



Michele T.D. Tanaka

**LEARNING  
AND TEACHING  
TOGETHER**

**Weaving Indigenous Ways  
of Knowing into Education**



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## Introduction: A Welcoming

In the fall of 2005, a remarkable course was offered within a teacher education program on the traditional Coast Salish territory of the Lkwungen, Esquimalt, and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples. This place, SIĆENEN~becoming W̱SÁNEĆ, is also known as the University of Victoria, in British Columbia, Canada.

The course, titled “Earth Fibres, Weaving Stories: Learning and Teaching in an Indigenous World,” was the second in a continuing series designed and implemented by Lorna Williams, Wanost’a7, Lil’wat scholar and professor emerita, University of Victoria. Taught in partnership with local elders, or wisdom keepers, from several First Nations, the course provided direct and humble access to indigenous knowledge and holistically addressed issues of crosscultural awareness and pedagogy. The calendar description states:

In this course students will be engaged in an experiential educational practice. They will learn firsthand how teaching and learning occur in an Indigenous world. Undergraduate and graduate students will work alongside artists-in-residence and wisdom keepers/mentors to witness, experience, learn, and work with a variety of traditional Indigenous fabric and textile arts. The learning community will engage in hearing the traditional stories and songs associated with each of the textile pieces. The course will integrate hands-on practical activities with theoretical and academic goals. Students will experience the principles of traditional Indigenous ways of teaching and learning such as: mentorship and apprenticeship learning; learning by doing;

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learning by deeply observing; learning through listening and telling stories and singing songs; and learning as a member of a team; learning by sharing and providing service to the community. (Williams, 2006)

Through the innovative experience, Lorna demonstrated that it is possible to give space and time for significant crosscultural awareness and dispositional change within the context of teacher education. Her vision created a place where learning and teaching emerged from indigenous ways rather than from the status quo, so that educators could gain a deeper sense of indigenous world-views (for more information on Lorna's vision, see Tanaka, 2009; Tanaka, Williams, Benoit, Duggan, Moir, and Scarrow, 2007; Williams and Tanaka, 2007; Williams, Tanaka, Leik, and Riecken, 2014; Sanford, Williams, Hopper, and McGregor, 2012).

This book highlights the experience of twelve pre-service teachers who were enrolled in the course: Leanne, Courtney, Garrett, Jayne, Sara, April, Nicole, Kevin, Danielle, Chelsea, Heather, and Jade (all pseudonyms). These soon-to-be teachers worked alongside other course participants in a collaborative team environment of six smaller groups, each led by wisdom keepers who engaged them in working with one of the following traditional materials: sheep's wool (May Sam, Tsartlip), buckskin (Gay Williams, Li'wat), button blankets (Gina Robertson, Laichwiltach/Kwakuitl), woven sashes (Lynne Hemry, Métis), cedar bark (Carolyn and Fran Memnook, Hesqiaht Saddle Lake/Cree), and print buckskin (Janet Rogers, Mohawk/Tuscarora). In addition, Della (Rice) Sylvester (Cowichan) led the group on a poignant nature walk.

In the course, the participants created a variety of items, including a cedar bark shawl, knitted wool garments, a ceremonial button blanket, beaded medicine bags, woven sashes, beaded moccasins, and a printed buckskin blanket. These handcrafted creations were placed on a large multi-textile mural (see page 26) designed by T'SOU-KE artist and lead instructor Charlene George (kQwa'ste'not). Named XAXE SIÁM SILA~Honoured Grandmother of Many Generations: Wise, Learned, and Respected as Mother Earth, the mural created what Charlene called a "*theé lellum*, an honoured home to welcome all our guests." The stories of the thirteen moons depicted on this mural are shared in depth on pages 30–37.

In designing and implementing the course, Lorna and Charlene made a concerted effort to ensure that the experience was rooted in place, and so it is in SI,ĆENEN, the land upon which the course took place, that my stories begin. Honouring the traditions of this land, I introduce myself as I begin. My name

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is Michele Therese Duke Tanaka, and my ancestry is rooted in many cultures, including Scottish, Irish, German, English, Creole French, and 'Cajun (Acadian). I was born and raised in the United States and began my immigration to Canada in 2003. Since that time, I have been an appreciative visitor on this land as my family and I have been nourished – body, mind, and soul – by the richness and gifts of SI,ĆENEN. With gratitude, I acknowledge and respect the ancestral knowledge of this inspirited place.

This theé lellum welcoming now extends to you; I invite you to leave your familiar beliefs around education and to imagine a different setting embedded with ancestral teachings extending beyond time. Here, gentle, capable hands intuit their way as they weave, sew, knit, and create. Strewn about the busy classroom are various fabrics, velvety hides, strips of cedar, and supple, spun wool. Colourful beads, threads, paints, and shell buttons pass through deft fingers. Sounds of laughter, tears, and wondering intermingle with the telling of stories, both joyful and sad. The taste of fresh salmon and berries is infused with the smoke of a fire and the rich, clean scent of cedar as the course participants enter into an indigenous world.

As we shall see, Lorna and Charlene wove the theé lellum moon stories throughout the course. These offerings suggest the importance of learning to live in a good relationship with the natural and sustaining rhythms and cycles of life. What does Charlene's indigenous perspective offer to educators? What can we learn by listening and embracing indigenous ways? In the increasingly diverse context of North American schools, most teachers are white, middle-class women (Ladson-Billings, 2001; Sleeter, 2008). To inform their teaching practice, these educators draw primarily on experience from their own familiar upbringing and sometimes struggle with how to understand and teach students who are from backgrounds that differ culturally from their own. In addition, non-Aboriginal pre-service teachers are often so immersed in their own cultural beliefs that they are unaware their beliefs are culturally biased; some even see themselves as somehow being without a culture (Schmidt, 1999). Charlene's stories and the earth fibres course experience offered other pedagogical possibilities.

Teachers hold positions of power and bear the responsibility of developing deep crosscultural awareness, given an increasingly culturally diversified student body. Too often, habits of the dominant culture are privileged to the exclusion or detriment of other cultural ways of knowing brought into the classroom by students. In Canada, in the case of Aboriginal learners, this presents a particularly poignant case: as one of the fastest growing student populations, Aboriginal

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learners continue to face significant struggles in school disproportionate to those faced by the larger student body (Cowley and Easton, 2006; Statistics Canada, 2005a, 2005b).

All educators across Canada, whether they are in classrooms or community settings, whether they are teacher educators or policy makers, are tasked with attending to the resurgence of indigenous ways of knowing and the emergence of indigenous perspectives in educational contexts. In particular, teacher educators should give special attention to helping pre-service (student) teachers become more familiar with ways of learning and teaching that embody indigenous ways of knowing. We have arrived on the shore of a new paradigm. Now, we have to stand on the ground in which we believe and make our way forward in a good way.

Indigenous approaches can be useful not only for youth of Aboriginal heritage but also for all learners, especially those who are steeped in the traditions of the dominant Western paradigm (Tanaka, 2011). Making indigeneity an educational priority is challenging and requires bringing experiential and holistic emphasis to formal education settings that have typically privileged intellectual knowledge to the exclusion of other ways of knowing. Crosscultural understanding requires a shift in *teacher disposition* – the beliefs, attitudes, and values held by teachers (Kanu, 2006). While shifting pre-service teachers' dispositions can be difficult (Richardson, 1996), educational scholars are beginning to identify and define important factors that support deep and lasting change towards cultural inclusion (Gay, 2000; Kumashiro, 2008; Sleeter, 2008).

The challenging work of shifting dispositions requires stepping outside of, and sometimes resisting, deeply embedded social, cultural, and institutional structures as well as personal ways of being-knowing-doing. This text shares a rich example of such an effort in the context of teacher education, where pre-service teachers engaged in a course that deepened their knowledge, insight, and receptivity to indigenous epistemologies and worldviews, resulting in notable dispositional shifts.

Immersed in an indigenous learning environment, the pre-service teachers set aside their Western habits of being-knowing-doing and suspended their judgment to engage differently in the creation of the various earth fibre textile pieces. They carefully observed both their own processes as learners and the ways in which the wisdom keepers acted in their role as teachers. The insight gained through this immersive experience unsettled the pre-service teachers' deep-seated Eurocentric perspectives around the twinned processes of learning and teaching. They reported changed attitudes towards incorporating

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indigenous approaches within their teaching practice. This book describes the experiences of these emerging teachers and how the course became for them a formative *touchstone* (Strong-Wilson, 2008), an anchor from which to consider what might be true of learning and teaching.

As a researcher, I was fortunate to be able to walk alongside the participants in this course – the pre-service teachers, the wisdom keepers, and the earth fibres. I wish to acknowledge my gratitude to both Lorna and Charlene for welcoming me into the experience to do this research. Over a six-month period in the fall and winter of 2006 and 2007, I was able to listen to many poignant and interwoven stories of learning and teaching. I was also a participant in the creation of XAXE SIÁM SILA, and together we wove, sewed, painted, and knit with cedar bark, wool, buckskin, cloth, shells, buttons, and beads. We listened to stories of the ancestors and of the earth fibres themselves. We laughed and cried together over what was, what is, and what might be possible for learning and teaching in our schools.

Something significant happened during the creation of the Honoured Grandmother mural and, as an educator, I believe the stories of the course are worth sharing as part of the larger conversation about indigenizing curricula and crosscultural understanding. Through the vibrant, though relatively brief, encounter with the wisdom keepers and the earth fibres, the non-indigenous participants (including me) were changed. Many of us were willing to let the epistemological and ontological ground on which we thought we stood shift and be re-formed. We became different teachers, more open to indigenous students and more understanding of other cosmologies and possible ways of being.

This book describes how the pre-service teachers, as they engaged deeply in indigenous ways of learning and teaching, altered their assumptions and beliefs about pedagogy. While walking alongside the wisdom keepers, the pre-service teachers listened deeply across cultures (Schultz, 2003), engaged in emotional reflexivity (Dressman, 1998), and became comfortable in the discomfort of knowing while not knowing (Kumashiro, 2008). The increased sensitivity and insight gained through the experience of walking alongside the wisdom keepers helped these young teachers both to increase their cultural knowledge of particular indigenous people and to develop their conceptual understanding of learning and teaching. They then adopted teaching dispositions – beliefs, values, and attitudes – that were more inclusive of indigenous ways of being-knowing-doing. They brought forward this pedagogy into their practica in ways that were supportive and encouraging of all students within the classroom, regardless of their particular cultural worldview.

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As an educator, I care a great deal about the usefulness of actions and about how to do things in a “good” way. My aspiration echoes the teachings of the wisdom keepers; useful and good actions help us to be our very best, both in the classroom and in other areas of our lives. Such actions require having an openness to getting along with each other, without causing harm, and to live in good relation with TENEW~Earth that sustains us. Useful and good actions nourish our souls. Charlene speaks of using good hands, “to be a tool for all that needs to happen and have an openness to do the things that need to be done” (field notes). Using good hands means proceeding “humbly, with skills it takes a lifetime to learn properly and an openness to the spirits of the place and the wonder of the unpredictable moment when the connection is made” (Chamberlin, 2003, p. 236). As an educator, I often discuss the importance of using good hands. I believe that promoting useful and good action is our primary purpose as teachers.

### A Note about Terms

There is no simple or precise definition of *indigenous*. It can be used as a political or racialized term that indicates one’s birth in a particular place (Battiste and Henderson, 2000). It can be a term of self-identification, often indicated by capitalization (i.e., *Indigenous*). I use the term in lower-case (i.e., *indigenous*) to describe people and ways of being that are *of the Earth*. Thus, “being indigenous” implies a place-based, relational understanding of TENEW~Earth that acknowledges and draws from the interrelated realms of mind, body, emotion, and spirit. The term *Aboriginal* refers specifically to the first inhabitants of Canada and includes First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. The term *participants* refers to the broad group of people who took part in the earth fibres course, including the wisdom keepers (Aboriginal instructors, or elders) and the pre-service teachers. The first time a name is used in each chapter, the reader will be reminded as to whether the name refers to a wisdom keeper (WK) or a pre-service teacher (PST).

While English is my learned familial language, I use some indigenous language where appropriate, primarily SENĆOŦEN, as this is the language of the Aboriginal people upon whose traditional land the course took place. Some of the indigenous terms used are derived from the diverse languages of the wisdom keepers, and I have tried to be true to the way these terms were shared with me. Much of what I write here comes from oral teachings. There are variant alphabetical representations for oral languages; for the SENĆOŦEN words, I follow

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the W̱SÁNEĆ orthography, which uses capital letters, except for the lower-case *s*. Spellings for Aboriginal words were determined in consultation with Lorna Williams, Charlene George, and Nick Claxton. I thank them for their guidance through this complex terrain.

I use the term *education* to include experiences of learning and teaching and particularly formalized structures of schools and schooling. The term *teacher education* refers to the formal processes of educating teachers within higher education contexts. Of course, what is useful and true in education more generally is often useful and true within teacher education as well. Therefore, I also use the term *(teacher) education* and *(teacher) educator* to remind the reader that education broadly and teacher education more specifically are intimately intertwined through common history, lived experience, and hopes for the future. Finally, I use a hyphen to indicate fluidity between terms; static notions of either/or are outdated. We are not *either* a learner *or* a teacher but always hold the potential of being both simultaneously; we are *learner-teachers*. It is not possible to *be* without *knowing* and *doing*; rather, we hold the immediate plasticity of *being-knowing-doing*.

### **Mindful Reflexivity: My Attitude of Gathering**

As a teacher, I bring to the classroom my own past experiences that have shaped my disposition towards learning and teaching (Britzman, 1990/2003). As educator Parker Palmer (1998) says, we teach who we are. Our beliefs, values, and attitudes shape the learning in our classrooms, the larger community, and beyond. I recognize that what I do as a teacher educator affects the pre-service teachers with whom I spend time. My actions ripple outwards, however subtly, through these young people as *they* go out to teach many more students over the years. Because of this environment of accountability, I engage in a type of *mindful* inquiry (Bentz and Shapiro, 1998).

My personal teaching actions are motivated by concerns for humanity, ecology, and spirituality. Around the world, peoples, plants, animals, and ways of life are rapidly disappearing and our “elbow room” in the world is shrinking. Indigenous knowledge matters now, more than ever before (Davis, 2009; Hawken, 2007). At the same time, I have become more conscious of how my privileged position as an educator entails a certain responsibility of awareness. I feel the need to clarify my bearings, my guiding disposition, my values, and my attitudes and beliefs through a recursive practice of *reflexivity*. I consciously pay attention to my own practice, which is embedded in complex relationships

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with my learner-teachers, my professional community, my home community, and the larger world. If we teach who we are, I need to know who I am and where I stand. From there, I set my bearings for how to proceed in a good way, with good hands.

Reflexivity requires me, and all educators, to extend skills of reflection (Dewey, 1933; Schön, 1983). While *reflection* involves looking carefully at teaching practice and how that practice affects students' learning, *reflexivity* entails a deeper, more nuanced process that includes attention to one's ontological and epistemological positioning. As an educator, I need to know what my beliefs are about the nature of existence and the nature of knowledge. What ground am I standing on? From where do my actions flow? What feeds my soul? What shapes my worldview? It is immensely practical for me to name and understand where I stand, as that in turn affects my beliefs, values, attitudes, and, ultimately, my actions.

Teacher identity is deeply embedded in educational practice. Drawing on personal narratives helps the teacher to make sense of personal practical knowledge gained through teaching experience (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). One reflexive technique is to bring memories forward by paying attention to *touchstone* experiences, particularly in crosscultural settings (Strong-Wilson, 2008). The term *touchstone* refers to "that which serves to test or try the genuineness or value of anything" (*Oxford English Dictionary*). Salient memories, such as favourite books from childhood, can shape teaching practice (Strong-Wilson, 2008). The stories we remember, read, tell, and hear can become significant points of reference, touchstones by which teachers can "judge the worth of other stories and experiences" (Strong-Wilson, 2008, p. 95). Through a process of remembering, teachers become more fully situated in their "landscape of learning" (Greene, 1978, p. 2). The earth fibres course became for many participants a significant touchstone for indigenous ways of learning and teaching (Tanaka, 2011).

In using the term *reflexivity*, I wish to accentuate a process in which "the subject/researcher sees simultaneously the object of her or his gaze and the means by which the object (which may include oneself as subject) is being constituted" (Davies et al., 2004, p. 360). Here, the learner-teacher becomes learner-teacher-researcher. As Dressman (1998) suggests, reflexivity is a process that goes beyond reflecting on the more mechanical aspects of practice to include deep attention to individual positioning within social and, I would argue, ecological and spiritual contexts. Effective crosscultural pedagogy requires both reflection and reflexivity on the part of (teacher) educators.

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Reflexive scholarly work requires attention to and acceptance of emotional engagement. As a learner-teacher-researcher, I am motivated by a heartfelt sadness and concern about the palpable disrespect that people too often show for each other, other living creatures, and TENEW~Earth. I believe that in the context of my work, this emotional connection should be acknowledged rather than ignored under the guise of so-called scholarly objectivity. Despite the tendency on the part of many educators to separate their emotions from their academic work, passion is an integral and important part of scholarly investigation (Neumann, 2006). The inclusion of my personal emotions in my academic writing is intentional, and I am unapologetic. The role of emotion in learning has become increasingly clear (Artz, 1994; F.L. Brown, 2004) and is particularly important to acknowledge in teacher education (Bullough and Young, 2002; Hayes, 2003). If there is one thing that I have learned from indigenous elders, it is that we must try to bring together the intellectual (objective) knowing of the mind and the emotional (situated) knowing of the heart, in order to bring increased balance and wellness both to ourselves and to the world. Bentz and Shapiro (1998, p. 108) suggest that this be done through heightened mindfulness as “the closer you are to the source of the text, the more valid your interpretation is likely to be.”

### **An Indigenist Worldview**

So: Who am I? As an educator, who am I being-becoming – that is, both being and coming to be, at the same time? On what ontological and epistemological ground do I currently stand? What is my personal cosmology? How do I understand, relate to, and locate myself in the universe? These are important questions for me to pose, as they are the homeland of this scholarly work. After much consideration and reflexive exploration of my own touchstone stories (Tanaka, 2015; Tanaka, Nicholson, and Farish, 2012), I find myself humbly rooted in what Shawn Wilson (2007) calls an “indigenist” worldview. In the same way that a man can be a feminist, a non-indigenous person such as I can be an indigenist. While this terminology feels awkward, it is the best way I have found to describe my location.

This setting of my moral and ethical compass was reinforced for me during an educational research conference I attended in San Diego a number of years ago. I had to choose whether to go hear indigenous scholar Gregory Cajete speak or stay in my hotel room to meet an imminent writing deadline. Luckily, I followed my heart: Cajete’s words now shape much of the work I do today.

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He began by mentioning environmental educator David Orr (1994/2004), who believes it is imperative for educators to think carefully about what education is *for*. What is the purpose of having all those kids with us in those places we call schools? What learning or teaching do we want to have happen? In response to Orr's challenge, Cajete (2009) suggested three simple questions that every teacher should ask: How are we going to deal with the environmental crisis as it is today? How are we going to live with each other? And how do we take care of our own souls? For me these questions have both stayed with me and evolved, becoming luminous guides, useful in all educational contexts. Note that throughout the book, my articulation of these questions changes slightly. While I am consciously trying to keep the spirit of Cajete's original voicing, I am at the same time letting the questions breathe and expand within the new context of this work and in relation to my own thinking. I hope Cajete will be pleased to see that the questions take on a life of their own once put into practice.

Like many Aboriginal and Native American scholars of education (e.g., see Cajete, 1994; Fixico, 2003; S. Wilson, 2008), I believe that the notion of who we are is defined by our relationships (with ourselves, with each other, and with the Earth) and cannot be defined outside of them. Identifying my location serves to help the reader identify his or her own location. Once we have identified our locations, we can all act in relationship to transform our educational practice. My reflexive practice has brought me to believe deeply in the importance of relationships and relational accountability that demonstrate respect, reciprocity, and responsibility (S. Wilson, 2008). Many non-Aboriginal scholars do work that is highly complementary to, or shares fundamental similarities with, indigenous perspectives, particularly in the area of environmental and ecological studies (e.g., see Capra, 1996; Hawken, 2007; Orr, 1994/2004; Saul, 2008).

### **The Gathering of Stories**

At first glance, readers may wonder if I, a non-Aboriginal woman of mixed European descent, am inappropriately telling the stories of others – those of the indigenous wisdom keepers, the pre-service teachers, and the earth fibres. But as I was a participant-observer in the course (Spradley, 1980), these stories were shared with me, and my personal story has become intertwined with them. As a researcher, I listened from a phenomenological perspective, with an openness to the experience at hand (Thomas and Pollio, 2002; van Manen,

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1990/1997); our entwined stories have touched my heart. Through this intimacy of understanding, I have come to believe that I am *obliged* to tell these stories. I don't own this knowledge; I am a caretaker of it. And now, as Charlene's teachings advise, it is my responsibility to bring this knowledge forward in a good way. Thomas King (2003), a Canadian American novelist of Greek and Cherokee descent, reminds us that once we've heard the stories, it's up to us what we do with them. And so I choose the uncertain path of storyteller, with the intent and willingness to share what I hold, to help good change to happen through this writing. Once you have heard these stories, it will also be up to you what you do with them.

Across Canada, teachers struggle to create inclusive environments in their multicultural classrooms and, in particular, to welcome indigenous students. The purpose of this book is to respond to this struggle by shedding light on the process of dispositional change within the non-indigenous pre-service teachers who were enrolled in the earth fibres course. The book offers a focused glimpse into the immersion of pre-service teachers in indigenous pedagogy and a sense of how that experience changes teaching practice.

My enthusiasm for this work is embedded in what I have come to know, and what I realize I don't know, through my practice as a teacher. My intent is twofold: first, to better inform myself in my journey towards becoming a useful and good teacher; and second, to share this new understanding with the practising community of teachers, teacher educators, and policy makers in the hope that this will improve the capacity of educational programs to meet the diverse needs of children in multicultural classrooms across North America and beyond.

### **The Significance of Stories**

Stories and storytelling are integral parts of indigenous knowledge creation and research (Archibald, 2008; Smith, 1999). In his Massey lecture series, Thomas King (2003, p. 2) repeatedly tells a creation story about the world resting on the back of a turtle. What's under the turtle? Another turtle. And what's under that one? "It's turtles all the way down." King suggests that our beliefs are built on story upon story upon story: "The truth about stories is that that's all we are." Life is narrative – a sequence of events, an account of who and what we are. We express ourselves through stories, and we listen to the stories of others to find out who *they* are. We reflexively examine our life stories to better know ourselves, to figure out how the world works, and to find our place within a complex

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web of relationships. We give voice to where we are located, and where we are going, through the telling of our stories.

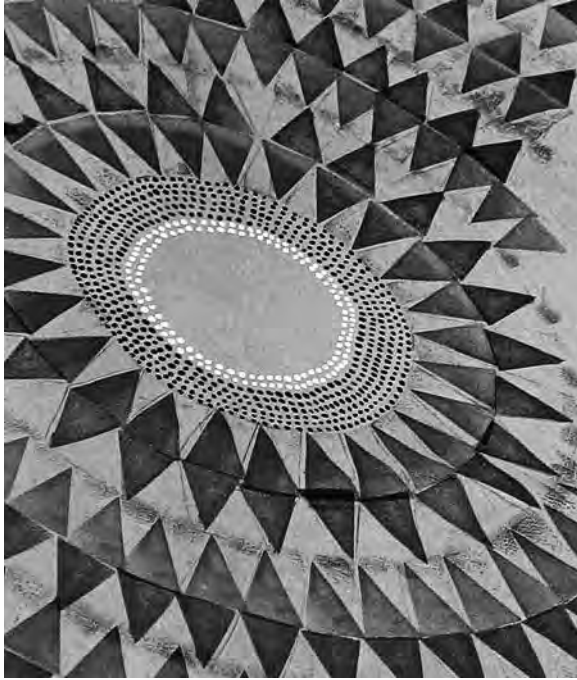
In the study, my approach to narrative inquiry was based on an assumption that the personal, practical knowledge of teachers can serve to inform theory (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000), and I embraced both descriptive and explanatory narratives (Polkinghorne, 1988). Using descriptive narrative, I tried to create accurate portrayals of the personal accounts shared with me in the interviews as well as what I saw during my role as a participant in the course. In using explanatory narrative, I focused on interpreting and understanding the causal relationships between the earth fibres experience and the dispositional changes within the pre-service teachers. Except where noted, all quotes used in the telling of these stories are from one-on-one interviews with the participants.

Nigerian storyteller Ben Okri (1997, p. 46) writes: “In a fractured age, when cynicism is god, here is a possible heresy: we live by stories, we also live in them. One way or another we are living the stories planted in us early or along the way, or we are also living the stories we planted – knowingly or unknowingly – in ourselves.” The course was a serendipitous opportunity for the participants to pay close attention to the stories that had been planted within their landscapes of learning. The pre-service teachers were at a developmentally critical point in their teaching career, moving from an emphasis on their role as learner to an emphasis on their role as teacher. They came from a past that was steeped in strong stories of Euro-Western influence. The narrative expressions of these young people at this particular time and in this particular context were rich and informative as they struggled to make sense of their new role as teachers. The wisdom keepers lived other stories, stories planted generations ago by ancestors with significantly different worldviews. Within the interweaving of these stories exists a good and useful way forward for (teacher) educators.

The stories of the earth fibres study described here have been, and continue to be, disseminated in conversational rather than prescriptive ways. This approach intends to support educators to inform their practice intelligently and intuitively, particularly around ontological, epistemological, and pedagogical issues in multicultural classrooms. It is my hope that this book helps educators to think about what might be possible in their particular location and that it becomes a touchstone encouraging dominant-culture teachers to listen and converse more deeply across cultures.

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*Buckskin print, resonating complexity*

### **Weaving Stories, Walking the Wheel**

Before moving into the heart of the stories, it is important to understand the overarching structure of this work. The earth fibres course was rooted in a deeply complex pedagogy. Honouring that complexity required careful attention to framing the findings of the study in a way that reflected their web-like nature. The course served as a vessel for various experiential stories. There are many ways to narrate the events, and as many ways to present what might be considered significant in the data. I hope to put these stories into words in a way that honours the relational and living complexity of the course, that the experiences do not become too dissected or linear in the telling. Tafoya's (1995) principle of uncertainty suggests that the closer one gets to a definition or explanation of an idea, the more it loses its context. For this reason, I describe two particular framework images that I found useful in bringing the stories forward in a good way: those of a woven braid and of a Métis medicine wheel.

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*Charlene and learner tying braided strands of reed*

The stories of the earth fibres course can be likened to the image of braided strands of cedar woven together into designs that are both interesting to look at and functional. In the context of this writing, I have chosen to highlight four specific storylines, or strands in the braid: those of the wisdom keepers, the pre-service teachers, and the earth fibres themselves, as well as my own personal account. Each of these strands (except for my own) embodies multiple stories representing multiple voices. The four strands weave around and through each other, revealing the reciprocal nature of the overall experience. To reflect the completeness of the course experience, I have chosen not to tell any individual's story on its own. Instead, I present the stories as they came to me, all parts of one complicated whole. This has become a tapestry of story, a story of stories, with each person's account rising to the surface at various times during the telling to add colour and texture to the overall piece.

The first strand in the story is that of the wisdom keepers, who held the intention of bringing their cultural teachings forward through sharing with us their traditional skills with various natural Earth fibres. Theirs is a storyline

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rooted in the lives of people who have lived for countless generations in a particular physical location, a story that extends back far before colonial impact. The wisdom keepers drew upon their profound connection to nature and introduced stories to the participants that were deep, rich, and true to their own personal cultural knowledge embedded in place. They brought cultural teachings forward with the conscious intent of showing us some of the different worldviews that co-exist in the contemporary context of Vancouver Island.

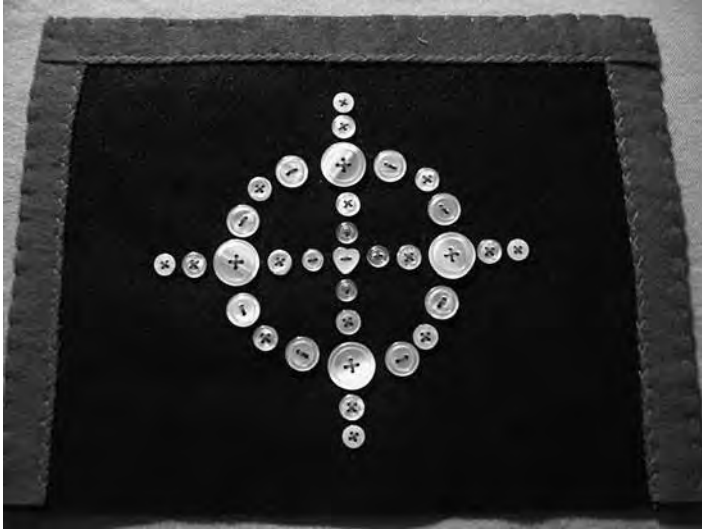
The second storyline is that of the non-indigenous pre-service teachers enrolled in the course. Their ancestors, of primarily European descent, came to the area of SIĆENEN relatively recently. For the most part, the pre-service teachers took the course because they felt unprepared to teach indigenous students. In addition, many expressed an intense longing for, as Courtney (PST) said, “a really genuine experience of learning at the university level.” Throughout the course, the pre-service teachers carefully observed themselves as both learners and emerging teachers, while being acutely aware of finding their way through what Sara (PST) termed “a jumble of teaching beliefs.”

The third storyline is that of the Earth fibres themselves – the cattails, cedar bark, wool, buckskin, shell, and other natural materials that were constantly held and felt by participants throughout the course. These fibres hold stories of physical place, of that which has endured in a particular location over time. Witnessing the wisdom keepers’ present-day interactions with the fibres shed light on the relationships that people had with similar fibres in the past, and how those teachings are being brought forward today. The stories of the Earth fibres are embedded and revealed in the photos, the narratives of the participants, and the finished textile pieces in numerous and powerful ways.

The final story strand is my own. As both a participant in the course and an observer, I engaged in the process of working with the Earth fibres and watched myself as a learner-teacher-researcher. My experience in the course (and with the other storylines) was useful in considering the nature of the participants’ experience. Together, the four storylines create a metaphorical braid of lived experience that emerges in stark contrast to the positivist-oriented backdrop of the university, a context that the course instructors so boldly tried to disrupt. As these storylines intertwined through our shared activity, the unusual learning experience disturbed the pre-service teachers’ ways of being in the classroom and unsettled narratives that had been privileged in their prior school experience.

Alongside the image of the braid, the main themes in the data (those of place, spirituality, learner and teacher relationships, good hands, and integration)

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*Button blanket medicine wheel made in the earth fibres course*

emerged as being deeply congruent with a framework suggestive of the spiraling sensibilities found in the Métis medicine wheel. The teachings about the wheel were first described to me in an interview with wisdom keeper Lynne, midway through the course. In a later meeting, Lynne explained that the wheel was a good image for my findings because she saw me as “teaching about circles and not about squares.” Further, the holistic and flowing nature of the wheel is suggestive of the intricacies of the Earth fibres experience.

Lynne has generously shared with me her teachings of the wheel in order that I may use them in the context of this writing; I thank her for her generosity of spirit. I want to be clear that it is my intention for this work to support understanding between all peoples, including the Métis from whose tradition this version of the wheel extends. I hope my indigenist interpretation will resonate with the teachings of the ancestors. My purpose is to use the wheel not as a static model but, rather, as a resting place of sorts, a fluid framework that can hold the data of the Earth fibres course experience in a gentle way, as it lives and breathes in my hands. I see the wheel as a place where the experience can rest for a time, as I tease out and convey some of the stories before they move on, as stories do, to become whatever else they are meant to be.

After the course, as I moved through the various stages of data analysis, I often struggled to find a suitable way to organize the stories. I wanted to honour

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not only the complexity of the weave but my feeling that the stories were somehow still in motion. My frames were always too hierarchical or linear in nature. I consciously tried to let go of my own Euro-Western-oriented mindset, but I couldn't find a structure that felt right. This was due in part to the complexity and size of the data set (roughly thirty-four transcribed interviews and focus group sessions, totalling more than forty hours of audio data; numerous field notes; and dozens of field photographs) but also to the fact that I did not yet feel comfortable embracing an indigenist stance.

At one point in the process, when I felt particularly “stuck,” I decided to pay another visit to Lynne, as she was one of the participants who had offered to meet with me beyond the initial interviews. My hope was that by sharing my ideas with someone who had an indigenous perspective, I might be able to realize a more organic way of presenting my findings. At this time, I had organized the data into approximately eighteen loose groupings, which I had been rearranging in different ways in my attempts to find a resonant structure. I showed my categories to Lynne and sketched a diagram of how I thought the data were unfolding. The diagram was visually similar to the structure of a DNA molecule, with the stories of the pre-service teachers and the wisdom keepers interweaving and spiralling upwards. Lynne quickly recognized its congruence with her own medicine wheel teachings. Working together, we placed my sub-themes into the framework of the wheel. I then developed the five primary themes that are explored in Chapters 1 through 5.

As I understand it through Lynne's teachings, the medicine wheel is a simple, reflective tool that helps a person situate him- or herself amidst relationships in a given time and place. Lane, Bopp, Bopp, Brown, and elders (1984, p. 9) describe the medicine wheel as follows:

An ancient symbol used by almost all the Native people of North and South America. There are many different ways that this basic concept is expressed: the four grandfathers, the four winds, the four cardinal directions, and many other relationships that can be expressed by four. Just like a mirror can be used to see things not normally visible (e.g., behind us or around a corner), the medicine wheel can be used to help us see or understand things we can't quite see or understand because they are ideas and not physical objects.

In a similar way, wisdom keeper Charlene had spoken briefly about local Coast Salish teachings that draw on the image of four house poles holding up a lodge. Although the earth fibres course was offered on Coast Salish territory, I chose

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to use the Métis wheel as a framework, with Lynne's guidance, because the wheel was shared and talked about in the course and brought up by the participants themselves during the interviews. I believe that the image of the medicine wheel suggests a strong relational accountability to the participants in the course.

Lynne also shared with me that “the true power in the wheel is in the centre, in the hub, and the outer rim follows.” The middle of the wheel is a place of strength and connection to spirit, reminiscent of a place where it is possible to connect to knowledge that endures (Aluli Meyer, 2008). Lynne told me:

With your four directions, you have the four teachings: North, South, East, and West. North is strength; the East is the ancestors and illumination and wisdom; the South is purity and innocence and the child within and joy; and the West is the look within place, the place of here and now, paying your bills, looking after life, being responsible.

Lynne then described the process of “walking the wheel,” a process used when one is trying to choose a good path to take in a given situation. For me, her description evoked a sense of spiralling movement: the walker of the wheel continuously comes back to the centre after visiting the four directions for clarification. This was a more suitable model for my analysis than my previous models had been.

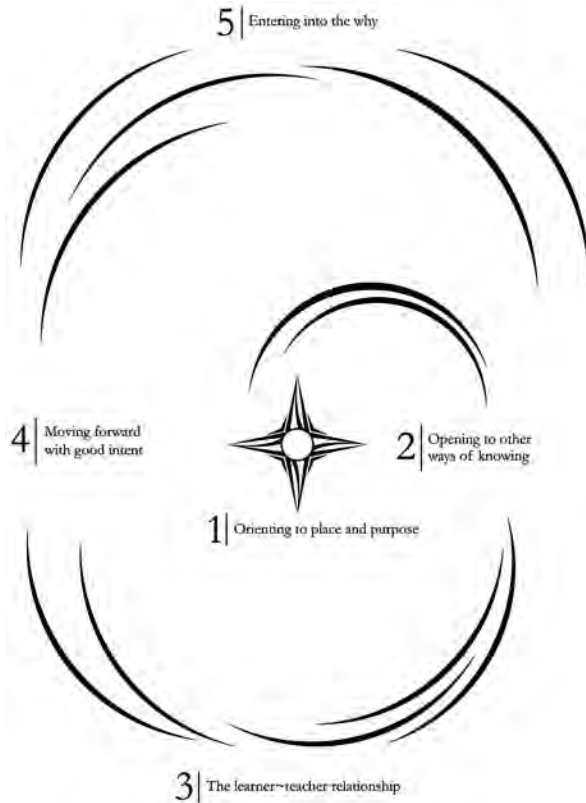
After our conversation, I decided to experiment with walking the wheel in my personal life on various topics. Each time I did so, after “returning” to the centre, I noticed a shift in my understanding, a shift that also slightly adjusted my sense of self. In this way I experienced the wheel as a reflexive practice that helped me recognize and clarify my personal beliefs. When I placed the stories of the course into the frame of the wheel, this, too, became a reflexive process that furthered my analysis in a way that is congruent with the indigenous worldview articulated by the wisdom keepers. As discussed below, the chapters of this book take on a similar cyclical pattern.

This version of the story, then, is my interpretation, emerging through my own personal sensing and writing process. These stories would be different if someone else were to tell them. I ask the reader, as you consider the stories of the course, to keep in mind the images of the braid and the medicine wheel, as temporary vessels that help to hold the earth fibres course experience in time and place for the purpose of this writing. The stories are complex and interdependent. The path laid out in this writing is one of many possible ways through the lived experience in the course – a temporary snapshot. I invite and welcome you into my interpretation of the indigenous world as an earth fibres course.

## Overview of the Chapters

The book provides a small piece of a complicated, multi-dimensional, and animate puzzle that has different implications for all teachers, teacher educators, and teacher education programs, whether they are indigenous or not. It is written in the spirit of dialogue within the realm of education generally, and teacher education specifically, and describes how indigenous teachings were woven into the curriculum practice of these pre-service teachers.

Chapters 1 through 5 tell the entwined stories of the course participants, including the wisdom keepers, the pre-service teachers, the earth fibres, and me. Chapter 1 describes the importance of orienting to place in the context of the course, with an emphasis on interacting with the surrounding physical place,



Walking the wheel of Chapters 1 through 5  
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understanding personal beliefs about learning and teaching, and engaging in a mutually derived sense of common purpose. The pedagogical beliefs of the wisdom keepers and the pre-service teachers are presented in detail in order to highlight pedagogical orientations and each individual's sense of direction.

Overall, the intent of the wisdom keepers in the course was to bring the teachings of their ancestral cultural knowledge forward to the members of the learning community. For the pre-service teachers, two primary intents were to learn more about indigenous culture and to have a genuine learning experience at university. The course was designed to create a space where these two groups could walk alongside each other and interact with a shared common goal. Here, a re-storied learning community emerged – one that was atypical of those generally found in university settings. This learning community thus highlighted a different sense of educational place.

Chapter 2 portrays spirit as an important aspect of the learning process. *Spirit* is defined as that mystery which makes us alive. It does not imply or necessitate any connection to a particular religion or religious belief. The participants describe the act of putting down their notebooks and of opening themselves up to other ways of knowing – ways that differ from the mental engagement commonly encouraged in university and school settings. Listening differently is a particular focus, as is a heightened awareness of language and its underlying meaning. The ritual of an opening circle is discussed as a way for participants to suspend knowing, gain comfort in unknowing, and access other ways of knowing.

The indigenous pedagogical stance taken in the course is described in Chapter 3. The wisdom keepers approached the learning environment by making, in their words, “gentle offerings” of information in ways that were akin to “laying a table” or “planting seeds” for the learner to do with as he or she saw fit. The endogenous learning process of each learner was carefully acknowledged by the wisdom keepers; the pre-service teachers were given fertile ground in which to access their own learning spirits. The pre-service teachers not only felt supported by the wisdom keepers but also knew that the wisdom keepers had faith in them as learners who could find their own way and fulfill their own learning needs. This pedagogy respected the learner and led many participants to feel that during the course they experienced the sort of deep learning that guides one's soul.

Chapter 4 shows how hands-on engagement with the earth fibres helped the participants move away from a solely mental engagement with the material towards other ways of knowing, interacting, and being in the learning environment. Notions of “the good life” and “the way” (a phrase that is described in more



detail on page 94–99), and using “good hands” by having a clear mind and healthy intent are deepened through a focus on physicality and doing. The unveiling ceremony for the final mural created in the course is discussed as a time of completion and connection.

Chapter 5 considers how the participants moved into a deepened awareness that helped them, as one participant said, understand “into the why” of another culture. The pre-service teachers’ shifting perspectives and dispositions around notions of learning and teaching, as well as issues around the integration of indigenous teachings in classroom practice, are described and discussed.

Chapters 6 through 8 reflect on the stories of the course, framed through the lens of Cajete’s (2009) questions for educators, presented now in reverse order: How do we deal with our own souls? How are we going to live with each other? How are we going to deal with the environmental crisis as it is today? These chapters include text boxes that highlight critical questions for practice. Many of these questions emerged in the margins as I first wrote about the course; all have stayed with me as an educator trying to improve and indigenize my practice. These questions are overlapping and interrelated and require extended conversations among educators about what it means to learn and to teach (Pinar, 2004). Chapters 6 through 8 reflect this complexity as key themes from Chapters 1 through 5 are woven more tightly together and brought to the fore.

Resting on the assumption that educators tend to focus on learning rather than teaching (Britzman, Dippo, Searle, and Pitt, 1997), Chapter 6 explores how the course teaches us to care for our souls, both our own and those of the learners we work with. It is about *re-membering* the wholeness of who we are because we teach who we are (Palmer, 1998). It is also about creating our sense of what wholeness means. Learning is the “membering” of the emotional, physical, and spiritual with the intellectual. Learning is circular, cross-disciplinary, and cross-cultural. Learning is complex and requires a kind of trust in the learner that is unfamiliar in Eurocentric educational thought. To take care of our souls, we do well to embrace what Freire calls the “death of the professor” (in Vella, 2002, p. 20) and let the learner find his or her own way. Learning requires us to be vulnerable, to engage our emotions, to follow our intuitive knowing.

Chapter 7 focuses on how we learn to get along with each other. Often this is about resisting the familiar and putting aside what we have come to know. A large part of this is *re-fusing* the status quo. This means “refuse” as in decline to participate, but also “re-fuse,” as in to combine and coalesce. We need to re-wire and come together in a different way. (Teacher) education is founded on an industrial model where schools are like factories producing educated workers.

We must not only recognize that this idea is rooted deeply within us but also consciously move towards another paradigm. This is difficult work, and in the course this often meant moving into vulnerable spaces where our ontological beliefs were brought into question. This chapter looks at the importance of being honest and taking risks in liminal, but safe enough, spaces.

The environmental crisis and how we care for the planet are addressed in Chapter 8. One of the most alarming findings of the study is the degree to which the pre-service teachers felt disconnected from TENEW~Earth. At the beginning of the course, they were unaware of the origins of cedar bark, for example – that it comes from one of the *inner* layers of the tree. They were also unfamiliar with the relational positioning of cedar in the larger indigenous-knowledge context of the stories, spirit, and generational memory. The course experience expanded awareness of important issues of sustainability, asking us to consider how our activities might be useful for the seven generations to come.

Chapters 9 through 11 take a third cycle through the earth fibres experience, focusing on the larger context of resistance and the practical implications of implementation. How do we bring the teachings of the ancestors forward into the world of today? How do we listen to our grandparents and to our children at the same time? Crosscultural education asks teachers to shift their dispositions away from the habits of the dominant culture. This requires time and the right kind of space. Chapter 9 discusses how the Earth fibres course provided such time and space, and the opportunity to manifest resistance to Eurocentric ways of knowing on many levels, from the personal to the institutional. Resistance can take many forms, but what occurred in the course was a certain type of opposition that I call a *tender resistance*, a decolonizing act of social justice that is simultaneously caring, vulnerable, mindful, and dialogic. It is steeped in the act of a careful, open-minded, and generous listening.

Chapter 10 highlights the tensions the pre-service teachers found as they brought the teachings of the course into their practicum placements. Here we learn much from the fresh eyes of pre-service teachers, who became quite inventive as they brought the teachings forward into their unique practicum settings. Given the pervasiveness of what I call “positivism soup,” the pre-service teachers had to address various challenges, including their feelings of disconnection, ideas of ownership, external motivation, assessment, efficiency, group work, and the lack of support for reflection.

Chapter 11 completes this third cycle by discussing how many of the problems in education are really better described as problems *of* education (Orr, 1994/2004). Educators are at a crossroads, where locating a sense of educational

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purpose is paramount. What is our intent? What do we want our classrooms, our world, to be? We have anxiety over these fundamental and often hidden issues in education. Suggestions are made as to how these issues might be addressed, including finding a sense of collaborative purpose, developing relational accountability, walking alongside each other, enacting a pedagogy of spirit, being-becoming mindful inquirers, and walking our talk. Chapter 12 completes the larger circle by returning us to a renewed sense of place within the earth fibres experience.

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