Indigenous Pedagogies: Weaving Communities of Wonder

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Abstract

Indigenous metissage weaves together life writing, poems, scholarship, and images, as a way of sharing strands of my experience of how, while not innovative to us, Indigenous research methods and transformative, participatory pedagogies, such as dreaming, ceremony, making, and drumming, offer suggestions around ways in which to create communities of learning which are inviting for all learners. This is particularly so when we work in arts-based practices, approaches, and paradigms. These transformative Indigenous pedagogies have become the sites of rich, healing conversations with myself, with the land and waters, with my Ancestors, and All My Relations.

Me and All My Human Relations: Situating Myself With My Ancestors

Aniin. Boohoos. Tansi. Ramona Lynn Elke Nindizhinikaaz. I identify my Ancestors[1] as Anishinaabe/Metis from my mother and Celtic/Germanic from my father. All were people of the dust, the dirt, the land in what is now known as Saskatchewan and Ontario. I live and work on the ancestral, traditional, unceded, shared territories of the Katzie and Kwantlen peoples, where I feel, honour, and send gratitude to all Spirits—all Beings—of this place. I am a daughter, mother, and Nokomis (grandmother). I am a poet, artist, and dreamer. I am a teacher, a learner—a student of life, ceremony, and all of creation. I have been taught (Absolon & Willett, 2005; Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008), as an Indigenous scholar/searcher, to introduce myself in ways that connect me, relationally, to people and place and spirit so that I may reveal myself to those with whom I walk. This beginning in reciprocity creates relationship of connection between you, me, and all beings and Ancestors around us who bring us teachings and prepare us to gather knowledge together.

A Metissage of Transformative Pedagogies

This Indigenous Metissage weaves together my life writing, poems, scholarship, and images, as a way of sharing strands of my journey and my experience of how, while not innovative to us, Indigenous research methods and pedagogies offer suggestions around ways to create new communities of learning which are inviting for all learners. This is particularly so when we work in arts-based practices, approaches, and paradigms. Indigenous Metissage is:

> a counternarrative to the grand narrative of our times, a site for writing and surviving in the interval between different cultures and languages, particularly in colonial contexts; a way of merging and blurring genres, texts, and identities; an active literary stance, political strategy, and pedagogical praxis. (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009, p. 9)

Papachase Cree scholar, Dwayne Donald (2012), adds ethical relationality to the above idea of metissage:

> One central goal of doing Indigenous Metissage is to enact ethical relationality as a philosophical commitment. Ethical relationality is an ecological understanding of human relationality that does not deny difference, but rather seeks to understand more deeply how our different histories and experiences position us in relation to each other. (p. 535)

In this way, my Indigenous Metissage seeks to speak to the relationality between myself, the youth with whom I work, my teachings, the lands and waters of my community, and the peoples who are the original caretakers of this land (Katzie and Kwantlen). As a methodology, Indigenous Metissage differs from other forms of metissage work in that it consciously brings in ethical relationality and Indigenous understandings of reciprocity and respect for the work, the teachings provided by the work, and the relationship between the reader, the writer, and all beings in between. As an Indigenous scholar, I must honour and acknowledge all of the teachings and teachers living in the liminal spaces between the threads of the weaving of this work, the breaths in the pauses of my words, and the pixels in the colours of my images.

Fig. 1: A Saskatchewan sunset from a trip "home" in July of 2018.

My poetry weaves the pieces of this work together, as a way to enter into ethical relationality with the teachings/pedagogies/practices I have received from my teachers and Elders. In sharing what I have learned about how to create community through making, ceremony, and the participation in transformative Indigenous pedagogies, I am fulfilling a promise I made to the Elders when I received the gifts of their teachings. Such teachings have not only become medicine for my learning Spirit[2] (Battiste, 2010) and the learning Spirits of others who have received them, but have also come to form the foundation of my teaching/learning spaces and my life ways. These transformative Indigenous pedagogies have become the sites of rich, healing conversations with myself, with the land and waters, with my Ancestors, and All My Relations.[3] Through the transformative pedagogies of dreaming, ceremony, making, and drumming, I have learned to re-make myself, hopefully, to become who I was born to be so that I may help others do likewise.

Dreaming the Way: How Everything Usually Begins

> *After I fell asleep, I was having an animated conversation with a group of people…we were all very excited and heightened about what we were saying. Not arguing, just passionate about the topics. One [topic] that I remember was about the word "pedagogy." I wanted the word to have an "i" instead of an "a" because, I suggested, pedagogy—what we did—had to have legs. We had to move around in it, walk inside of it—do it.* (Taken from my morning pages, September 4, 2021)

I am certain that nothing has been "usual" in my wayfinding through my journey as a "teacher" or as a "student." I have placed these terms in quotation marks because I believe that we are all teachers and students simultaneously. The Haida teachings of sk̲'ad'a state that the teacher and student are always one in the same (Davidson & Davidson, 2018, p. 13). For me, there needs to be a humility in the process of learning from others. In this way, I feel odd to use the term "teacher" for what I do because even though I have a few pieces of paper hanging on my wall to show I have completed formal training, this does not mean that I am finished learning. This way of thinking keeps me humble with my "students" who have taught me more than decades of university ever could. From Indigenous perspectives on teaching and learning, this means we are all equal and valuable in learning spaces and all of our gifts count—not just mine. I have discovered that my change in perspective around this has opened the space for youth to feel safe with their ideas and growth, as well as empowering them to feel that their gifts are worthy of sharing and important for everyone in the space, not just the youngest ones. I let the youth know, regularly, how I learn from them and how much I value their teachings and how grateful I am to have them as such wise, generous "teachers."

Everything is a teaching and "teachers" are everywhere. I have always been keenly, profoundly linked to the liminal spaces between the waking world and dream world—a world richly populated with Ancestors, Spirit Beings[4] and answers, not only for Indigenous peoples, but also for many spiritually rooted peoples around the world. My Celtic Ancestors are dreamers, my Germanic Ancestors are dreamers, my Anishinaabe Ancestors are dreamers. The story of my journey to the power of Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing, begins in dream 10 years before I had even realized I needed these practices as ways of healing myself and the youth and adults with whom I walk.

The first few years of my "teaching" journey were rough, as they are for many early career "teachers." For me, though, I found myself quickly realizing that the colonial system did not have room for how I centred relationship, the importance of creativity, and wholism, as ways to establish nurturing communities for youth and other adults. Deep in my centre, I struggled with an existential wound formed by the knowledge that what was being offered by colonial ways of competition and separation were "not sufficient" (Kelly, personal communication, September 15, 2021) to the longing I was witnessing in the youth with whom I worked. They wanted more than had been offered them in the oppressive and profoundly damaging traditional offerings of colonial education. I needed more, too, than was being offered to the traditional role of "teacher" in the colonial understanding of what a "teacher" needs to be for the benefit of myself, the youth, and the planet. I needed to be seen, re-cognised in the eyes of the youth, the eyes of my colleagues, the eyes of the land and waters witnessing the work I was trying to do respectfully and humbly. I knew the youth needed to be doing something to help them access pathways

into the light of their own recognition, but I was not sure what it was that they needed to do. This "something" had to come outside of what was being offered by colonial learning systems. I knew that I needed to do something to help me with this same journey for myself, but I was also lost. I knew I needed something new and unexpected to reawaken me. Once I had been a playwright. Once I had been a poet. Once I had painted; I had sewed clothing for my children. Once I had been an actor. At that time, over a decade and a half ago, I knew I was a better human when I participated in the ceremony of those activities. In my woundedness, I could only see those activities as a distraction, rather than the medicines I sought for myself and my students. My Ancestors knew what I needed, so they sent me dreams to guide me.

Dreams have been important for our Ancestors. In Shawn Wilson's (2008) "Research Is ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods," Cree scholar Lewis Cardinal shares the importance of dream for solving problems:

> they'd come to a point perhaps where they couldn't decide about what it was they were going to do or what recommendations they'd make and they would say 'Let's sleep on it.' And pretty much the meeting would end at that point. They would do their personal ceremonies…then…they would be sitting and talking about what they dreamt… They'd be comparing information from the dream work, and they'd start to realise that the various symbols were being dictated to them from a different part of their being. So, we're starting to see something more. And suddenly they'd come up with an answer. (Cardinal in Wilson, 2008, p. 113)

I had two dreams which would become pivotal to the shift in direction I would take in the ways I would walk with my students and myself. One placed my feet on the path to the discovery of my Indigenous Ancestry; the other would lead me to the teachings of Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing, which would utterly transform my practice and my life.

dreaming proof

They've done it again –
those Ancestors in waiting –
they have walked out of the deepest of yesterdays into my dreams,
bringing teachings of the before to question the ways of the now
and my head swims,
the drunk fatigue of the sleep deprived,
with the teachings handed to me in conversations I only partially recall.

As if to answer my fears –
my questions of who I am to any of them –
they reach out to me in the only way I understand
and take me by the hand to show me where we live
lived
are living…
without me
or my family.

A call home, maybe.
Maybe that's what that was.

It was, for sure, an answer to my questioning heart:
I know what I know.

My dreams call me from my DNA
that can never be quieted.

This should be enough. Oct 16/18

Fig. 2: Seymour Longhouse photo by Brian Lee. Shared with permission.

The second came to me the night before I was supposed to attend a ceremony for a professional development event in the Pierre family longhouse on Katzie territory near Maple Ridge, B.C. That night, I dreamed I sat across a fire pit from three Elders. One had silver braids, one wore glasses, one spoke while the others were silent witnesses to the words and the fire. The Elder in the middle told me it was time for me to learn the teachings of my Ancestors. I assumed they[5] meant the teachings from the longhouse I was supposed to visit that morning. The teachings that day were not meant to be. What ended up happening is that I was late to pick up the person who knew directions to the longhouse (in the days before Google Maps). En route to her house, I fell ill with a fever and would have had to return home anyway. That was not the day I was, literally, prepared to learn the teachings of my Ancestors, but the spiritual wheels were in motion. I was now paying attention to the signposts along the way which would guide me to the practices and pedagogies which were innovative to me at the time, but have now become part of my everyday living. I realize now that this dream did, indeed, prepare me.

Seven years later, after being accepted into a Graduate Diploma in Education (GDE): Indigenous Education for Reconciliation at Simon Fraser University, I entered the longhouse I had dreamed about where those Elders sat across the fire from me. Through this GDE, I would meet the Elder with silver braids (chi miigwech to late səlil̓wətaɬ [Tsleil-Waututh] Elder, Uncle "Iggy," Ernie George) and the Elder with glasses (Elder Keith, the fire keeper of the longhouse). The third Elder ended up revealing themselves as Dr. Vicki Kelly, my professor in the GDE, Master of Educational Practice (MEdEP), and my PhD supervisor, who, in our first mid-term conversation, told me it was time for me to learn the teachings of my Ancestors.

We were brought to the longhouse for our first day of class, under the light of the full eclipse of the sun, to participate in a naming ceremony. The generosity of the Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish) and səlilw̓ətaɬ (Tsleil-Waututh) nations, formed the framework for our learning. It was necessary for us to set our intentions through ceremony, as a way to engage in reciprocal, ethical relationality with the nations, their teachings, the land and Ancestors of the territories upon which we were invited to learn. This experience grounded us in transformational Indigenous pedagogies which were to serve as the foundation of all our re-searching and inquiries throughout our time together and beyond.[6] Our work began and ended in ceremony in the longhouse sent to me in dream all those years ago.

During our work in the GDE, Vicki shared with us that the idea for the program came to her in a dream . . . dream connected in dream connected in dream, a great example of Penoboscot scholar and lawyer, Sherri Mitchell's (2018) teaching that our Ancestors dreamed us here: "*'we dreamed you into the future.'* [italics in original text] Our Ancestors lived for us; they died for us; and they dreamed for us. Through their collective imaginings, we were all brought into being" (p. 13). From what I was called to pay attention to in my dream world, I would say that my Ancestors have, as always, been right on target. I have had many informative dreams in my life, but none have been as important as the dream of those three Elders across the fire.

Everything Begins and Ends in Ceremony: Living the Call to Attunement

> *Me: What is the purpose of ceremony?*
>
> *Old Woman: To lead yourself to yourself.*
>
> *Me: How?*
>
> *Old Woman: By giving you an idea of who you want to be and then allowing you to create the experience of being that way.*
>
> *Me: Which ceremony is best, then?*
>
> *Old Woman: Life. Choose what leads you to the highest vision you can have of yourself, and then choose what allows you to express that. What you express, you experience. What you experience, you are.*
>
> *Me: How do I prepare?*
>
> *Old Woman: Breathe.* (Wagamese, 2016, p. 29)

Through GDE and MEdEP programs, I had begun the process of becoming transformed by the practices and pedagogies inherent in the Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing. These are life ways of my Ancestors and the Ancestors of many Indigenous peoples and Earth-honouring traditions around the world. We have ceremonies to greet the day, greet new relationships, and greet new life. We have ceremonies for gratitude, for grief, for regeneration. We have ceremonies for planting, for harvesting, for sharing. All our lives are ceremonies. Everything begins and ends with ceremony. Everything.

Even though Indigenous and non-Indigenous folx[7] have differing protocols, teachings, and forms of ceremony, the purpose is pretty universal: "Ceremony is a vehicle for belonging – to a family, to a people, to the land . . . it marries the mundane to the sacred . . . the material and the spiritual mingle" (Kimmerer, 2013, pp. 37–38), a way to: "build stronger relationships or bridge the distance between the cosmos and us" (Wilson, 2008, p. 237). Closing our eyes to whisper words of gratitude to the beauty of a setting or rising sun; singing "Happy Birthday" to a beloved friend, family member, or our children; or sitting in a sweat lodge or long house connect us, at our centre, to the universe, the Great Mystery/Creator, creation, and All Our Relations. They remind us we are all related, all connected to each other through the mystery of what it is to become human.

I am grateful to have experienced the power of ceremony firsthand for myself and for the youth with whom I walk. As I have shared above, my journey to re-member myself to myself and my Ancestors began in a naming ceremony and ended in a celebration ceremony in the Seymour longhouse, on the territories of the Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish) and səlilw̓ətaɬ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. I struggle to find the words to describe the experience of the deep metamorphosis I witnessed and lived in that sacred space. The only way I could come close, was to use poetry to express my awe. I wrote this poem the day after the naming ceremony under the total eclipse of the sun:

smoke
my hair smells of smoke
from fires of my ancestors
brighter than the eclipse,
holding more prayers than handfuls of sand grains on beaches on Earth.

my hair smells of smoke
and my dirty feet,
blackened with the dust of good Mother Earth –
pure and new,
like my feet on this path to myself –
my mother's, mother's, mother,
keeper of this deep blood from men who came to her on her homestead.

my hair smells of smoke,
fills my head with visions
and dreams
and drumbeats heard before I was born,
vibrating through my genetic memory like an earthquake.

my hair smells of smoke,
so I must remember to pray when I wash it.

r. l. elke
Aug 22/17

I had been awakened; cracked open. The voices in me begging me to re-member them to my heart. To this day, I still feel the fine silt of long house dirt on my bare feet, my soles vibrating with the desire to root myself in ceremony. I knew, immediately, that I needed to find ways to bring ceremony into my practice. The first year I returned to the classroom after a decade of support work, I did just that.

In December 2018, my Grades 11 and 12 English First Peoples and BC First Peoples Studies classes served deer stew, Bannock and sweets; offered song and gratitude; and gifted carved paddles, smoked salmon, and Salish woven bags to the Katzie Elders able to join us that day. This ceremony of sharing transformed everyone in that room that day. From the communion through food and conversation, to the witnessing an Elder's story of surviving St. Mary's residential school in Mission, British Columbia, to the good feelings of giving what we made, each person was profoundly changed by the experience.

Fig. 3: Our classroom on feast day.

The ceremonies of hosting and preparing for the feast provided sites for our longing to be good relatives, praxes for our leaning into questions about what it means to live reciprocally within the web of creation. We learned about ceremony by preparing for ceremony in a ceremonial way. Our weavings wove us together; our preparation of food and spaces prepared our hearts, minds, bodies, and spirits, to be good hosts; and our witnessing the stories and teachings of others allowed us to become witness to ourselves within the human story, alongside the Elders, the animals and plants who fed us, and the guests who came to join us in our celebration and gratitude. These connections, and the process of lifting up and honouring these relationships, are important for youth to experience—especially Indigenous youth. We cannot separate ourselves into pieces (mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual). We are whole beings who must honour and lift up all of ourselves and others. Ceremony allows us to do this and, if we are going to heal educational spaces in order to begin to repair the damage done by colonial systems, we must acknowledge the spirit in our learning spaces:

> When we share our knowledge, there is no separation between the spiritual realm and the one in which we live…we need to recognise that this spiritual knowledge is a significant aspect of the knowledge our students bring with them from their homes and communities to school. (Davidson & Davidson, 2018, p. 73)

My students, the youngest of whom graduated two years ago, still talk about that feast day. It was a beautiful day for all of us; a day of radical transformation brought about by practices rarely offered in "mainstream," western educational spaces.

The Transformation in the Making: More Than Meets the Eye 😉

> I have been tracking Indigenous Poeisis or 'making' as a profound participatory pedagogy, a process that makes me and unmakes me. 'Making' needs the soil of the soul to enact its active alchemy. In its unfolding, it renders or transforms us, makes us available or resonant to the world around us. This sensitizing of our aesthetic sensibility creates an instrument that allows us to learn to entrain with the sounding of acoustic ecologies of being. (Kelly, 2019, p. 19)

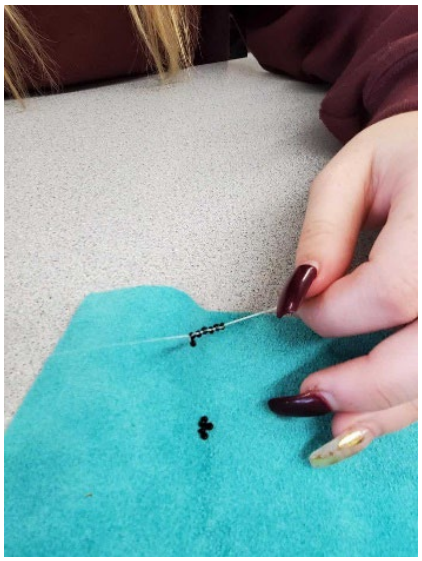

Fig. 4: A student learning to bead.

On any given day, if you were to pop by our classroom for a cup of tea, you would see students working on any number of making projects. Some will be practicing their Salish weaving of bags to give to family or Elders for our next feast; some will be beading earrings or orange shirts for pins; some will be carving designs into yellow cedar—all during my lessons or during the times I read out loud the novels, stories, teachings, or poems, we are learning from that day.

We learn better, listen better, with "busy hands." Traditionally, our Elders would have taught us life teachings through story while we were sharing in an activity with them. My own Granny would ask me to help her in the garden with the weeding or picking slugs off the tomato plants when she needed to talk to me about "life stuff," from encouraging me in my schoolwork to suggesting ways I could get along better with my younger sister. The same would happen when she asked me to help with baking or cooking or other chores we would do together. The making and doing made it so much easier to talk about difficult issues with her because the calming, repetitive motion of pulling weeds or raking or hoeing took my mind off of being "in trouble," and the invitation to help share the workload let me know that she valued my abilities and work ethic. I was contributing to our collective needs. This made me feel good about myself and my relationship with my Granny. She needed me. This made me feel valuable.

Fig. 5: Mother bear and her cubs carving in our classroom last year.

There are many teachings inherent in making practices for which children and youth are longing. They long to be tuned to the spiritual and acoustic ecologies of the land and waters of place, as well as of themselves, as Vicki states in the quote above. Making gifts us with the teachings of patience, when learning a new, complex skill (such as weaving or beading); the teachings of honouring and respect when working with cedar and sharp carving tools; and the teachings of generosity and gratitude when you give away the first item you make, to name but a few. Each presents itself to us when we are in the liminal space between the world we are in when we are in the acts of creation, and the world we are in when we are not. My students and I have learned, firsthand, from the making practices themselves, that how we approach our work has everything to do with how the work turns out. For example, if we are in knots within ourselves when we bead, our thread will become tangled, our bead counts will be off, and we will have to start over different sections (or whole projects sometimes) over and over again. If we approach our weaving with "bad feelings" or frustration, we will be passing those feelings to the person who will be receiving the gift we are making. Intentions matter. As a result, many youth have found weaving to become a practice that has helped soothe the symptoms associated with anxiety. When they are feeling the need for repetitious actions to calm their speeding heart and spirit, they sit with the weaving, and it teaches them calm—it teaches them to sit with themselves in all of their ways of being and make their way out of their crisis.

Fig. 6: Odeminon – Heartberry pins I beaded for friends.

I have experienced this medicine myself. In preparation for our final GDE ceremony, each member of our learning community was taught how to weave our regalia on a floor loom and to carve metal to make a shawl pin to finish that regalia. I was new to both practices, unsure and longing to do a good job to honour my teachers and my learning journey throughout the GDE. I had to come humbly to the process so I wouldn't ruin the copper, the walnut of the pin end, or the patterns I had dreamed into my weaving. At the same time, I was teaching myself to bead medallions and pins as a way to re-member myself to the making practices of my Anishinaabe/Metis Ancestors. Over one year ago, my daughter taught me how to bead earrings, a practice she learned when she was doing her Master's program at Carleton University in Ottawa, Ontario. She was gifted with story teachings and understandings around beading which she generously shared with me. Through her own Indigenous research methodologies, she learned from beaders like Sherry Farrell Racette who, in her 2011 article *Encoded knowledge: Memory and objects in contemporary Native American art,* teaches us:

> Objects…embody their maker's knowledge and the times of their creation. The imprints of skilled fingers are everywhere: tiny stitches carefully laid in regular rhythm. Delicate materials pushed to their physical limits. The media used in their creation are the material evidence of science and technology, trade, relative degrees of wealth and poverty. Their forms and materials are narrative accounts of struggle, innovation and continuity. (p. 41)

All these ways of expressing myself aesthetically allow me to tune myself to the teaching stories of my Ancestors and the Ancestors of this place—the unceded, shared territories of the Katzie and Kwantlen people. I learn to resonate with all beings, seen and unseen, transforming my being into one who is receptive and sensitive to the resonance of others. What this means for me, I believe, is that I am a better mother, partner, friend, "teacher," and learner, because of this honed sensitivity. I am taking up my responsibility to attune to the land and waters and to learn how to be fully human:

> The responsibility to be fully human requires us to create profound resonances within our being: physically, emotionally, mindfully, and spiritually through a participatory pedagogical process that informs our being. This process helps teach us through the creation of an elegant symmetry within our imaginations. Thus, the land animates our traditional, cultural, and spiritual cosmologies, as an act of imagination within place. (Kelly, 2021, p. 190)

Weaving, carving, and beading, are tuning the youth with whom I walk to the land on which they live and the waters flowing in rivers, streams, and creeks, all around us. They re-member their imaginations to this place and the places in which they encountered themselves as children. Our making together allows us ways to encounter each other, too. We teach each other how to weave, carve, and bead, opening our creative and learning Spirits to the work, the world, and ourselves. Again, while these practices are not "innovative" in Indigenous spaces, I believe, deeply, that these practices are necessary to heal the wounds caused by colonial learning and teaching spaces. I have lived and been witness to the healing of these pedagogies as they work, like balm, on the chafed spirits of those who long for a place of belonging.

the unseen

All of this invisible magic seeps into the fibres of the "right now,"
so that we are reminded to pray deep prayers of gratitude with every breath
because what is unseen is not unfelt –
is as real as the lines on my face,
the ink on my skin,
or the ache in my knees from bending under the weight of faithlessness.

Now I should be levitating with weightlessness in
peace of all these answered prayers.

These helpers are always here and I should never be more grateful. May 4/19

Fig. 7: My regalia shawl in process (July 2019).

Drumming: Sounding All Our Hearts Together

> *Me: Why do I use a drum?*
>
> *Old Woman: To touch the earth.*
>
> *Me: Then why do I sing with it?*
>
> *Old Woman: To allow the earth to touch you.*
>
> *Me: What am I singing for?*
>
> *Old Woman: So that someday you might sing the one note that joins your heartbeat and the earth's heartbeat to the heartbeat of everything.*
>
> *Me: You're saying that drumming and singing, anything that leads me inward and then outward, are just like praying and meditating?*
>
> *Old Woman: You are getting wiser, my boy. (Wagamese, 2016, p. 93)*

Fig. 8: Me drumming for the opening of our Grade 8 Indigenous Games in the winter of 2019.

At least once per day, one of my classes engages in drumming and singing songs I have been gifted by various teachers and Knowledge Holders from various communities. We sing Earth Songs, Water Songs, and Men's and Women's Warrior songs. On days when I don't offer the drumming, the youth ask to drum and sing. I have noticed that I have a much stronger relationship with the youth in the classes I drum and sing with on a regular basis. I have great relationships in the other classes, too, but I find that I feel safer sharing cultural knowledge with the group with whom I drum and sing on a regular basis. We take the drums outside of our learning space into the school to sound into colonial spaces so we can shake up the school—decolonizing with music. We have four 10-inch cow hide drums, ten 16-inch elk hide drums, a buffalo hide rattle, and one 26-inch elk hide powwow drum. We are loud, proud, and bonded by the reverberations of the drums and our voices raised in unison to honour the beings and people of the place, seen and unseen.

Anishinaabe teachings of the drum (Johnston, 2013) tell us that the drum came in a vision to our Ancestor Nanaboozho when his dear brother, Cheeby-aub-oozhoo, died in a canoeing accident. He missed his brother so much, he wanted to communicate with him in the spirit world. Cheeby-aub-oozhoo visited Nanaboozho in a dream with instructions on how to create, bless, and care for the hand drum. He told Nanaboozho that the drum was the way we can communicate with spirit . . . all spirit. He taught us that the sound of the drum was the heartbeat of our mothers, linking us to the Mother Earth and all those beings who have raised us and sustained us. We use the drum to bring our hearts together. When we are in synch, my group of thirty can stop and start with me without a missed beat or an over-beat. We are one body, one voice, one spirit. This is medicine.

Part of my assessment practice is to have a conversation with the youth in our classroom communities, before report card times, as a way for us to come to a consensus about their "grade"; as a way to check in with them around how they are doing; and how I am doing as a "teacher." I ask them if they are getting the support they need, how they are resonating with the teachings, what they are enjoying the most, and so on. Without fail, the drumming (and making) always top the list of activities they like best. They always talk about how good the soundings of the drum feel in their chests, how they feel connected to the whole

group when they drum and sing, and how they feel more focused and prepared to learn after they finish drumming and singing. Even when I initially decided not to bring the drums (and changed my mind), like I did a couple of years ago for the first in-person summer school group after the pandemic, everyone put drumming at the top of the list of activities they enjoyed the most. Even when we don't use them, those silent drums bring soundings from other places and beings which help to re-member our selves to those pieces we thought we had forgotten:

> unused items are often thought of, and referred to, as dormant or sleeping with the potential to be awakened by movement, gestures, and words. Inaction does not reduce meaning; rather objects are viewed for their potential reanimation, but perhaps, more importantly, for the history and memory of actions they hold within themselves. They remember. They remember us. They remember for us. (Racette, 2011, p. 42)

Fig. 9: Our hand drums and our classroom.

Final Thoughts on Making Our Way Forward: Building Communities of Wonder

> Communities need a shared story of their future from shared values and shared understandings. Achieving this requires that each member of the community become engaged in sharing the communal mindset and in caring about each other – in becoming emotionally and psychologically vested in the community's future. (Cajete, 2015, p. 108)

> Wonder changes to reverence when we feel and honour the powerful presence or force of agency that lies within the living phenomenon of the land, it becomes a sacred ecology. We feel the presence of 'All Our Relations'; we sound and resound with the inner energy or sounding tone or voice of Creation. (Kelly, 2019, p. 20)

My journey into these spaces has been transformative. I have witnessed the metamorphosis of many youth and adults who have chosen to open themselves to the wonder inherent in Indigenous participatory pedagogies. Dreaming, making, ceremony, and drumming, have become the foundation of my own practice within and outside of the teaching and learning spaces in which I find myself. Until recently, these practices have not made their way into "main stream," Western education. By introducing colonial learning spaces to Indigenous pedagogies and practices, I hope "to weave a new basket of understanding for holding Indigenous Knowledges" (Kelly, 2021, p. 199). I am also working to create spaces where

everyone who enters, feels safe from "the trauma of erasure and separation" (Snowber & Bickel, 2015, p. 67). If the pandemic has taught us anything about community, it's that we desperately need healthy communities to bring us back together after this long journey through separation. We need to be healed in a sense of wonder of the world around us, the wonder at our ability to create, the wonder at our own generosity and ability to survive challenges, and the wonder of our connection to the mystery of the cosmos. Youth need these pedagogies of dreaming, making, ceremony, and drumming, to bring themselves into the world we need to create as a community of spirits learning to be fully human. Deep metamorphosis is possible through these innovative practices. Gateways are opened into unseen, liminal spaces, where we may learn to take up the serious work of healing ourselves, our planet, and each other—spaces where the Ancestors are watching.

the Ancestors are watching

There is no going back now.
For any of it.
The vines part, clearing the path before me,
and I know this is my way forward.

I am rooted to the teachings,
whispers of Ancestors in my hair,
medicine smoke in the wind,
confirmations that this is the way
for now.

I raise my hands to the clear blue breaks in the sky praising the sun
and the drum
and the story song in my blood, thrumming like thunder in my ears.

I am where I've always longed to be.
So, now walk forward prayerfully.
The Ancestors are watching. (May 29/18)

Fig. 10: Sunset on the Fraser River. From my photos.

Notes

1. I have capitalized the "A" in Ancestor because in my teachings, our Ancestors are living beings who are powerful and present even though we may not be able to witness them in physical form. The capital "A" denotes respect and reverence.

2. Mi'kmaq scholar Marie Battiste (2010), teaches that the learning spirit guides us in our journey to become the people we were born to be: "What guides our learning (beyond family, community, and Elders) is spirit, our own learning spirits who travel with us along our earth walk, offering guidance, inspiration, and quiet unrealized potential to be who we are…with a purpose for being here and with specific gifts fulfilling that purpose. In effect, the learning Spirit has a Learning Spirit. It has a hunger and a thirst for learning . . . (pp. 14–15).

3. All My (or Our) Relations is a term used to describe all beings in all realms of our lives, seen and unseen. This may include spirits, Ancestors, more-than-human beings such as Rock People, Plant People, Animal People, and so on. It is a term meant to include all beings in our cosmology. For me, that is an Anishnaabe cosmology.

4. I capitalize Spirit Being because in my cosmology they are proper nouns. This is a show of respect for those ones we cannot see who are also teachers.

5. I use the non-gender pronoun "they" for Spirit Beings because they are not gendered in our understanding.

6. See Kelly (2021) for a detailed description of the necessity of this program and its role in the wayfinding to trans-systemic change for working in ethical relationality with Indigenous Nations and how the practices in the program's creation and content have transformed the practices of over 60 educators, support teachers, and others working with youth.

7. Below is an excellent explanation and source for the use of the word "folx":

Overall, research around the usage of "x" in language shows that there are generally four reasons it is used, says Norma Mendoza-Denton, Ph.D., linguistics expert and anthropology professor at UCLA.

1. To avoid having to assign gender within a word.
2. To represent trans and gender non-conforming people.
3. As a variable (such as in algebra), so it acts as a fill-in-the-blank term for each person. For example, in the use of "xe" or "xem" in neopronouns, a category of new pronouns that can be used for anyone, regardless of gender.
4. For many colonized communities—whether Latinx, Black, or other Indigenous groups—the "x" also stands for all that has been taken away from them by colonizers. For example, communities in Mexico call themselves Chicano/Xicano/a/x as opposed to "Mexican" because it signals identification with Indigenous languages that have always had or have lost their third gender. For example, the community in Juchitan, Mexico, is reclaiming and celebrating their third gender "muxe."

All of these reasons reference the desire to escape binary language as well as colonization. In reclaiming language, it is easier to pave the way for a more inclusive system.
https://www.shape.com/lifestyle/mind-and-body/latinx-folx-womxn-meaning

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