missing in my own life or the life of my children and wonder how we can further find ways of giving them knowledge about who they are as nehiyaw people. I love the fact that they are becoming so connected to being nehiyaw; however, I also think about the lack of knowledge we have about their culture and ancestry from their Secwepemc background. This is not the blame of anyone in particular, as I recognize that we have not had many opportunities to learn about their culture living so far away from the land of their ancestors. This situation might be viewed by many as a “problem,” but, from a nehiyaw perspective this would best be viewed this as a “puzzle.” When this “problem” is being viewed from the nehiyaw worldview, one can say that there is no problem; rather, something for us to look at as an opportunity to see what is missing-*kikway e-patahenow oma*? When asking this question we allow ourselves to look within to think of ways we can best live together as human beings and my children need to find a way to live with their relatives here and in British Columbia. Thus, this has led me to the research question: what can a nehiyaw man learn from the traditions of Secwepemc and other Salish people?

*kikway e-patahenow oma? What is missing?*

When considering the experience of Indigenous peoples in the various education systems across Canada, one could say there is a significant problem that does not fit for many Indigenous

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students. There has been a significant difference in completion of High School for Indigenous students when compared to the rest of Canadian students (Stats Canada; 2012). Moreover, there has been a form of ontological violence that affects the well-being of youth as they are trained to believe that their emerging identities are directly tied to “neoliberal market logics and consumerism as a necessary lifestyle choice.” (Donald & Krahn, 2014, p. 120). This has caused humans to guide themselves in ways that primarily focuses on bringing economic prosperity to society as a whole (Donald and Krahn, 2014). Donald and Krahn (2014) add that forcing education based on neoliberal economics takes away from Indigenous peoples to live “according to the inherited communitarian ecological sensibilities of their ancestors-something guaranteed through the treaties.” (Donald & Krahn, 2014, p .121). For Lambe (2003), “the goal of education is to make a common body of worthwhile knowledge, sound ideals, important skills, and other facts equally accessible to students, often through employing lecture-recitation method.” (Lambe 2003, p. 312). If we are not providing any youth with the opportunity to learn about anything other than western perspectives then learning other worthwhile knowledge is not being received. As this occurs, Donald and Krahn (2014) believe that the message being sent to Indigenous youth is that they need to change themselves in order to be successful in the prescribed lifestyle set out for them by colonial society. Which, in the process, has also created a mess where indigenous peoples can no longer identify with their own knowledge bases (Ermine, 2007). Goulet and Goulet also add that “colonization and racism have produced high levels of social and personal problems in Indigenous communities, such as alcohol and drug abuse, violence, suicide, and medical problems.” (Goulet & Goulet, 2014, p. 85).

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Additionally, the manner in which Aboriginal people were and are continually colonized was through racialized ideology and social relations (St. Denis, 2007). St. Denis (2007) adds that these ideas of racial identities are deeply rooted in our institutions such as politics, education, and economics. (St. Denis, 2007). Donald (in Press) has shared that curriculum is focused on promoting a certain kind of human being-homo economicus-who is motivated by self-gain and materials goods. Additionally, this type of curriculum is guided by neoliberal sensibilities and takes away opportunities for students to see other opportunities that may guide them in their lives such as sacred ecology wisdom traditions and spirituality (Donald, in Press).

Donald (in Press) also notes the three mythologies guiding curriculum today as: individualism, progress, and anthropocentrism and are embedded in ways that teach our society that this is the ultimate goal of life. The individualistic human being is one that is a “source of rational thought, innovation, and economic prosperity” (Donald, in Press, p. 4) and is seen as a site of societal success. Progress, which “has grown out of the colonial experience,” (Donald, in Press, p. 5) sees the West as a unified entity and works together to help everyone assist in the realization of the dream of expansion (Donald, in Press). Progress also promotes the “secular, rational, technical, and scientific” ways of life that are seen hierarchically by Western society as the only way to live and is often seen in our curriculum as calls for innovation and forward thinking (Donald, 2016). This cognitive imperialism has created the idea that one worldview is superior to all alternative worldviews (Anuik, J., & Gillies, C. L., 2012). Furthermore, Donald (in Press) discusses how anthropocentrism is used in curriculum as a way of showing students that their needs and interests will always hold precedence over other beings in this world. We have been trained to see these views as normal as the pathologization of youth begins here and

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many of us start to believe that children need to be changed and these ideas do not align with traditional Indigenous foundational knowledge (Donald & Krahn, 2014). These philosophies shared by Donald and Krahn (2014) along with the inability to meet the needs of Indigenous youth shows that our education system needs to move beyond the approaches of the past in order to appreciate other knowledge systems and this stems beyond indigenous ways of knowing. (O'Reilly-Scanlon, K., Crowe, C., & Weenie, A., 2004). There is a belief that as educators we are doing great harm to children as we are telling them that the only valuable knowledge in this world are western ideas and not their own (Anuik, J., & Gillies, C. L., 2012).

### **Chapter Four: West - What I have learned from nehiyaw ways of knowing**

#### *Literature Review*

In the west sits the Thunder Being who teaches us to communicate in respectful ways and also about the gift of life and living. The Thunder Being teaches us about ethical relationships, to learn about self, and to learn about care for others. (Bob Cardinal, personal communication, 2017). While being an educator, I have found that the biggest guide for the work that I have done with youth has been what I have learned from Indigenous wisdom, ethical relationality, and holism. According to Latremouille et al. (2016), "...holism involves honouring ourselves by honouring the various more-than-human entities that give us life. Balance comes from that honouring and from holistic balance comes the ability to act in ethically relational ways." (Latremouille et al., 2016, p. 9). Donald further explains in Latremouille et al. (2016) that "wisdom insights guide us to realize that we often have the most to learn at the very moment that we think we have it all figured out." (Latremouille et al., 2016, p. 9). This has allowed me to approach life and teaching as a way of creating ethical relationships with my students and peers.

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According to Donald (2012), ethical relationality is an ecological understanding of human relationality that does not deny difference but seeks to understand how these differences can relate us. Ermine (2007) further explains that our daily interactions can infringe or violate others, thus, an ethical space must be created in order to have reflection and not overstep any boundaries while having relationships with other people. Moreover, LaFever (2016) shares that thinking about relationships is a step toward interdependence and beyond the self. This is important as one's identity is formed in relation to a group as relatives and involves striving for unconditional respect (LaFever, 2016).

### *Importance of Balance - The Four Directions*

One of the key teachings that I have learned from nehiyaw perspectives is the teachings of the four directions. The four directions, as I referenced early on in this paper, are what guide us in life and living as nehiyaw people. Another name for the four directions that some have come to know these teachings by and carries some of the same concepts is the “medicine wheel.” The medicine wheel has widespread use and has been found to be a useful tool to bridge understanding between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples (LaFever, 2016). However, despite the widespread use of the medicine wheel, there are different teachings and meanings in the different regions of Indigenous country. According to Preston (2016), the medicine wheel teaches balance in one's life through the aspects of physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental. Miyo-mahcihoyan are the things that are needed for good health and are guided by the medicine wheel which takes into account the physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental aspects of your life. It is believed that when you are able to meet the needs of all those aspects of life then you have

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attained true health (Graham & Martin, 2016). Padzerka et al. (2014) share that Elder teachings tell them that when a person does not have balance in their life, negative issues are caused and there is a greater need to focus on the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual aspects of life. Preston (2016) also believes there is a great need for schools to focus more on teaching balance and less on 'work' and 'rigour.' Styres, S. D., & Zinga, D. M. (2013) also share that the institutional educational systems have tended to only focus on physical and mental aspects of each person and do not teach balance. McNally adds that "such a wholistic framework provides a concrete tool toward understanding the nature of balance, harmony, and 'Bimaadsiwin'-living a good life. It acknowledges the factors that contribute toward achieving that sense of peace and balance" (McNally, 2004, p. 76) which is what Indigenous epistemologies strive for in life.

Jodi Latremouille, who wrote *Raising a Reader: Teachings from the Four Directions* (2016), shared some of her experiences as a parent of a daughter who was viewed as a struggling reader in school. The holistic approaches to life and education practices that she learned about in her holistic curriculum studies course at the University of Alberta, along with the teachings of the four directions shared with her from Elder Bob Cardinal have allowed her to see the world through a new lens. The four directions are ancient wisdom traditions that were taught to her from a nehiyaw (Cree) perspective and are utilized by First Nations as guides to life and living (Latremouille, 2016). The four directions are not only seen as guides in life but, they also represent the four aspects that make up human beings (physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental), have four beings (guides) that sit in each direction, and the four seasons (winter, spring, summer, and fall) (Bob Cardinal, personal communication, 2017). Each one of these directions are deeply thoughtful and organic, and show us how to live with balance, harmoniously amongst

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each other, as well as provide a holistic lens on life. Through this holistic approach, she was able to change her thinking from western perspectives on how her daughter should be reading at her age, to understanding that the focus should be on her daughter's learning process.

McNally (2004) shares the importance of process by discussing how Indigenous ways of knowing are embedded in learning and how indigenous people learn; everything has a purpose and is learned through experience. Teaching and learning often comes indirectly and we do not always find the answers when we seek them (Tanaka et al., 2007). Sometimes answers show up in places we least expect and sudden realizations of our learning will appear. McNally (2004) shares a story of his frustrations with his teachers' unwillingness to provide direct Ojibwe lessons and quickly "realized later that I had become in Ojibwe parlance, *miindawe*, pouting like a tired toddler who did not know exactly what he wanted. If I did not learn those conjugations, I did learn lessons taught 'in a good way' come to those fit for them and when conditions were fitting for them." (McNally, 2004, p. 607). McNally adds that "if I did not learn those conjugations, I did learn lessons taught 'in a good way' come to those fit for them and when conditions were fitting for them." (McNally 2014, p. 607).

The approaches and knowledge shared from nehiyaw perspectives are not meant just for Indigenous peoples. They are gifts from the Creator that cannot be kept for ourselves and they are meant to be shared with everyone (Bob Cardinal, personal communication, 2018). According to Preston (2016), the holistic view in education is needed to support indigenous learners but can also work for non-indigenous learners and teachers. Donald (2011) adds



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“Meaningful teaching and learning requires the creation of a pedagogical context that fosters an organic, life-giving, and life-sustaining form to hope...what we want to learn cannot be separated from the processes we go through while learning. For teaching and learning to be meaningful, we need to see ourselves in ecological relation to that which we want to know. Relation always comes first.”

(Donald 2011, On making love to death).

Furthermore, from an Indigenous perspective, teaching and learning often comes indirectly and we do not always find the answers when we seek them. Sometimes the answers show up in places we least expect and sudden realizations of our learning will appear. Davidson (2018) explains that:

“as educators, we often feel pressure to have all of the answers. As a result, we may guide our students to ask questions that align with our knowledge. But we do not need to have all of the answers. We can model curiosity for our students. We can seek answers to our own questions and teach students how to be comfortable with their curiosity and to find answers for themselves. Sometimes, the answers will not be known. In those moments, we can improvise based upon the knowledge we do not have.” (p. 70).

This type of epistemology is where “a person can only be expected to learn and speak about what is within his or her knowledge and experience.” (Lambe 2003, p.317). Thus, learning comes through a process of relationship and experience which will be different for every learner.

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Indigenous ways of knowing are embedded in learning and how indigenous people learn; everything has a purpose and is learned through experience (Preston, 2016).

Two principles which have been guiding nehiyaw people for thousands of years and have found their way into the world of some educators are the concepts of *miyo-wicihtowin* and *miyo-wahkohtowin*. *Miyo-wicihtowin* refers to “a healing energy or medicine that is generated when we are actively together with the intention of honouring and respecting the relationships that are enmeshed within.” (Donald & Glanfield, 2011, p. 80). *Miyo-wahkohtowin* “teaches that, as human beings, we are enmeshed in series of relationships (human and more-than-human) that gives us life.” (Donald, in Press, p. 11). Our relationship with our mother the earth, the water, with all of the different plants, medicine, the herbs, the animals, the birds, all the four legged being[s]. Everything we encounter in our lives there is a relationship that we are always reminded of and are mindful about. We see ourselves belonging to the entire existence of our world; we are not separated from anything. *Wahkohtowin* talks about embodying that entire holistic idea of how we exist. (LaBoucane-Benson, P., Gibson, G., Benson, A., & Miller, G., 2012). Preston (2016) adds that in the worldview of aboriginal peoples, everything from people, animals, trees, stones, minerals, and the natural world is imbued with spirit. Every aspect of nature and life is linked to everything else in some way-everything is one. (Preston, 2016). This perspective requires us to see ourselves related to, and implicated in, the lives of those who have gone before us and those yet to come. We always need to see ourselves in relation to the past, present, and future (Donald, 2009). Elder George Brertton (2009) continues by saying “*wahkohtowin* is a Cree name for the rules that governs the relationship from one thing to

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another. The guidelines ensure all people respect one another and the other living things on this earth.” (Bearpaw Media, 2009).

One of the most powerful pieces of knowledge that I have learned during my journey is about how children are viewed traditionally by nehiyaw people. This is not only a view of a single group of Indigenous people; however, I have learned from a nehiyaw perspective over the years. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples was created in 1996 by the Department of Indigenous Affairs in Canada. They discuss the importance of children within Indigenous communities and share that, from an Indigenous perspective, they are key to the future of the people. (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Volume 3, Chapter 5, 1996). When we arrive on a more local scale, nehiyaw people see their children as the most precious beings on earth and need to be treated as such. Goulet and Goulet (2014) point out that

“...the Nehinuw word awasis (child), has its origins in the light given off from the radiant power of the sun and stars. Awasis literally means ‘the little being that shines.’ In traditional Nehinuw culture, it is children who epitomize the light, sparkle, and vibrancy of life.” (Goulet & Goulet, 2014, p. 60)

This of course is not to say that Canadians do not put the same value on their children; however, the descriptive nature of the word ‘awasis’ provides some light into how nehiyaw people refer to children. There is a direct reference to the sun which is a giver of life and this in itself informs us how our children are created in relation to the sun. The importance of relationality and acknowledging what gives us life is being highlighted through descriptive words of children. As well, there is great emphasis on the way children are raised as there are a series of teachings

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provided that allow nehiyaw to take care of their children. Sensory experiences, the singing of songs, connecting to children physically, meeting the needs of newborn babies, and allowing children to find their own voice are noted by Pazderka et al. (2014) as the focus of nehiyaw when raising their children. Additionally, Pazderka et al. (2014) note that

“the Elders put an emphasis on developing good, peaceful peer relationships. One elder describes it as being taught, ‘to be able to play and interact with our peers, other children and not to horde our toys but to share it with them.’...nowadays there is a much stronger emphasis on achievement and being first in class; competition rather than cooperation.” (Pazderka et al. 2014, p. 61).

I believe this is important to note as it directly opposes the views of the “homoeconomicus” perspective of western curriculum that is influencing learners in our schools today (Donald, in Press). Indigenous wisdom and knowledge focuses on developing children in a way that focuses on their overall well-being and the ability to live with good relations. It is difficult for anyone to learn what that means when they are being taught from only one viewpoint while in school.

### **North - What can a nehiyaw man learn from BC traditions?**

In the north we find grandfather buffalo who teaches us to utilize and not waste our gifts (Bob Cardinal, personal communication, 2017). As well, in the north direction, we find a time of the year where there is much looking inward as it is a time of sharing stories, rest, and renewal. To nehiyaw people, the gifts we are given are never meant to be kept to ourselves as we do not have ownership over them and we are taught that they must be shared with others. (Bob Cardinal, personal communication, 2018). Upon looking inward and reflecting upon the gifts I

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was given, I understand these gifts as my wife and children-which will provide me with the opportunity to expand my own learning as an educator as well as helping them understand their identity. It is very important for all Indigenous people to understand where they are from as it provides many connections to our ancestors and our territories. Knowing your history, culture, and stories are vital to connecting to who you are as an Indigenous person. Billy (2015) explains that for Secwepemc “learning our stsptekwle is important to keep us connected to our territory by knowing our place names, the passing on of knowledge of the lands, and the teaching of Sek’lep by seeing land markers left by him to remind us of ‘proper behavior.’” (Billy 2015, p. 39). Thus, this is especially important for my family since we have more than one Indigenous identity and both need to be honoured.

Of course, I am aware that I could never fully share the knowledge that First Nations groups in British Columbia possess in a short literature review but, I am hoping that I can demonstrate how some of their knowledge is similar to nehiyaw. For the purposes of this paper, I will be solely focusing on relationship to and with land, ecological knowledge, and wisdom of the Secwepemc and other Salish people in British Columbia. As well, I understand that by doing a literature review, reading history, knowledge, and stories we can never fully understand the depth and layers the knowledge holds and the strong ties it holds with the Indigenous people who come from the land in what is known today as British Columbia. I also acknowledge the fact that this knowledge has been in these traditional territories since time immemorial and is what gives the people strength and provides unbreakable ties to the land. Their stories and histories are what give the Secwepemc the rights to the land (Ignace & Ignace; 2017) and I am hoping that I can honour the work of those whose literature I reviewed as well as the Elders who shared the

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knowledge with them. The purpose of writing this paper is so that I can be a better husband to my wife and father to my children. Additionally, I will attempt to find the best way of bringing what I have learned as a nehiyaw person reviewing literature about Secwepemc to education. Furthermore, I hope to honour the ancestors, people, and future descendents of Secwepemc and the land they come from through this work so I can be a better visitor.

As I mentioned earlier in my paper, my wife's family is Secwepemc from the Canoe Creek Indian Band and is in the interior of British Columbia. However, she was born and raised in Maple Ridge, BC-the traditional land of the Halkomelem people. Her parents still reside in Maple Ridge and prior to beginning my research and literature review I knew almost nothing about the land and still know very little. I am hoping that this can open the door for more learning for myself and my family so they can have a strong identity and love for who they are and where they come from. Additionally, I am aware that having this knowledge will help me understand who they are and how I can help feed their spirit.

### *Relationship with the land*

The Secwepemc, like many other Indigenous peoples, have a strong relationship with the land that is described heavily in their language as their words remind them of not only how the landscape looks but also the history of those places. The words vividly describe ecological relationships, events, and travel in these places (Ignace, 2008). When the words that describe these places are spoken they are meant to bring the land, history, and people together. Ignace (2017) explains that “together with the detailed words and combinations of words for landscape forms and place names, they provide something like an oral geographic positioning system.

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Moreover, they enable a listener to visualize and vividly imagine movement in the landscape from the perspective of the storyteller.” (p. 257). *Stsqey* are the rights the Secwepemc have to the land and is represented through the stories, history, actions of ancestors which marked the land, place names, and thus gave the rights of the land to Secwepemc. (Ignace and Ignace; 2017). The land can never be taken away due to the connection that is provided through story and furthermore, is a right of any Secwepemc person. From an indigenous perspective, land carries with it the idea of journeying, being connected to, and interconnected with, geographic and spiritual space. There is an ecological relationship in place that has been present since time immemorial (Styres, S. D., & Zinga, D. M., 2013).

Land is central to life for all indigenous peoples and is not used in a geographical sense; rather, it is seen as a place of interconnectivity and spirituality. Land provides life, thus, becoming a part of who we are and it must be respected and treated as such (Styres, S. D., & Zinga, D. M., 2013). The Secwepemc peoples' strong relationship with the land is described heavily in their language as their words inform them of not only how the landscape looks but also the history of those places. The words vividly describe ecological relationships, events, and travel in these places (Ignace 2017 & Billy 2015). When the words that describe these places are spoken they are meant to bring the land, history, and people together. Ignace (2017) explains that

“together with the detailed words and combinations of words for landscape forms and place names, they provide something like an oral geographic positioning system. Moreover, they enable a listener to visualize and vividly imagine

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movement in the landscape from the perspective of the storyteller.” (Ignace 2017, p. 257).

Thus, It would be difficult for a Secwepemc person to understand who they are without knowing the stories that connect time, place, people, events, and actions. The Secwepemc people find their identity by knowing their connection to the places where creation and learning about what took place historically. (Ignace and Ignace, 2017). Much of the language of the Secwepemc is focused on relationship with land as Ignace (2008) states, “the sparse language of *stspetekwll* that are aimed at an audience that knows the land” (p. 163). *Stspetekwll* is a word that describes the oral histories that have been handed down from generation to generation since ancient times (Ignace and Ignace, 2017). Ignace (2008) further explains that place names are not merely labels; rather, they share a great understanding of references to relationships that provides meaning for what the land means.

The laws of the Secwepemc people have been passed down orally for thousands of years and have been interpreted through their relationship to the land. For Secwepemc people, the land has been telling them how to live and what rights they have since they came to live in these places. Their words that refer to laws and rights are encoded deeply into the understanding of the land. Ignace and Ignace (2017) explain the meaning for the word “*stsq’ey*” and the importance of this word to Secwepemc. They state that they “heard elders talk about *stsq’ey* in my youth. As I understand it, *re7 stsq’ey-emp* means ‘your (plural) rights’....*stsq’eyulecw re Secwepemculecw* - ‘the land is marked where your rights are, where your boundaries are.’” (Ignace & Ignace, 2017, p. 90). In contemporary times, most people have come to know this



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word to mean paper; however, as Ignace and Ignace (2017) explain, the word has transformed to this current meaning as the laws of Canadians are written on paper. Turner, Ignace, and Ignace (2000) explain that despite the strong reference to rights to lands and boundaries are widely accepted in language, “the widespread loss of specialized vocabulary (such as names for plants, animals, and places) and discourse associated with peoples’ relationships to the land and various life-forms is a major tragedy; yet the concepts are at least partially retained to the present day.” (Turner, Ignace & Ignace 2000, p. 1280). In other words, stsq’ey and their stories are their deeds to the land. (Ignace, 2008).

### *Relation to all things/wisdom*

From an indigenous perspective, land carries with it the idea of journeying, being connected to, and interconnected with, geographic and spiritual space. There is an ecological relationship in place that has been present since time immemorial (Styres, S. D., & Zinga, D. M. 2013). For Secwepemc and other Salishan people, place, and relationships are inseparable. Turner, Ignace, and Ignace share that “people, animals, plants, natural objects, and supernatural entities are not separate and distinct. Rather, they are all linked to each other and to the places where they reside through cultural traditions and interactive, reciprocal relationships.” (Turner, Ignace & Ignace 2000, p. 1280). Many First Nations people share similar stories about a being who is known for assisting in creation of the world which helps to provide an understanding of the natural laws and where humans fit into it all. These stories help to reinforce the values of the people (Billy, 2015) and also give the people ties to their ancestors. To the Secwepemc people, the Coyote or Skelep as they know it to be, is a trickster (Ignace, 2008; Billy, 2015) and is considered a sacred being as he is seen as a helper of The Old One (The Creator) (Ignace &

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Ignace, 2017). Skelep, to the Secwepemc, is believed to be the ancestor of all Indians (Ignace & Ignace, 2017) and are “descended the Thompson, from others the Okanagan, from still others the Shuswap...At one time they all spoke the same language. It was like Shuswap.” (Ignace & Ignace 2017, p. 42). There are many stories shared about Skelep and how he has made many mistakes and blunders as he created Secwemepcuw (the land). Ignace (2008) shares that, for Secwepemc people, story aligns with history and the two cannot be separated as the stories also bring past, present, and future together as one (Ignace, 2008). According to Billy (2015), the stories of Salishan people can be categorized as follows:

- “Identity
- cultural teachings
- Interconnectedness
- transformation and
- imagination or creativity.” (Billy 2015, p. 24).

and provide a way for Secwepemc and others find a connection to themselves, their ancestors, the land, and history. Ignace and Ignace (2017) share a story about Skelep that provides wisdom for the Secwepemc people. They state:

“[coyote says] ‘...you are making the world right: so am I. Why try to punish me when I have done you no harm? This is my country. Why do you come here and interfere with my work? If I wished, I could turn you into stone; but as you have likely been sent into the world, like myself, to do good, I will allow you to pass, but you must leave this country as quickly as you can. We should be friends, but must not interfere with each other’s work.’” (p. 43)

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This story provides a lesson that, when we enter someone else's territory, it must be done with respect as to not bring in your views, culture, and perspectives without acknowledging the knowledge that is already there. Despite the many similarities with the traditions and beliefs between groups of people, often times we will see one group attempt to undermine the other without realizing that, culturally, beliefs may align. The worldview of acknowledgment is often seen amongst many First Nations groups and I believe is something that we can consider as educators. Too often the beliefs, cultures, history, and experience of Indigenous people are pan-indigenized and when coming from another territory to another, it is important to acknowledge those who live in the places we work.

Moreover, there is plenty of guiding wisdom in Secwepemc that has similar understandings to other groups of Indigenous people. For Secwepemc, K'welselktnews is the word that reminds the people that all beings are related (Ignace & Ignace, 2017; Billy, 2015). This principle "establishes the importance of the Secwepemc belief that all things are related, all things are equal, and that we all have a responsibility to each other and the earth." (Billy 2015, p. 32). These words that establish relationship and kinship carry with them expectations of how we should treat one another. (Ignace & Ignace, 2017). The understanding of relation and kinship is the glue that binds the Secwepemc nation together. (Ignace, 2008). Additionally, there is a strong sense of belonging to the Secwepemc and Salish community as a whole rather than a particular community where you are born. (Ignace, 2008). Again, we are reminded by the guiding principles of First Nations to consider one another and the rest of the world as our relative. For the Secwepemc, this is also located in their stories which provides an understanding that in the order of this world, that we all have our roles. (Billy, 2015). Turner, Ignace, and Ignace provide

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an example of this by sharing that “stories such as ‘Coyote Juggles His Eyes’ and the ‘Star Husband Tales’ are imbued with lessons in ecology and proper ways of relating to others.” (Turner, Ignace & Ignace 2000, p. 1281). It is through these kinship bonds and blood relations that all Secwepemc have a right to the land and is called “kw’setktenews” (Ignace, 2008).

Another guiding principle for the Secwepemc is “mellelc” which is a reminder for all people to “take time to relax; regenerate and enjoy” (Billy, 2015) each day. Another interpretation for this would place importance on having balance in one’s life and to take care of all of your basic needs (Billy, 2015). During these times of ensuring we have balance, the Secwepemc would share the stories of their people and focus on building and re-building relationships (Billy, 2015). Additionally, the identity of Secwepemc people is also strengthened during this time as we previously learned that it is in the stories where the identity of the people is found. Their strength as a nation and understanding of the land and their relationship to it is relayed in story. The importance of living a life of balance is seen amongst many different First Nations groups and an important teaching as it can be easy to find yourself focused on being busy.

The Secwepemc people, like nehiyaw, also place great value on their children. The principle of “slexlexs” which means to develop wisdom in all people-which begins at an early age (Billy, 2015). According to Billy (2015), “the value of slexlexs stresses the importance of providing an environment for all children to learn. The goal is have the children become more knowledgeable in the language, in history, in our beliefs, traditions, customs, be knowledgeable about the land.” (Billy 2015, p. 34). The use of stories also provides a way for children to

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understand change and tension that might be happening around them. (Billy, 2015). There is a strong understanding amongst the Secwepemc that the identity of their people must be developed at a young age to provide a long understanding of relation to each other and everything in the world. It is through the stories-stspekwle-that children are provided with teachings and understandings of who they are as Secwepemc. From an Indigenous perspective, it is important that many of these lessons or teachings are not simply done by listening alone. Rather, there is a great importance that children are given the opportunity to emulate what is being taught to them so they can learn through experience. (Tanaka et al., 2007).

### **Chapter Six: Conclusion/Summary of Findings**

In summary, engaging in this literature review of nehiyaw and Secwepemc traditions has been transformative for me as an educator, person, and a father. I began by sharing my personal and educational journey from the time I was a youth until now by engaging with narrative inquiry. As my own experiences in school were shared, readers could understand that I had my own struggles and did not always find a way to fit in the school system. Despite graduating on time, I was not very successful in high school as I was just there to find the quickest way to complete high school. As I moved forward with education, I found more struggles in post-secondary because I was not prepared for the demands, structure, and rigour which nearly led me to not completing university. There are many reasons why this happened; however, I understand that the main reason was that my identity as a nehiyaw person was not strong as I was unable to find a way of building it or connecting to it while I was in school. I attempted to find

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other ways of understanding this world that were not my own and they did not always work for me.

Fortunately, as I moved forward into post-secondary, I was able to find a way of being successful in university while also finding ways of connecting to my identity. This was important for me as it not only provided an opportunity to learn about who I was as a nehiyaw person but, it also allowed me to have a positive identity. The more I learned and experienced from the nehiyaw ways of knowing, culture, and wisdom, the more my life became fulfilled. By the time I returned to school as a graduate student, I was more immersed in culture than I ever was previously and that opened up a door for me to enroll in the EDSE 601 course *Holistic Approaches to Life and Living*. While I was in EDSE 601, I learned so many new ways of connecting with culture and holism which further strengthened my identity and I believe that is what has allowed me to remain in school and be successful.

Writing this capping paper also allowed me to take time to consider what I and others from my literature review feel that is missing in education. One of my teachers, Bob Cardinal, always asks the question of “kikway e-patahenow oma?” which translates as “what is missing?” This understanding is not to say that there is always something missing; rather, affords us an opportunity to be mindful about what we are doing and how we are living (Cardinal, personal communication, 2019). When I asked myself this question about education, I strongly considered the ideas that were shared in Donald’s (in Press) paper *Homo Economicus and Forgetful Curriculum: Remembering other ways to be a human being*. According to Donald (in Press), homo economicus is a person who is motivated by self-gain and materials goods. After studying

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his literature, I have learned that our education focuses solely on neoliberal sensibilities and does not provide space for any other way of knowing to be seen as valuable. It is troubling to know that our education systems are politically and economically driven which, in turn, causes our youth to understand that the only way to live is if you are working toward economic gain. Unfortunately, this logic pathologizes Indigenous youth by viewing them as “deficit” students since they are not successful in current education systems (Donald & Krahn, 2014). Donald (2012), argues that providing an opportunity for youth to have an education that focuses on ethical relationships will allow us to change this situation as these relationships allow for difference to be honoured. Donald and Krahn (2014) further explain there is currently no space for any other perspectives in education due to these ideas. Despite the lack of space given by western education for alternative perspectives, Indigenous knowledge and wisdom provides teachings that all life must be honoured-especially for our youth. As you have read from my own experiences, not having any value placed on my own culture in education did not provide any opportunity for my own identity to grow. This idea furthered Donald and Krahn’s (2014) statement that the message being sent to Indigenous youth is that they need to change themselves in order to be successful in the prescribed lifestyle set out for them by colonial society.

Unfortunately, ideas about education led by economics do not align with nehiyaw wisdom that tells us about the ways in which respectful relationships are provided through the principles of miyo-wahkohtowin and miyo-wicihtowin and guide nehiyaw people through life. Miyo-wahkohtowin provides us with the understanding that “we are all related” not only as humans but also to everything else that has life and gives life. Miyo-wicihtowin is “a healing energy or medicine that is generated when we are actively together with the intention of

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honouring and respecting the relationships that are enmeshed within.” (Donald & Glanfield, 2011, p. 80). “By creating a place where Indigenous ways can exist unhindered, a narrative develops that crosses over cultures and creates curriculum that truly combines two very different ways of teaching and learning. It is not a question of choosing one pedagogical perspective over the other. Rather, it is finding a way to make space for both-and to be enriched by both.”

(Williams, L, and Tanaka, M. 2007, p. 17). What I have learned over the years and from my literature review is that the wisest people, whom I have come to know and have learned from, have shown me that humility is the best approach. I have been mentored to be aware that many different perspectives exist and it is up to me to honour each one. It is not a matter of saying that one has to contradict or overpower the other; rather, it about bringing them together where they can exist in the best way possible. Sanford, Williams, Hopper, and McGregor share that, if the roles were reversed, then “Indigenous education would embrace Eurocentrism as another form of knowing rather than the form of knowing.” (Sanford, K. Williams, L., Hopper, T., McGregor, C., 2012, p. 22).

### *Answering the research question*

This capping paper sought to answer the question: what *can a nehiyaw man learn from the traditions of Secwepemc and other Salish people?* I raised this question because, as a man who has married a member of the Secwepemc Nation and also has two children who are both nehiyaw and Secwepemc, it became important for me to find a way of connecting to the maternal side of their ancestry. Through this learning I am hoping that I can also find ways of finding opportunities for my children to learn and so I can be a better father, husband to my wife, and visitor to Secwepemc territory. Additionally, I will attempt to bring what I have learned as a



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nehiyaw person reviewing literature about Secwepemc, as an outsider, to my practice as an educator. Traditional nehiyaw teachings that I have learned over the years have guided me to understand the importance of honouring other ways of knowing through ethical relationality. Which, according to Donald (2012), is an ecological understanding of human relationality that does not deny difference but seeks to understand how these differences can relate us. As well, the principles of miyo-wicihotowin (good relations) and miyo-wahkohtowin (we are all related), which I have referred to several times throughout this paper, have continued to guide not only my work but, also my life. These understandings of relations were important for me to recognize as I was aware that the Secwepemc people have their own understanding of who they are and how they connect to their lands and identity. I was hoping of finding a way of finding connections between the two cultures for the sake of my family through exploring views on holism, traditional wisdom, and identity which for the Secwepemc is their strong connection to the land.

Some of the key findings recognized from the literature review included several similarities between nehiyaw and Secwepemc ways of knowing. Prior to conducting this literature review project, I knew very little of Secwepemc traditions, culture, history, and ways of knowing. I did not have much exposure to the people until I met my wife and never learned anything about them throughout my education. I still feel that I know very little about the Secwepemc but, I feel as though I was provided with some understanding of how the Secwepemc people see themselves in relation to the land as well as their connections to each

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other through relational wisdom. As well, I believe this is a good starting point for myself and my family as we work toward learning further knowledge about Secwepemc.

As discussed and shared earlier, the understanding of relations is important for both Secwepemc and nehiyaw peoples. The understanding of who we are as human beings in relation to everything around us acts as a reminder to acknowledge those relationships. I referred to miyo-wicihtowin and miyo-wahkohotwin several times throughout this paper and, as a nehiyaw, this has allowed me to see myself in relation to others while keeping those relationships sacred. Secwepemc also have their own way of relating to each other, their ancestors, and the land. For Secwepemc, K'welselktnews is the word that reminds the people that all beings are related (Ignace & Ignace, 2017; Billy, 2015). There is no separation between human beings, the land, nature, and the supernatural and are all linked to each other in the places they reside. (Turner, Ignace, and Ignace, 2000). These concepts and ideas allow us to be mindful of the relationships we have with everything that is provided to us and keeps us alive. There is an understanding of respect for everything because it has its place in the order of the world and keeps us alive. I have found that utilizing concepts such as miyo-wahkohtowin and K'welselktnews has provided me with a guiding principle that allows me to live with my own worldviews as a nehiyaw person while working as an educator in mainstream society-both can exist at the same time and have a good relationship. Being mindful of these ways have allowed me to be sustained while working as an educator as they help me understand that there is not one dominant way of knowing and, as a combination, I can utilize these ideas through my pedagogy in the classroom.

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Another finding in my literature review was the idea that nehiyaw and Secwepemc both place great value on their children and how they are raised and taught from an early age. For nehiyaw people, the name they have given their children-awasis-as explained by Goulet and Goulet (2014), literally means “the little being that shines” (Goulet & Goulet, 2014, p. 60) and provides strong references to the sun within the name. The idea that there is a direct connection to the sun through our children, which is a life-giver, emphasizes the life our children give to nehiyaw people. Furthermore, Secwepemc people also indicate the value of their children as they focus on providing them with appropriate education early that connects them with who they are as Secwepemc. The principle of “slexlexs” which means to develop wisdom in all people-which begins at an early age (Billy, 2015) in order to provide an understanding of who Secwepemc people are in relation to their land and everything around them. Slexlexs builds a strong identity from an early age for Secwepemc to understand their laws and also provides them with the skills and knowledge to navigate change and tension around them (Billy, 2015). As educators, I believe that we can use this type of wisdom with the children in our schools as well. It is important for us to build up the identity of our children and place great value on them to provide a foundation for who they are as people. There is far more to education than providing a curriculum that, according to Donald (in Press), guides us to teach in a way that is guided by economics. Providing an opportunity for children to build their identity and learn about other ways of knowing will move away from the idea that the only valuable knowledge in Western knowledge (Anuik, J., & Gillies, C. L., 2012).

Another valuable finding during the writing of this paper was the significance of having balance in life for both nehiyaw and Secwepemc people. For nehiyaw people, we are guided by

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the four directions which teaches us to have balance in our lives. The entirety of this paper was led by the four directions as I entered each section through a specific direction. The purpose of using each direction was to remind myself of the importance of balance as I wrote this paper and to ensure that I was mindful of what I have learned. The four directions are seen as not only guides in life but also represent the four aspects that make up human beings (physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental), have four beings (guides) that sit in each direction, and the four seasons (winter, spring, summer, and fall) (Bob Cardinal, personal communication, 2017). Each direction has teachings that direct us in life and show us how to live in balance and harmony with our world. The Secwepemc also have an understanding balance is “mellelc” which is a reminder for all people to “take time to relax; regenerate and enjoy” (Billy, 2015) each day. During these times of focusing on balance, the Secwepemc share stories about their history and people and would work on building and rebuilding their relationships (Billy, 2015). Additionally, the identity of Secwepemc people is also strengthened during this time as their stories provide the understanding of who the Secwepemc are as people. As educators, I believe having balance is key for us all to sustain ourselves in our practices. The day-to-day actions of educators is full of busy-ness that is focused primarily on work and rarely is there time for ourselves. Regenerative practices like “Mellelc” and teachings such as the four directions can show us ways of having the balance we need in our lives so we are able to take good care of ourselves. Far too often the focus is on anything but humanness and becomes a race to get through the curriculum content as the industriousness and market economy focus on education makes us feel as though that “time is always running out” (Jardine 2008, p.8) in our classrooms.

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Furthermore, this study of Secwepemc and nehiyaw ways of knowing was not about proving or finding which way is better. Rather, one of the purposes was to understand how the two cannot contradict the other and find ways of bringing the both to life for my children-so they can have some understanding of who they are as nehiyaw and Secwepemc people. This is something for educators to consider as they view their curriculum. When teaching students, the reasons for providing learning is not to show that there is only one way of knowing; rather, there are multiple ways of knowing that can all be honoured with something to take away. Additionally, when the focus is on Indigenous people, there are multiple ways of knowing, cultures, histories, and experiences that are important to understand and acknowledge when we are in those territories as educators. I have learned the importance of mindfulness about this knowledge and wisdom and, although there are some similarities, the core of these ideas and understandings of the world are different for each group of people.

It was really wonderful to have the opportunity to read and learn about all of these traditions from the Knowledge Keepers of the nations. I truly learned so much about the Secwepemc people through the literature; however, I also understand that for this knowledge to come alive for myself, my wife, and my children we must live and experience it all. We must spend time on the land to understand how my family is connected to it and their ancestors through story and stsq'ey. Through their blood relations known as "kw'seltktenews" (Ignace, 2008), my children have rights to the land as Secwepemc people and the moment they were conceived and brought into this world, those rights belonged to them. According to Ignace (2008), it does not make a difference which community you were born into, there is acceptance amongst all Secwepemc people as a community. Thus, according to stsq'ey and kw'seltktenews,

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my children, although born and currently living in Alberta, have just as much rights to the land as their ancestors. I know from my own experiences that I could not understand who I am as a nehiyaw without living what the Elders were teaching me and I have learned that I want that for my children. I have been learning about nehiyaw ways for a few years now and I am aware that there is so much more to know. It will take time for my children to learn about both ways but, I know that whether they are learning about their nehiyaw or Secwepemc ways of knowing, I understand that it would be best for them to spend time in each place to understand their own identity. I do not share that same identity and neither does my wife so we will have to provide them with opportunities to grow as nehiyaw and Secwepemc.

There is so much value in what I have learned during the study of nehiyaw and Secwepemc knowledge. It is important to note that Indigenous knowledge is temporal and is alive through generations of people who have known and passed it down for thousands of years. The knowledge that has been shared with us today is the same knowledge that was known by our ancestors and carries with it the same power it had back then-it does not forget. Both nehiyaw and Secwepemc people knowledges have guided the people and is just as relevant today as it was in the past. McNally (2004) explains that “knowledge of and stories about the past in lived moments of oral exchange are never simply locked up in bygone eras: they become tangible realities that create a felt relationship with the past that cannot easily be engendered in histories that are written and read alone.” (McNally, 2004, p. 606). These ideas “are inspired by Aboriginal ways of knowing that focus on the relationship to the Earth as the place where continuous and/or repetitive processes of creation occurs...People learn by committing to the process of participating in these cultural practices.” (Donald, 2010, p. 8). Thus, it is important for

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us to acknowledge this knowledge and epistemology and find ways of bringing it forward as educators to enhance our practice. There are many ways of knowing that can be utilized to enhance what we are already doing in our classrooms when done in the right way. I am hoping that the learning that I have shared in this capping paper will not only guide my family and I but will also create some understanding for everyone as educators.

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