Rethink Revitalization: Wellbeing within Indigenous Language Revitalization.

by
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I acknowledge and respect the Lək̓ʷəŋən (Songhees and Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Lək̓ʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

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Abstract

This doctoral project consists of a website Rethink Revitalization and this written companion piece. The website uses digital space, personal experience, and applied knowledge to explore intergenerational trauma's impact on Indigenous Language Revitalization (ILR) practitioners. Building interdisciplinary connections between trauma, mindfulness, and embodiment, I consider how ILR practitioners can start to understand, and address, the influence of colonization on their lives. In doing so, I work from an understanding that Indigenous language revitalization isn't just about *language*. Language revitalization is about *everything* related to being human. Language connects to our identities, our values, our beliefs, and our relationships. Most importantly, from my perspective, language revitalization connects to—and impacts—our wellbeing. I focus on the question "How do we revitalize language safely in ways that expand wellbeing?". Grounded in my personal experience, I seek to illuminate concepts, perspectives, and practices that might help other ILR practitioners reduce stress, promote health, and prevent burnout.

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Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the people who supported me throughout my research and the creation of this doctoral project.

Dedication

This doctoral project was made possible by the thousands of interactions I've had with other ILR practitioners over a 30-year span. It is dedicated to the hard road each of you walks and to the hope that we can each learn to walk those roads in health and balance.

Overview of chapters

The bulk of my original contribution to the field of Indigenous language revitalization is not contained within this document. Rather the primary demonstration of learning for my doctoral research is the Rethink Revitalization website that I created on wellbeing within the field of ILR. This document serves as a companion piece to illuminate the personal, ethical, and conceptual foundations, process, insights, and outcomes that lead to the creation of the website. My intention is to share with you the path of my research—some of the important places I stopped along the way—and how I arrived at a website as a container for my demonstration of learning.

Chapter 1: Introduction includes an introduction to the overall doctoral project.

Chapter 2: Personal, ethical, and conceptual foundations: my scholarship as an ILR practitioner includes a summary description of the personal, ethical, and conceptual foundations of my scholarship.

Chapter 3: Summary of the research process includes a summary of the research process that I used to examine the relationship between trauma, wellbeing, and Indigenous language revitalization.

Chapter 4: The insights of my doctoral research: rethinking revitalization as wellbeing includes a summary of the key insights of my research examining the relationship between trauma, wellbeing, and Indigenous language revitalization.

Chapter 5: Designing a website for ILR practitioner wellbeing includes a summary of the design process to create a website on wellbeing within the field of ILR and screenshots of the website sections.

Chapter 6: Conclusion: Reflective Essay includes a reflective essay on learning, contribution to the field of ILR, and possible future directions for research.

An important note about scholarship and embodied experience:

If you are an ILR practitioner, but not a scholar, the chapters of this dissertation which describe the process of research might feel inaccessible to you. The tone, and the writing style, sometimes shifts as I move away from my direct experience as an ILR practitioner, and into the language of scholarship. I can feel this shift in my own body and it's uncomfortable. It's like putting on a coat that doesn't quite fit. Personally, no amount of tailoring will ever make the academic coat rest comfortably on my body. Given the role of academia in my personal and communal life, that makes a lot of sense. It also reflects the concepts of embodiment, safety, and hostile environments that I discuss throughout this dissertation.

What I mean about reflecting the concepts of embodiment, safety, and hostile environments are that, regardless of my participation in it, academia doesn't feel particularly safe or welcoming to me. The language of scholarship, which I've learned thoroughly, doesn't feel right coming out of my mouth. Many of the practices of scholarship, for example citation, send my nervous system into high alert. I could write a long diatribe on how citation is a microaggression against Indigenous ways of knowing, but that isn't the point. The point is that understanding my scholarship depends on you *accepting* the reality of colonization. All colonial systems, including academic ones, are hostile environments for Indigenous people, or anybody, whose embodied experience tells them that bad things happen(ed) in these places, or that a way of doing something is oppressive.

It doesn't mean that I, or anybody else, can't participate in academia. It's not any different than being an African American person who must walk around in a country built on slavery or a woman who must walk around in a society steeped in misogyny. Sometimes it doesn't feel good, but you learn survival skills. You find little pockets of safety. You try to surround yourself with people who are safe, even if the systems aren't safe. What you don't want to do, because it's bad for your wellbeing, is to gaslight yourself (or let somebody else do it for you) into ignoring your embodied experience. That's true in academia and it's also true in Indigenous language revitalization. If you feel unsafe, there's a reason, and often that reason

will have its roots in the inherent violence of colonization. The subject of this doctoral project is how to recognize those feelings and start to exercise agency over them.

Chapter 1

Introduction[1]

> Rejecting shame is a messy and nasty affair. Dirty business. It requires some serious shadow work to unhinge yourself from the manifestation of hundreds of years of foolishness that shows up in every facet of your life. You commit yourself to being uncomfortable. I committed myself to being uncomfortable. You commit yourself to some of the worst emotional pain you have ever felt. I committed myself to that pain. You want to literally crawl out of your skin. It is not linear or exponential. And sometimes you realize that shame, hiding, shrinking, suffering is infinitely easier in the short term than the arduous and intentional work of getting spiritually and emotionally free.
>
> -Tanya Denise Fields, Dirty Business: The Messy Affair of Rejecting Shame

In 2019, after a decades long slide into exhaustion, I burned out as an Indigenous language revitalization (ILR) practitioner.[2] The timing couldn't have been worse. I was starting a PhD program in ILR, coordinating a nation-wide planning and development effort, and in the middle of an ambitious personal project on the Sauk language. It was also the United Nations International Year of Indigenous Languages. I had nine conference presentations scheduled. Physically and emotionally unravelling was not an option. I had no explanation for what I was experiencing. I tried desperately to summon the will that had taken me through so many difficult challenges, but it had evaporated. I felt weak and embarrassed. My sense of shame, and of failure, was profound. It was probably equaled only by my sense of denial that I had reached the point of total collapse.

I didn't tell anybody about it. I had been an ILR practitioner for 25 years. My entire adult

[1] This introduction, like much of my work, is written primarily for ILR practitioners. In choosing to speak directly to ILR practitioners, I intentionally set aside many of the conventions of academic writing.

[2] The most useful, accessible book I have found on this topic is *Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle* by Emily Nagoski and Amelia Nagoski (2019).

life had been spent working with language revitalization programs.[3] Being an ILR practitioner was integral to my identity, and my source of income. So, I just kept working, my burnout deepened, my mental and physical health deteriorated, and my passion for ILR guttered to a tiny spark. I hit rock bottom as an ILR practitioner, and I did not understand how I arrived there. I did not decide to face my burnout. The world made that decision for me when it shut down in March 2020, trapping me on Vancouver Island far from home, and pushing me, like so many people, to sit with the reality of my existence. Sitting with the reality of my existence, as Tanya Denise Fields (2021, pg. 29) describes, was a "messy and nasty affair".

Mostly what my doctoral research, and the COVID pandemic, gave me was time and space to do the necessary reflection on the reality of my existence. What I had to do was commit myself to being uncomfortable, because it is arduous work to liberate yourself from suffering. So, since March 2020, I've turned my effort towards understanding why I burned out, what to do about it, and how to share my experience in the hope that doing so helps other ILR practitioners prevent, or recover, from burnout. "Burnout" is simply a word that stands in for the trauma, stress, and other negative impacts from colonization.[4] "Colonization" is just another way of saying life as a human being, who's trying to fully be, inside systems designed to grind you to dust, inside countries built on oppression, inside worldviews manifested to justify

[3] I don't have precise definitions for who is an ILR practitioner or what constitutes Indigenous language revitalization. I think it's better to let people recognize themselves. I use the term "ILR practitioner" to describe myself (and to refer to people I know) as shorthand for those engaged in teaching, learning, studying, using, etc. Indigenous languages. I like the word practice because its etymology is "putting into action" and I like revitalize because its etymology is "put new life into". Ultimately, I don't really think it matters what terms we use in English.

[4] See Nagoski & Nagoski (2019) for a detailed description of "burnout" and its impacts.

subjugation. It is foolish to turn away from the suffering inflicted by colonization, capitalism, patriarchy, and empire in the world. It is also foolish to deny the influence they have upon our existence as human beings and ILR practitioners.[5]

Colonization, like shame, is dirty business. Many ILR practitioners swim daily in the ongoing effects of systemic oppression, historical trauma, and linguistic, cultural, and territorial loss (Brave Heart et al., 2011). Language revitalization can bring all this oppression, trauma, and loss to the surface.[6] In my experience ILR often stirs the deep waters of pain, grief, and suffering because language connects to everything we are as human beings. Language connects to our identities, our values, our beliefs, and our relationships. It connects to our sense of place, purpose, and belonging. Language connects to all our emotions and our capacities to feel, learn, express, and heal.

This context of oppression, trauma, and loss makes Indigenous language revitalization tough, challenging work unlike any other kind of language learning or teaching. In my doctoral research I've explored these nitty, gritty realities and how one might 'persist' through them.[7] For four years, I engaged in a system of reflective practice about how colonization has impacted me as an ILR practitioner, and what I might do about it. While the experiences leading to my

[5] It can be difficult to recognize how colonization impacts your experience, your body, or your own wellbeing. It's also uncomfortable to examine how it shapes our own thoughts, feelings, and embodied responses.

[6] Language revitalization can also bring to the surface joy, liberation, and healing. My point is that regardless of the emotions involved the experience of oppression – trauma and loss is a central part of the context of ILR efforts.

[7] The theme of persistence which became so central to my work emerged from a gathering at UVIC called "Exploring Innovative and Successful Adult Language Learning Methods in Indigenous Communities in Canada and the US." To read the report from this gathering: https://netolnew.ca/all-research-reporting/growing-fire-within/

burnout are specific to me, they are also commonly shared by other ILR practitioners.[8] On the website that became the primary output of my doctoral project, I share information about how colonization impacts the bodies, minds, and spirits of ILR practitioners. I try to speak honestly about things practitioners will encounter in the field of Indigenous language revitalization and what they might do about them.

Let me share some of that same honesty with you. I want to speak clearly about the most important insight of my research. It is simply to tell you that you're not LESS.

> Colonization, and all the loss that comes from it, wants you to feel that you are LESS. It wants you to feel bad about everything you don't know, weren't taught, or didn't learn.
>
> Colonization wants you to believe that you, your family, and your community are to blame for you feeling LESS. It wants you to believe that you, your family, and your community are to blame for you knowing LESS about your language, culture, history, ceremonies, or traditions than your ancestors.
>
> Colonization wants to hide, obscure, and mystify what happened and continues to happen, that violently removed Indigenous people from the protective blanket of healthy families, strong communities, intact cultural systems, and a balanced relationship with the living earth. It wants you to believe that revitalizing your language,

[8] These experiences are also commonly shared by many other people. I write about the experience of ILR practitioners because that's what I have lived, but the impacts of the suffering colonization, capitalism, patriarchy, and empire cause in the world is happening to every human being on planet Earth.

> restoring everything to its original state, is your responsibility, and that if you don't achieve it, then there's something wrong with you, that you cease to be, and that you should just give up, and accept LESSness.
>
> Colonization wants you to hide, and feel ashamed, about this LESSness, and all the things that you don't know, might not be able to achieve, or simply don't have the energy to attempt. Colonization is a deep trap that nurtures feelings of LESS in all of us.
> The antidote to feeling LESS isn't to be MORE or know MORE.
> The antidote to feeling LESS is to feel WHOLE.

It is arduous and intentional work to seek wholeness. It takes, as Tanya Denise Fields (2021) says, commitment to face shame and other forms of LESSness that many ILR practitioners' experience. It also takes, as I share on the website, skills for expanding your own wellbeing. It takes a lot of practice to develop those skills. Most importantly, for wholeness, you need other people. Wholeness isn't just an internal state. Wholeness comes from the world around you. Wholeness comes from having space to be fully yourself, places where you set down vigilance, and relationships where you feel safe, and can get help. Relationships where you experience kindness, compassion, and belonging. Language revitalization can provide those things, and it also cannot. We may find ourselves in safe, nurturing relationships or in risky, high-stress relationships, often moving back and forth between them, or having them exist in the same space, with multifaceted experiences and emotions happening simultaneously, as we seek ways to revitalize Indigenous languages in the context of hostile systems.

Only you can decide if your ILR practice cultivates wholeness, and to what extent, and what it means for your wellbeing. My research simply seeks to give you some conceptual tools that might help during that process. The revitalizing of my own practice did not emerge from strength, skill, or expertise. The revitalizing of my practice emerged from accepting that I needed help. Much of the help I needed was to release myself from the weight of colonization, historical trauma, and language, cultural, and territorial loss. I had to, as I came to describe it much later, Rethink Revitalization. I had to find a new relationship to the field of ILR. I needed new boundaries about what I was willing to do. I needed to rethink where, and with whom, I am willing to practice language revitalization.

These days I'm concerned with healing, strengthening relationships, and creating safety. If that can happen through language revitalization, then I'm interested. If people are going to fight, create stressful environments, and blow trauma all over each other, then I'm not interested. That some people do nothing more than fight, create stressful environments, and blow trauma all over each other in the name of language revitalization – that is a reality that many of us must face. It is the legacy of colonization embodied in human beings. It is intergenerational trauma and systemic oppression playing itself out upon Indigenous bodies, minds, and spirits. My refusal to continue exposing myself to toxic environments or relationships isn't from a lack of empathy or an unwillingness to face difficult circumstances. It is recognition that the sustainability of my ILR practice, and of my own wellbeing, requires boundaries around the impacts of colonization.

Understanding your own relationship to the legacy of colonization, its ongoing impacts, and what it means for your ILR practice, is what I hope my doctoral research can help you do.

The website I've created provides opportunities to Rethink Revitalization, in ways that might make your existence more hopeful, less stressful, and perhaps most importantly, more honest. If you can't be honest (with yourself and others), then it's difficult to feel hope, because your aspirations are built on pretending, ignoring, or hiding. I've done all those things, mostly in my attempts to protect other people from being hurt, but it doesn't work out, because it blocks the pathway to true seeing.

True seeing is finding the balance between acceptance and possibility. True seeing is living in the tension of what colonization is doing, finding ways to insulate yourself from those harms, and accepting when protecting yourself isn't possible. True seeing is recognizing that the only elder speaker of your language is traumatized and toxic, releasing yourself from interacting with them, and finding another way to do language revitalization work. True seeing is realizing that you are deeply afraid to let go of English in your language learning and approaching that fear with curiosity, rather than shame. True seeing is admitting that you don't have the desire, energy, or dedication to become a fluent speaker, even though you told everybody that's what you wanted, and then letting go of feeling bad about yourself.

Through true seeing, real potential emerges for ways of doing language revitalization that are honest and hopeful. So much of actualizing real potential is learning humility and asking for help. Part of that humility is demystifying what we don't know, aren't willing to do, or don't yet have the courage to face, and being ok with those truths.

Here's my humility:

I do not have answers for how you turn your struggling ILR program into a model revitalization movement. That stands outside my own experience. My doctoral research is a set

of conceptual tools to help you Rethink Revitalization as wellbeing. What I want for you, regardless of circumstances, is to lead a balanced, meaningful life. I do not want your ILR practice to hurt you or make you sick. Indigenous language revitalization work is often difficult. For many of us, there will be a gap between what we desire and what happens. A lot of confusion, conflict, and suffering happens in that gap and it's where I do most of my work with ILR practitioners. Much of that work is finding hope, purpose, and acceptance from *inside* your own reality.

In neuroscience terminology, the gap between what we desire and what happens is called 'criterion velocity' (Nagoski & Nagoski, 2019). The discrepancy between desire and attainment causes stress. Essentially pipedreams are bad for your health. There needs to be a positive feedback loop between desire and attainment. If you want to become a fluent speaker, there must be a pathway for that to happen. If there isn't a pathway, then over time your body and mind will resist expending energy on a process that isn't creating a desired result. In these scenarios, it takes more and more effort (and causes more and more stress) to keep wanting something that isn't happening.

If the thing you want doesn't have a pathway, then you must create one. If you can't create one, then you are stuck between desire and attainment. I can want tribal government to be less dysfunctional, but clinging to that desire without a pathway is just going to stress me out. I can try to create a pathway but if that doesn't work, I'm going to experience more stress. You can spend your whole life trapped in the "discrepancy gap" expending energy that isn't creating a pathway. That is why "true seeing" and "real potential" are so important in Indigenous language revitalization. It negatively impacts your health to keep pursuing a pathway

that isn't going to lead to attainment no matter how much you *want* it to work. From a psychobiological perspective, the opposite of hope isn't despair. It's exhaustion. Despair is just one of the outcomes of exhaustion.

What frustrated, exhausted, hopeless people do is repeat the same feelings, thoughts, and actions over and over. They do so even when that behavior isn't working, causing stress, and making them tired. I've seen so much of this behavior in language revitalization. ILR programs that keep pursuing the same strategies even though they aren't working, causing intense stress, and making everybody tired. To be clear, the absence of pathways isn't the fault of ILR programs or practitioners. It's the ongoing effects of systemic oppression, historical trauma, and linguistic, cultural, and territorial loss. It's colonial institutions, structures, and systems that continue to impede Indigenous language revitalization efforts (Petrone & Stanton, 2021). Those realities aren't going away. Speaking from personal experience, as an ILR practitioner, it's difficult to navigate colonial systems without constant exposure to harm.

Thankfully, Buddhists and other practitioners of Vedic and Śramaṇic schools of contemplation have created multiple systems for closing the gap between desire and reality.[9] The skills, for example, of meditation are highly applicable to reducing the harms of colonization, not by changing external conditions, but by allowing you to *respond differently*. In responding differently, you create space for change. You stop the cycle of repeating feelings, thoughts, and actions that are causing you stress and harm. Reducing harm revitalizes your life force and expands your wellbeing.

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[9]In Pali-the ancient language of Theravada Buddhist scriptures-the word *dukkha* is commonly translated as suffering. The Buddha describes *dukkha* as "not getting what you want and getting what you don't want". Colonization is a gigantic exercise in *dukkha* for Indigenous people generally and especially ILR practitioners.

There aren't simple one-size fits all answers for how to reduce harm, revitalize your life force, or expand your wellbeing. For myself, I had to create space to *feel*, and then *reflect* upon, how my body, mind, and spirit were responding to the world around me. I had to learn to recognize that my own reactions, perceptions, and behaviors were draining my life force. I had to realize that there must be limits to the weight I placed upon my own shoulders. I had to train myself to observe my impulse to take care of everything myself and to allow people to depend too heavily upon me. I had to work through my guilt and shame that I wasn't doing enough. I had to stop forcing my poor, tired, overstressed body into working more, knowing more, helping more, being more. I had to face my own sense of LESSness. It's still embarrassing to say it out loud. It still feels like weakness. I still sometimes follow the old pathways that lead me to exhaustion. Yet, more often, I can observe the old responses, and instead I follow the new pathways that revitalize my life force. In following those new pathways, I'm slowly rebuilding an ILR practice that feels sustainable over the long-term, and I've returned hope to my existence.

Yet the hope I've found is not a pipedream of a return to a time before colonization. Hope, in my experience, is not the restoration of things that have gone on. Hope isn't an empty cup that you must fill back up with language, culture, or tradition. That desire in ILR so often leads to suffering, shame, and LESSness. Instead, hope is the transformation of suffering into wisdom. Hope is finding joy in the reality of the present. Hope is a pathway into rest and renewal. If language revitalization can't give you that, go elsewhere. Nothing is forever. You can always return. Revitalize *yourself.* It is your life force that requires nurturing, healing, and

protection. It is your life force and that of your friends, families, and communities upon which language revitalization depends.[10]

The antidote to feeling LESS isn't to be MORE or know MORE.

The antidote to feeling LESS is to feel WHOLE.

[10] I know it's a bummer but what this means is that people can make language revitalization healing, but they can also make it toxic. I'm sorry if you find yourself in a toxic ILR environment. Get out. Find another way to have an ILR practice.

Chapter 2

Personal, ethical, and conceptual foundations: my scholarship as an ILR practitioner.

Personal foundations of my scholarship.

I am a middle-aged mamîshîha (ceremonial attendant) and speaker of the Wolf Clan of the Thâkîwaki. Some of my ancestors were brought to Oklahoma in chains and some of them died walking from Kansas in the dead of winter. This was only the last in a series of forced migrations from our place of origin on the eastern seaboard that spans multiple centuries. Despite hundreds of years of disease, war, and genocide, the Thâkîwaki arrived in Oklahoma in 1867 with their language, culture, and ways of being largely intact. Only the systemic, forced removal of children for the purpose of assimilation disguised as “education” leads to an experience so traumatic that my people started to set aside their own ways of being.

My great-grandfather Elmer Manatowa experienced the abuse of the Sac and Fox Mission school and did not pass the Sauk language to his children. I learned Sauk as a young man through a team-based Mentor-Apprentice program that I created together with elder speakers. Creating the program was an immense undertaking that placed us in direct opposition to colonial systems and put me at the center of unhealthy community dynamics resulting from historical trauma, language loss, and internalized oppression. While I was successful in navigating both colonial systems and unhealthy community dynamics, the cost to my personal wellbeing was high, and in 2017, I stepped aside as Director of the Sauk Language Department.

I’ve worked in ILR for 30 years including 12 years as Director of the Sauk Language Department for the Sac and Fox Nation. I've also worked in nonprofit settings, universities, and at the grassroots. I’ve done everything from designing tribal language degree programs to teaching public school classes and creating immersion environments. I have endured in my own

life the passing of most of the native speakers of the Sauk language. I have experienced the ongoing effects of historical trauma and the constant stream of microaggressions against Indigenous people, as an organizer, an administrator, and a teacher. I have fought, and sometimes succeeded, at creating safe learning spaces. I've also witnessed institutional racism grind those safe spaces into dust and was forced to start over again.

I've made many mistakes as an ILR practitioner and a human being. I've used methods that didn't work. I've fought with people in ways that were unhealthy. I've made people feel unsafe. I've let people walk all over me when I should have defended myself. Through it all the toughest thing to face is how colonization has damaged relationships within Indigenous communities and how that impacts our capacity to revitalize Indigenous languages. The community dynamics I navigated while directing the Sauk Language Department, and others I've witnessed in many ILR contexts, are often driven by the shame, grief, and pain that people experience from historical trauma. In the field of ILR, we have not faced, or effectively addressed, how colonization impacts Indigenous minds, bodies, and spirits. Specifically, I don't think many ILR practitioners understand how deeply historical trauma and the other ongoing colonial harms, influence our capacity for communication, conflict, collaboration, and connection. In my own life as an ILR practitioner, I continue to struggle to communicate effectively, to have healthy conflict, to create meaningful collaboration, and to sustain authentic connections.

Conceptual foundations of my scholarship.

In creating the conceptual framework for my scholarship, I draw upon three loosely defined bodies of knowledge:

1) I draw upon the body of research on trauma science, behavioral health, and other professional modalities represented by the work of scholars like Bombay et al. (2014), Brave Heart et al. (2011, 2016), Grayshield et al. (2015), Menakem (2017), Gobodo-Madikizela (2016), Petrone & Stanton (2021), and Whitbeck et al. (2004).
2) I draw upon the body of research around somatic practice, mindfulness, and the neuroscience of stress management, healing, trust, and safety represented by scholars like Brown (2012), Nagoski & Nagoksi (2020), Thompson (2015), Wood & Rünger (2016), and Van der Kolk (2015).
3) I draw upon the body of research in the field of Indigenous education that examines the linkages between language, culture, and learning represented by the work of Kipp (2009), Nasir et al. (2020), Smith (1997), and Stein (2018).

I place myself at the intersection of such a wide body of scholarship because I respectfully refuse to be reduced to an "ILR" scholar. My research, and all Indigenous language revitalization, is about larger issues. ILR is about fundamental aspects of human identity, relationships, and communities. ILR is about colonization, social justice, and ongoing oppression. ILR is about the troubling relationship between education, assimilation, the nation state, and marginalized people. The conceptual foundations I seek to explore are about how ILR connects to these larger realities and those exist outside of academic silos.

Some readers will note that throughout this paper I make only a handful of references to existing ILR scholarship. I make few references to ILR scholarship because I'm focused on connecting my experience to larger concepts, themes, and contexts. I don't need ILR scholarship to explain my lived experience. I can do that myself. What I wanted from this doctoral project

was theories, methods, and practices to expand wellbeing through a system of reflective practice, and to explore the relationship of my ILR practice to colonization, trauma, and oppression. Colonization, trauma, and oppression are human experiences that are shared by many people, studied widely, and not specific to ILR practitioners. I wanted to examine those realities, and ways to respond to those them that expand wellbeing, and then apply that knowledge to my own ILR practice. Most existing ILR scholarship isn't very useful for impacting wellbeing inside the real-time, on-the-ground complexity of an embodied life in motion and so it doesn't play a significant role in my research.[11]

While it's starting to change, there is still very little ILR scholarship that directly addresses trauma or wellbeing, much less seeks to explore what one might do about them. As a representative sample of the "mainstream" of ILR scholarship, the 552-page *Routledge Handbook of Language Revitalization* makes only three references to historical trauma and none of them substantive (Hinton, Huss & Roche, 2018). The small body of scholarship on wellbeing that does existing within ILR remains largely evidentiary, theoretical, or testimonial. These modes of scholarship either present evidence that language is good for Indigenous wellbeing, provide a testimonial that language is good for wellbeing, and/or theorize why language is good for wellbeing. For example, in Danielle Sullivan's (2018) annotated bibliography on the connection between Indigenous language learning and wellbeing each of the sixteen articles

[11] To be clear, the general lack of usefulness of scholarship for impacting wellbeing is not unique to ILR.

reviewed has an evidentiary, theoretical, and/or testimonial framework. Every single article in some manner "makes the case" for language positively impacting wellbeing. [12]

I don't find these modes of ILR scholarship very useful for on-the-ground ILR practitioners because they don't help you do anything in your own life. They simply describe or report. For example, Whalen, Moss, and Baldwin (2016) report that "language maintenance and revitalization efforts have positive effects on physical and communal health among indigenous populations" and "such evidence justifies increased support for language revitalization in order to improve health" (p. 1). While I don't disagree with generalized statements about the importance of ILR for health or wellbeing, these reports or descriptions don't often address complex realities where language revitalization has both positive and negative impacts, nor even indicate what makes an ILR environment healthy, or what specific impacts to health and wellbeing are being reported, and how they were created. Finally, the interpersonal and inter-relational "glue" that makes a specific learning environment have a "positive" impact are also rarely described, nor are the unique conditions, histories, or people who might be critical to "positive" impact.

It's important to note that not all ILR scholarship follows these general trends. For example, Kathryn A. Michel (2012) gives a highly contextualized account of the experiences of the founding members of the Chief Atahm immersion school. In doing so, she talks about the full

[12] For six years now, I've had a Google scholar alerts set for language revitalization, trauma, wellbeing, etc. It's only recently that I've started to see articles that push beyond evidentiary, theoretical, or testimonial modes and/or significantly address some aspect of wellbeing within ILR. One of the best examples of "emerging scholarship" that directly addresses wellbeing within ILR is Hau'olihiwahiwa Moniz's (2023) work on Native Hawaiian lateral violence within contemporary Hawaiian language acquisition.

complexity of community dynamics including the fear, skepticism, blame, and other negative emotions that people experience around Indigenous language revitalization. While not specifically focused on wellbeing, she demonstrates a deeply nuanced understanding of life as an ILR practitioner. Yet, I also don't interact with this "case study" body of ILR scholarship because it tends to focus on *how* to revitalize: the lessons learned, the methods used, etc. It does not center on what is happening to the body, mind, and spirit of ILR practitioners revitalizing under difficult conditions.

Nor, in my opinion, are case studies of successful ILR necessarily helpful to ILR practitioners in different circumstances. Many ILR efforts would not exist without the specific ILR practitioners that created those programs or lead those movements. ILR wreaks havoc with replicability because not all grassroots organizers, or the conditions in which they organize, are similar or create similar results. In my experience, ILR is an emergent process; not a socially engineered one. Finally, even in "successful" language revitalization efforts ILR practitioners can experience negative impacts to health and wellbeing.[13] For these reasons, while I have read widely in the field of ILR, you won't find many references to ILR literature in my work.

Ethical foundations of my scholarship.

I respectfully refuse the mode of scholarship whose conceptual foundation is "making the case" or "telling the success story" for Indigenous language revitalization. The idea that we need

[13] I burned out as an ILR practitioner by being "successful" at the community organizing, leadership, and program development aspects of ILR. Success and wellbeing in the colonial nation state do not necessarily have a relationship to one another.

to present evidence for language revitalization positively impacting wellbeing or being "successful" is inherently colonial. For myself, revitalizing Indigenous languages is ethically driven based on acknowledging the history of colonization, genocide, and oppression that created human suffering (including language loss) on a massive scale. Language revitalization doesn't require evidence of its goodness. It's like the idea that we need to prove that systemic racism is bad for African American health or that capitalism is bad for the planet. Forcing us as ILR scholars to prove anything about the value of ILR to legitimize our research (or to get funding to support language revitalization) is simply an exercise in colonial power.[14]

Everything I've done as a scholar emerges from my personal experience and the experience of those with whom I have worked, lived, and learned as an ILR practitioner.[15] Those experiences are the ethical foundation of my scholarship, and they do not require validation by external sources. Instead, I focus my scholarship on bringing greater understanding of trauma-responsive practice to the field of ILR. Building on the work of Resmaa Menakem (2017), my research is about acknowledging, and responding appropriately, to the impacts of colonization upon ILR practitioners, and specifically, the role of reflective practice in supporting wellbeing.

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[14] From my perspective, ILR researchers (and all academics) need to ask ourselves hard, uncomfortable questions about our modes of scholarship. I'm not suggesting that there isn't an immense amount of pressure-and perhaps even necessity-to "make the case" for ILR. I'm only saying that I personally refuse those modes of scholarship on ethical grounds and as not relevant to my own research.

[15] Nowhere in my scholarship will you find definitions for "ILR" or "ILR practitioner". It is not up to me decide what constitutes ILR or who is an ILR practitioner. "ILR practitioner" is simply the term I choose to refer to my experience and the common ground it has with the experience of other people with whom I've interacted with around Indigenous language revitalization. There are probably many "ILR practitioners" who don't share common ground with my experience. This doesn't make them not ILR practitioners. The colonial obsession with defining things, especially people, is reductionist and often divisive.

Equally, I'm interested in promoting increased understanding of the troubled colonial origins of Western educational systems, the ongoing harm those systems enact upon Indigenous people, and what trauma research tells us might constitute effective responses for harm reduction (Petrone & Stanton, 2021). Indigenous language loss, and all the other complex traumas of forced, compulsory participation in Western educational systems, continue to be the foundational learning experience of Indigenous students (Petrone & Stanton, 2021). While a colonial school might be physically close to a student's home, the values, knowledge, and ways of being taught within them remain vastly removed from their heritage communities (Lash, 2018). From this perspective, Indigenous students are *still* going to boarding schools. With some exceptions, this includes most 'Indigenous controlled' education. The purpose in acknowledging this reality is so we can have honest conversations about things like safety, harm reduction, and lateral violence.

Plainly stated, the purpose of colonial educational systems is to enforce Western values, knowledge, and ways of being (Bombay et al., 2014). Much of the existing scholarship in ILR, which has roots in colonial g, language policy, and language education, is built on inherent assumptions about progress, capitalism, and empire (Meissner, 2018). Terms like "second language acquisition" or "structured input" or "targeted output" aren't neutral. They are loaded with meaning drawn from a machine like, industrial view of language as a commodity that we can assemble, produce, and acquire. This kind of scholarship separates Indigenous people from our languages, pushes practitioners towards revitalization models built on colonial foundations, and nurtures internalized oppression.

Indigenous languages, deeply rooted in land, culture, and identity, can challenge not only the colonial pillars of assemble, produce, and acquire, but the metaphysical foundations of the Western world (Smith, 1997). Indigenous languages can teach students about tribally specific ways to understand reality, more communally grounded values, and tribally specific methods to be, learn, and know that support their identities and wellbeing. At their best, ILR learning environments provide Indigenous learners with the opportunity to experience safety, expand wellbeing, and nurture connection with people, places, and knowledge that help them navigate the reality of their existence (Smith, 1997).

In contrast, many colonial approaches to language policy, planning, and education come from industrial models that treat humans like interchangeable component parts (Jernudd & Nekvapil, 2012). These models aren't designed to nurture safety, connectedness, or wellbeing. They aren't designed to support healing. They aren't designed to be open, flexible, and adaptive. They are designed to exercise control, measure performance, and track deliverables. They are capitalist systems created to maximize production; not systems to care for traumatized human beings. These models aren't a neutral playing field. They are performance-based approaches that can continue to cause harm. They also just don't often work in the ILR field. ILR practitioners organize in unique contexts with specific people; mostly small handfuls of irreplaceable speakers and second language learners. These people aren't machine parts; there isn't a skilled labor pool. The entire performance-based approach to program development is hostile to ILR efforts, and while some people learn to navigate it, many ILR practitioners do not.

Indigenous language revitalization helps bring into sharp focus, and challenge, the basic assumption that modern education, and industrial models of learning, are good for students. As stated earlier, one of the foundational premises of my research is that Western educational systems are not inherently good, and in fact, are categorically unsafe learning environments for Indigenous learners (Petrone & Stanton, 2021). Safety is not the absence of violence, offensive language, or other overt oppression. Nor is safety simply the inclusion of Indigenous people, content, or language inside modern schools. Safety is an embodied experience (Van der Kolk, 2015). Safety emanates from the human nervous system, and it impacts cognition, stress levels, and a host of psychobiological processes, including one's capacity to learn. Environments, and the stressors they contain, are not neutral. Western colonial nation states, and their systems, are not equally safe places for all human beings (Menakem, 2017). In particular, the historical relationship between Indigenous people and colonial schools as sites of trauma is undeniable (Bombay et al., 2014; Brave Heart et al., 2011; Whitbeck et al., 2004).

The playing field is not level, and that unlevel playing field, means that ILR practitioners face stressors as learners, teachers, community organizers, etc. unlike any other kind of language learning effort. "Common wisdom" in educational reform focuses on structural, curricular, or instructional changes that will create a more inclusive experience, increase student engagement, improve academic achievement, or make a school "safer" for marginalized students. Yet often these reforms don't address that Indigenous people have an ongoing, multigenerational traumatic experience that impacts their psychobiological responses to schooling. Indigenous students often literally have a direct ancestral story about the systemic violence "education" has enacted upon their people.

Colonial schools are the starkest example of enforcing Western values, knowledge, and ways of being (Stein, 2018). Yet, in my experience, the stressors that ILR practitioners face take their most potent form in internalized oppression around language loss. Language revitalization can bring all the oppression, trauma, and feelings of disconnection to the surface. Language loss sometimes stirs the dark waters of pain, grief, and suffering in ways that negatively impact the capacity of ILR practitioners to create safe learning environments. In the absence of capacity to navigate difficult community dynamics, systemic oppression, and institutional racism, safe learning environments can be intensely challenging to create.[16]

My scholarly practice involves synthesizing theories, pedagogies, and resources from a diverse range of sources to help ILR practitioners respond to the troubling relationship between education, colonization, and Indigenous people. Specifically, I am interested in scholarship that helps me theorize models and create resources for trauma responsive ILR in the following ways:

1) Acknowledges the ongoing historical trauma and systemic oppression that Indigenous people experience within colonial systems, with an emphasis on educational institutions.

2) Centers on how trauma and oppression emerge in Indigenous bodies, specifically those of ILR practitioners, and how to expand wellbeing for those ILR practitioners.

3) Applies the lens of trauma-responsive practice as a doorway into alternate models for ILR focused on creating safety, nurturing connection, and expanding wellbeing.

[16] Capacity, in this sense that I use it here, isn't about resources. Capacity is the skill, energy, and wisdom to find your way through difficult emotions, hostile environments, and unhealthy human dynamics to create change. If change wasn't necessary, then we wouldn't need Indigenous language revitalization.

The beating heart of my approach to scholarship centers on how Indigenous bodies respond to language loss, the ongoing stressors of colonial systems, and the interpersonal dynamics of language revitalization efforts. In *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies* (2017), Resmaa Menakem outlines how racialized historical trauma in America impacts the lives, wellbeing, and bodies of the African American descendants of slaves and the European colonizers who enslaved them. The central premise of Resmaa's work, and my own, is that trauma is an *embodied* experience. Embodiment acknowledges that many of our reactions, our responses to the world around us, happen below the level of the thinking brain. "Our bodies," he says, "exist in the present. To your thinking brain there is past, present, and future, but to the traumatized body there is only *now* "(xvi).

From sexual abuse to war to domestic violence to historical trauma, as Resmaa Menakem (2017) discusses, the nervous system has a limited range of flight, flee, freeze, or safety reactions. The nervous system decides only if something is dangerous or safe. The body either constricts (fear) or relaxes (safety) in response to stimulus. A huge number of complex things happen *after* the nervous system responds to sensory input, but the nervous system "doesn't use cognition or reasoning as its primary tool for navigating the world" (p. 2). Safety, or lack of safety, happens first in the body's nervous system, and emanates out to impact the whole person.

Neither these nervous system responses, nor the stressors that activate them, must be conscious, obvious, or severe. Specifically, regarding historical trauma and systemic oppression,

they can be the cumulative effects of small, repeated microaggressions. As Nagoski and Nagoski (2019) discuss, the nervous system does not distinguish between rush hour traffic and being attacked by a lion. The fact that teachers are no longer literally washing the mouths of Indigenous students out with lye soap or beating them with straps does not erase history, its cumulative impacts, or the relational dynamics between Indigenous bodies and European bodies within modern colonial systems.[17]

While we often associate trauma with people, like sexual abuse survivors or combat veterans, who have gone through extreme events, historical trauma is the ongoing, cumulative impacts of extreme events that took place in the past but continue to reverberate in the present.[18] In the Western world, dominated by rationalism, we are taught to think about the mind as some executive power directing the body's function (Menakem, 2017). What neuroscience has clearly established is that many of our embodied responses happen at lightning speed, before cognition, and in reaction to stressors in our environment. Our bodies, as the houses of our collective being, decide whether an environment, an event, a person is safe or not safe. Embodied responses are conditioned and habitual (van der Kolk, 2014). These

[17] While I focus on Indigenous trauma, it's important to understand that the trauma of colonization reverberates differently, but still profoundly, into Settler bodies. I once observed a Settler researcher have an embodied threat response to the idea that Western science is intimately linked to colonization and then defend his embodied response with an aggressively "rationale" argument.

[18] See Bombay, et al. (2014), Braveheart, et al. (2011), Braveheart, et al. (2016), Grayshield, et al. (2015), and Whitbeck, et al. (2004) for examples of the growing corpus of evidence of the impact of historical trauma upon Indigenous bodies.

responses follow established pathways that come from individual and collective experience. Even responses that might look, sound, or feel rational are not necessarily.[19]

To comprehend my work, one must accept that historical trauma, passed from generation to generation, is *real*, *visceral, and ongoing*. The colonial narrative intentionally frames trauma, genocide, and systemic violence as past events but for Indigenous people, trauma happens in the present. If one accepts that historical trauma is real, then one must equally accept that the stressors of a hostile environment, with or without conscious awareness, activate the nervous systems of Indigenous people in ways that negatively impact their capacity to create change (Menakem, 2017; Van der Kolk , 2015).

[19] To use a precise example, an elder speaker can desire in their mind to speak their language, and their embodied experience can be too uncomfortable to allow that. This can lead to a "rational" argument about the need to translate into English to support learning. In ILR scholarship, we have tried countering this argument with "evidence" about the efficacy of immersion learning. Yet, at the root of letting go of English is *physical, emotional, and psychological discomfort*, not a misunderstanding about information.

Chapter 3

Summary of the research process.

I did not arrive at the personal, ethical, and conceptual foundations I just described at the beginning of my doctoral project. I knew I was interested in the human dynamics of ILR, but I didn't know how to approach what concerned me. I felt that something was missing in the scholarship on ILR, but I couldn't figure out precisely why I felt so disconnected from other scholars. I spent two candidacy exams deeply concerned with trying to place myself within academia, and to establish a useful purpose for my scholarship. I worked my way through a vast and dizzying amount of literature in disciplines as diverse as metaphysics, biological anthropology, system dynamics, physics, permaculture, and neuropsychology. I read work by philosophers, scientists, monks, activists, therapists, and gardeners.[20]

In working towards identifying a doctoral project, I explored multimethod analysis that included autoethnography, practitioner-based research, and counter-colonial scholarship as ways to consider the relationship between trauma, wellbeing, and Indigenous language revitalization. I used these techniques to synthesize information that helped me create an approach to scholarship centered on staying solidly within my own experience while also connecting my work to larger themes in the field of ILR. Below are brief descriptions of the primary analytical techniques I used within this "exploratory" stage of my research process.

[20] See *Bodies of knowledge* section for a sampling of the breadth of literature that I reviewed. It's a wide collection of work from many disciplines.

ANALYTICAL TECHNIQUES BY CLASSIFICATION:

Autoethnography: I used autoethnographic methods (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) to draw from my own experience as an Indigenous student, language learner, community organizer, teacher, administrator, and leader who has worked in both grassroots and colonial education systems for the past 30 years. In doing so, I explored reflexivity, evocative writing, unique voicing, and other techniques that helped uncover my personal relationship to the research and grounded my insight in authentic, lived experience (Riordan, 2014).

Practitioner-Based: I used practitioner-based methods to strengthen my analysis and focus on theorizing that might positively impact the lives of ILR practitioners. Following Groundwater-Smith, et al. (2012), I am concerned with deep examination of educational systems that "can result in constructive practical theorizing that directly addresses the dilemmas, tensions and contradictions that are faced daily by practitioners in both schools and universities" (p. 1).

Counter-colonial Scholarship: I used counter-colonial scholarship to ensure that my scholarship is grounded in a deep understanding of the metaphysical foundations of the Western world (Mika, 2015). Specifically, I read a wide range of scholars whose work exposes the tricks, deceptions, and operations of colonization.[21] I was interested in understanding how colonization manifests in Western philosophy and in the theories, methods, and practices of academia.

A wide exploration of the Western world and alternate ways of looking at scholarship.

What started as the overarching design for my doctoral project is what Sharlene Hesse-Biber (2015) has described methodologically as "border work" that incorporates ethics and

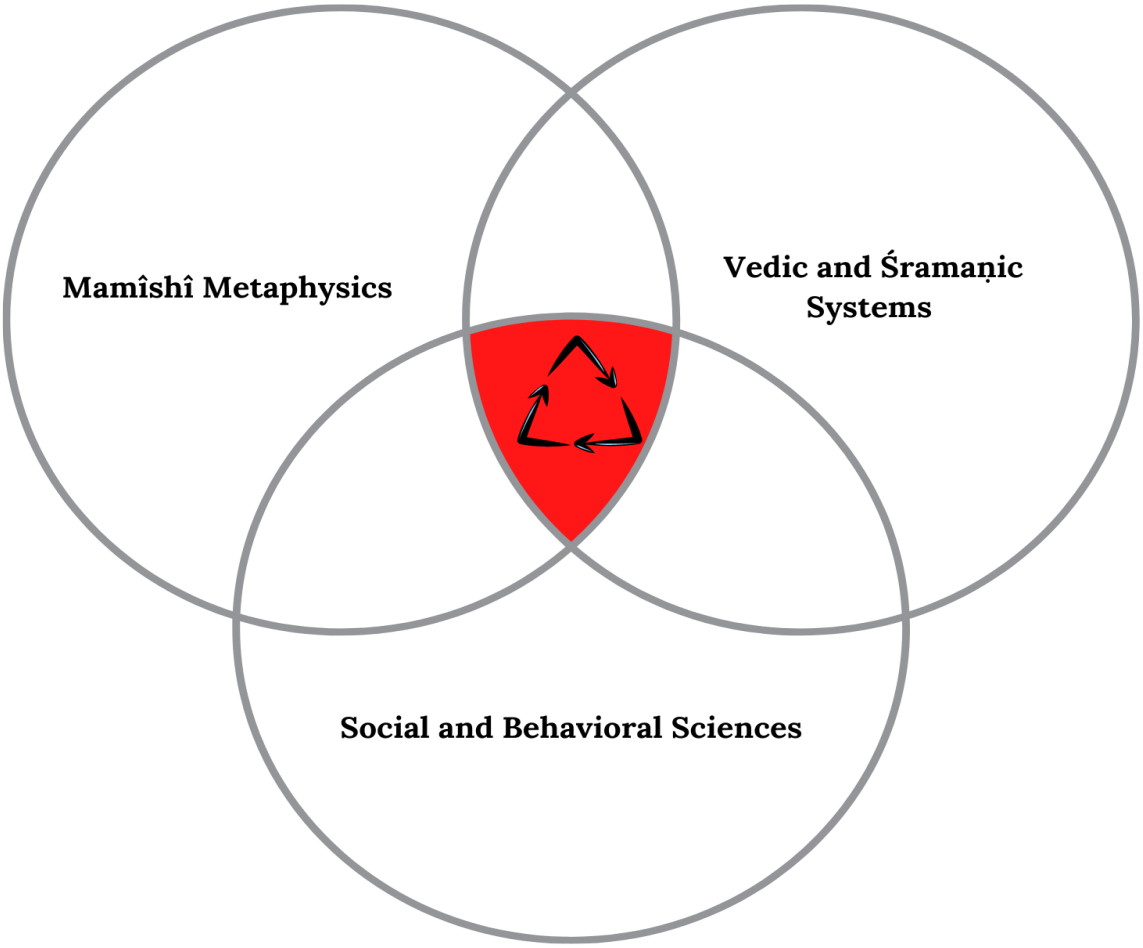
[21] For a sampling of the scholarship, I interacted with see the *Theoretical Frameworks: Metaphysics, Colonization, and Scholarship* section of Bodies of Knowledge: a sampling of literature from the exploratory phase of my research.

social justice. I began with big dreams about laying the groundwork for a research agenda far beyond the scope of my dissertation. Ultimately, my focus narrowed on to how to use scholarship to help ILR practitioners, and specifically myself, expand wellbeing. However, essential to the process was a wide exploration of metaphysics, colonialism, racism, and other foundations of both the Western world and alternate ways of looking at scholarship.[22]

In this exploration, I primarily sought to create insight into my own ILR practice. I took the position that my life as an ILR practitioner, emerging from my individual, familial, and communal experience, is a rich source of learning. I relied on the interaction between my own experience and three bodies of knowledge represented in the following visual:

[22] In the words of Canadian educator Sharon Stein, "If colonialism endures not because of a lack of knowledge about colonial violence but rather an enduring investment in colonial habits of being, what kind of cognitive, affective, and relational invitations might interrupt our satisfactions with this habit of being so that other forms of existence might become possible?" Found at: https://edst.educ.ubc.ca/facultystaff/sharon-stein/#tab_tabs-13456-1. See also (Stein, 2018).

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE IN ILR



Becoming, understanding, and doing in a dynamic, globalized world.

1) Mamîshî metaphysics refers to my experience of the Sauk cosmos, my life as an ILR practitioner, and my general approach to scholarship as described in Chapter 2.
2) Vedic and Śramaṇic systems refers to the varied schools of contemplation that emerge from the Indian sub-continent. Examples include multiple forms of Buddhism, Jainism, yoga, martial arts, and other pedagogies of deliberate practice.
3) Social and behavioral science refers to use of Western methods to illuminate modern human behavior. Specifically, I focused mainly on interdisciplinary research around trauma, focusing on the relationship between experience, environment, and biology.

Each body of knowledge I interacted with provided insight into how human beings respond to the world around them. Each body of knowledge suggested methodological approaches to creating change that might be useful to ILR practitioners. Each body of knowledge had its own lexicon, terms, and ways of speaking.[23] Yet in all this vast complexity, it felt like an endless number of factors impacted ILR practitioner capacity to create change, including my own, and I struggled to identify where to focus my research. Regarding just language learning alone, scholars like Diane Larsen-Freeman (2018) have identified over 100 dimensions to why learners' exhibit differential success. I did not know at this point in the research process that I was desperately trying to stem the tide of my own burnout. I just knew that nothing I read in the field of ILR helped me *feel* better. I was really frustrated with how absent of lived reality most scholarship felt to me.

[23] I am an interdisciplinary research junkie. I need to look at something through many different perspectives until I can feel the boundaries between things collapse. Only then do I feel calmer and like I've begun to grasp foundational concepts. The way that the Western world silos everything into different disciplines activates my nervous system and makes it difficult for me to process information.

I wrote 200+ pages of reflective analysis as I sought to pinpoint what I felt was absent in the scholarship on language revitalization. For a while, I concerned myself with planning, and then with policy, and mostly I kept writing over and over things like:

> *In my experience the dividing line between the handful of programs that are creating new speakers and everybody else in ILR isn't pedagogy. It's about leadership, capacity building, and human dynamics. If you're paddling a leaky canoe through brutal whitewater filled with rocks while hostile natives shoot arrows at you from the banks, you can't concentrate on the effectiveness of your teaching methodology. If you can't navigate the obstacles to develop a supportive learning environment, pedagogy doesn't really matter. Yet pedagogy is often the center piece of ILR gatherings, literature, and scholarship. Telling people how to replicate methods and structures without talking about the human dynamics involved is like telling people how to build a car without an engine.*

Trying to talk about human dynamics and interpersonal relationships in ILR was frustrating. Many ILR practitioners I encountered really wanted models to be replicable across contexts and they did not want to talk openly about the messy engines in their ILR cars (known as human beings). My colleagues and I talked about it constantly on the sidelines, but I didn't see it represented in articles, conferences, or presentations. Mostly I felt within myself that something needed to change in my own ILR practice as I had reached a place of mental, physical, and emotional exhaustion.

From broad analysis to a focus on trauma-informed scholarship.

It wasn't until I read Resmaa Menakem's *My grandmother's hands: Racialized trauma and the pathway to mending our hearts and bodies* (2017) that I started to fully orient to my own research. In the colonial nation state, where forgetting is an essential operation of power,

we are taught that history lives in the past (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2016). What Resmaa Menakem's work brought to my research was a way to bring history into the present, *embody* it, and examine its impact upon the wellbeing of ILR practitioners. Having a lens for how trauma shows up not just within a single individual, but also in families, communities, and even entire nations helped me to step back from how personal the challenges of ILR felt to me, and to look at how my experience reflected larger issues in Indigenous language revitalization.

Understanding how trauma manifests at every level of society narrowed the focus of both my research and my advising work. Throughout the research process, I've continued to advise language revitalization programs in the US, Canada, and Australia. This experience working across multiple countries, communities, and contexts had already fundamentally altered how I understood Indigenous language revitalization. What I learned through my advising work is that the challenges I've faced are found across many Indigenous communities. Most of the ILR practitioners I've worked with are struggling with one or more of: a dysfunctional tribal government, a toxic Elder, a wounded family, an oppressive school system, or some other harm of colonization. Through a trauma-responsive lens, these kinds of experiences become *embodied* (Menakem, 2017).

Embodiment is a way of representing that the mind, the body, the spirit, and the world around us is a single system (Menakem, 2017). As I discussed in Chapter 1, our bodies, as the houses of our collective being, decide whether an environment, an event, a person is safe or not based on prior experience. A traumatized body does not reason, and while the mind can construct stories to bury embodied responses, it is the body that ultimately "keeps score" (van der Kolk, 2014). Emotions, not thinking, guide our behavior and the first place we *feel* things is

in our bodies. In direct opposition to what we've been taught in Western systems, embodied responses create the emotional states from which our thoughts, perceptions, and behavior arise.[24] This doesn't mean we can't exercise influence over our embodied responses. We absolutely can, but not without internal awareness of how our bodies are responding to the world around us, and ignoring or suppressing those responses is *bad* for your wellbeing.

Language revitalization, like wellbeing, isn't a potted plant that you set on the window separate from the rest of your existence. Like a tree, our wellbeing is rooted in the soil of our existence. That soil isn't just what we put into our bodies, or think with our minds, or even experience with our whole being in the present moment. The soil of our existence is a complex mix of the past, present, and future. It isn't just what happens to each of us as individuals. It's what happened to our ancestors, to our families and to our communities. It's what might happen to our future generations. To understand the health of our trees, we must understand the soil in which they are planted. We are all trees planted in the soil of colonization; every person born in a colonial nation state regardless of origin. What that means is that every one of us carries trauma in our bodies, because we live in countries that are built on violence.

Acknowledging trauma, and its power, can feel heavy and hopeless. Yet it can also help give us back agency over our embodied responses. It can help us decide for ourselves how we respond to the world around us, and not let trauma do it for us. In understanding our embodied responses, we create space for ourselves to *change* them, and to develop new ones that better

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[24] Trauma research, like Indigenous language revitalization, is deeply challenging to the metaphysics of the Western world. Many people-raised in cultural traditions that gives primacy to the human mind-refuse the idea that our thoughts, perceptions, and behaviors aren't choices that we make. In ILR, we have hundreds of speakers and learners experiencing fear, discomfort, and insecurity around language use and learning. Those aren't choices. They are embodied responses.

support our wellbeing. Right now, I'm still usually stuffing cookies in my face when I feel the anxiety of somebody asking for my help, and me not being able to give it, but other times instead I go for a walk. Eventually I hope to feel less anxious about simply saying "no". Every single time I choose the walk, and a reminder to myself that I'm still a good person, I strengthen a different embodied response, and a new neural pathway, that comes from my own intentions about how I want to be in the world.

It sounds simple but it really works. I suffer from what I've self-diagnosed as PTGSS (Post Tribal Government Stress Syndrome). After two decades of exposure to a system that constantly tried to control me and impede my language revitalization efforts, I developed an embodied response where any kind of bureaucratic nonsense became a trauma trigger. Dealing with my phone bill would activate the fight response of my nervous system. I didn't know why I was yelling at customer service representatives when my order got screwed up, or when somebody put me on hold for 10 minutes. I didn't figure that out until later, but slowly over time I changed my embodied response. I still have moments where I blow up at bureaucratic nonsense, but most days I follow my new embodied response, and I wade through the red tape without getting worked up. I still have the moral outrage, but I don't let bureaucratic systems harm me. I know this is true because I can feel my nervous system remaining in a relaxed state, and I only know that because I've worked on strengthening internal awareness of my embodied responses.

Trauma responses can both happen for seconds at a time or be a constant presence guiding behavior for years. Trauma can take over small parts of one's life or one's entire life. In

colonial nation states built on violence, traumatic retention exists at every level of society. To quote Resmaa Menakem:

> Unhealed trauma acts like a rock thrown into a pond; it causes ripples that move outward, affecting many other bodies over time. After months or years, unhealed trauma can appear to become part of someone's personality. Over even longer periods of time, as it is passed on and gets compounded through other bodies in a household, it can become a family norm. And if it gets transmitted and compounded through multiple families and generations, it can start to look like culture. But it isn't culture. It's a traumatic retention that has lost its context over time. Though without context, it has not lost its power. Traumatic retentions can have a profound effect on what we do, think, feel, believe, experience, and find meaningful. (2017, p. 39)

Traumatic retention, happening over generations, helps us understand why even in environments labelled as "safe", so many Indigenous language learners experience fear, shame, anxiety, and are scared to make mistakes, or to speak in public.[25] Trauma helps us understand why speakers who went through adverse experiences become silent (Fjellgren & Huss, 2019).

In Indigenous language revitalization, I believe we must deepen our understanding of how trauma manifests in ourselves, our relationships, and our ILR practice. It's uncomfortable to have those conversations and to start to talk openly about how trauma shows up in ourselves, our families, and our communities.[26] The appearance of trauma can be very subtle. It can be present in the things that we avoid, or in the way we react to specific words, the layout of a

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[25] Safety isn't all or nothing. It's a spectrum and it's different for every single person. It's more accurate to say that some environments are generally safer and others generally less safe, but ultimately safety is an internal experience.

[26] I think it's important to reiterate that I'm not just talking about Indigenous people. I'm also talking about the traumatic retention and embodied responses of Settlers.

room, or other small, mundane things. Trauma is not always big and obvious. It can often be found in the things that we maneuver around, and the places we don't go. Trauma, both Resmaa Menakem (2017) and Bessel van der Kolk (2014) remind us, brings the past into the present with ongoing influence on the spirits, minds, and bodies of human beings. "Our bodies," Resmaa says, "exist in the present. To your thinking brain there is past, present, and future, but to the traumatized body there is only *now* "(xvi).

The value of trauma-informed scholarship, centered in the body, is that it allowed me to reduce the vastly complex human experience into specific, visible impacts around safety, harm, and embodied responses.[27] Instead of feeling stuck in theoretical models, embodiment helped me understand how I see colonization impacting the wellbeing of ILR practitioners, and gave me language for many of the repeating experiences I've had in my ILR practice. I can't count the number of meetings I've sat in where traumatized people who didn't feel safe were being asked to provide input, make decisions, or process information. What trauma research tells us is those are things you ask people after they feel safe, not before. In the absence of safety, people don't make good decisions, process information well, or navigate conflict effectively.[28]

While there is general acceptance of historical trauma and systemic oppression abstractly, what I'm talking about is how unsafe environments and unprocessed trauma harms the minds, bodies, and spirits of Indigenous people in real-time. How does lack of safety impact our capacity to engage in planning? How does lack of safety impact our capacity to

[27] See Grayshield, et al. (2015), Gobodo-Madikizel (2016), and Petrone & Stanton (2021) for theorizing about trauma, healing, and the role of scholarship in causing/reducing harm.

[28] I don't suggest that safety is a panacea that allows traumatized people to make good decisions, process information well, or navigate conflict effectively. I just suggest that in its absence things get a lot worse.

communicate? How does lack of safety impact our capacity to resolve conflict? How does lack of safety impact our interpersonal relationships? Instead of focusing on performance-driven questions like, "How do we create language proficiency?" I started examining questions like, "How do we revitalize language safely, nurturing connectedness and wellbeing, in ways that promote healing and healthy relationships?" or "How do we respond to the impacts of colonization in ILR practice?"

In myself, as an ILR practitioner struggling with the impacts of colonization and historical trauma upon my own wellbeing, I had a way to ground these kinds of questions in lived experience. Initially, I thought I would synthesize existing research with my own experience to create a trauma-informed planning and developmental model for ILR. I was interested in questions like: How does one learn how to recognize what is holding one back and overcome it? Or, alternatively, to accept those limitations and find peace within them? How do ILR practitioners, or anybody, face their fears, traumas, and disappointments? How do you people recognize harmful behaviors and replace them with healthier ones? How does one recognize, understand, and approach with intention the social, emotional, and cognitive landscape of ILR practice in a specific context?

Ultimately all my attempts to create a planning and development model that addressed these questions frustrated me. As a scholar, I can create theoretical models of what a healthy, sustainable ILR practice or language revitalization effort looks like, but those attempts felt absent of lived reality. I always found myself returning to the need for context; not just at the programmatic level, but at the level of the individual ILR practitioner. I'll discuss this more in Chapter 4, but when it comes to wellbeing every ILR practitioner's life encompasses a vast

number of variables that might expose, or protect them from, the impacts of personal or historical trauma, the stressors of daily life, and the many challenges of being an Indigenous person.

It's only when I started to openly place my lived experience as an ILR practitioner at the center of my scholarship that I truly found a focus for my research. I had to stop extracting my experience and trying to translate it into theoretical models. I had to stop putting distance between my scholarship and the messy reality of my lived existence. I narrowed my inquiry to something specific and personal. I simply started asking: How do *I* recognize, understand, and approach with intention the social, emotional, and cognitive landscape of my own ILR practice? How do I protect my own life force? How do I expand wellbeing from within my own messy reality?

In accepting the messy reality of my own ILR practice, I found a focus for my scholarship not dependent on specific circumstances, but applicable where any practitioner desires to create change, regardless of external conditions.[29] I shifted my research focus away from theorizing models of trauma-informed ILR. I repurposed the work I'd already completed and designed a system of reflective practice to expand my own wellbeing. In doing so, I did not have a clear idea about how I would translate reflective practice into a demonstration of learning. I just felt that deepening my understanding about how colonization, ILR, and burnout impacted my wellbeing, and what I might do about, could be scholarship. I didn't need to extract to theoretical models. I just needed to be willing to face my own reality.

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[29] "Regardless" is an overstatement. I was able to create space for a system of reflective practice because of my educational and economic privilege. It would have been impossible to follow a system as expansive as the one I created if I was working a full time, low paying job just trying to pay rent and keep the lights turned on.

Facing my own reality meant accepting that many of the external conditions of my ILR practice are not likely to change. I'm not going to wake up tomorrow in a new set of relationships that got less dysfunctional. Colonization isn't going to get less toxic. Systemic oppression isn't going to disappear. Historical trauma is still going to manifest in the lives of ILR practitioners—and in my own—in unhealthy ways. The necessary change in my ILR practice isn't about how to fix inherently violent colonial systems, but to understand how to expand wellbeing *despite* them.

It's been uncomfortable putting my fears, anxieties, wounds, and failures under rigorous examination and then figuring out what I want to do about them. Because what accepting reality means is that I must take full responsibility for my own thoughts, feelings, and actions. That doesn't mean ignoring what colonization is doing. It just means giving myself agency to feel differently, think differently, or act differently than I did in the past. To stop, for example, feeling shame about language loss. To recognize that shame about language loss is what colonization *wants* me to feel and then decide to disrupt that embodied response.

From general theorizing to creating a system of reflective practice.

The exploratory phase of my research gave me a strong foundation in theories, methods, and practices for creating a system of reflective practice. For this section, I'll be focusing on a system of reflective practice as a research methodology. I'll be talking about the process I used to face my own reality and expand wellbeing within my ILR practice. As you read this section, it is important to understand that there isn't a prescriptive formula for what constitutes wellbeing within your ILR practice or life. If what you're doing works, then keep doing it. There also isn't a prescriptive formula for how to expand wellbeing. There are complex, fully developed systems

for holistic wellbeing like Buddhism and there are specific systems for stress like Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction. There is also just making sure you go fishing every other weekend or setting boundaries around that one toxic relationship that's sucking up all your life force. There is a spectrum of possibility from small additions to whole life transformations. There's changing how you feel and there's changing what you do. Sometimes the biggest expansions come from releasing yourself from an identity, belief, or perspective that is making your life unbalanced. Ultimately, only *you* can figure out how to expand wellbeing within your ILR practice. That's what Rethink Revitalization is designed to help you do, but *how* change happens, is unique to you.

Reflective practice, as I use and understand the term, isn't just thinking about one's existence. Instead, it is a purposeful, systematic effort to see clearly one's embodied experience, and the feelings, thoughts, and actions that arise from your experience, so that you can exercise agency over them. Reflective practice's intention is to create change within oneself. To paraphrase one of my meditation teachers, "You are not here for tranquility. You are here to cultivate inner freedom. The only person standing in the way of your internal freedom in yourself. So, what are you going to do about it?"

Framed as a research method, a system of reflective practice has three parts: the system, the practice, and the reflection. First there is the *system* or establishing a process for behavior change through organized repetition.[30] In a nutshell, human behavior follows established pathways of feelings, thoughts, and actions. A system organizes the repetition

[30] The most accessible resource I've read on how to create systems is Atomic Habits by James Clear (2018) and much of what I'm talking about in terms of "behavioral pathways" he outlines in great detail.

necessary to disrupt the old pathways and create new ones.[31] A system organizes the space, the habits, the routines, and the practices into a structured process for creating change. A system is how I managed to meditate every single day, or journal, or read, or go for a run. I didn't manage to "find the time" for these activities. I carved it out systematically. From the dedicated space I created for meditation to the commitment to being in that space every morning at the exact same time to the accountability I created with other people to support my behavior change, I *organized* how to expand wellbeing.[32]

The second part of a system of reflective practice is the actual practice. Practice (the method of my system) is the recognition that behavioral change comes from a process of compounding actions. Learning to feel less ashamed isn't a thought. It's a practice. It's like learning how to shoot a basketball. You don't walk onto the court and think your way to a good shot, and you don't change your embodied responses by telling yourself to feel differently. You improve your shot slowly through small, repeating actions practiced consistently over time. In my experience reflective practices, like mindfulness, aren't really about the mind. Mindfulness and somatic practices involve the mind, but they are centered in the body, and their foundations are breathing and movement, not thinking.[33] These practices help you attune to your state of being, exercise agency over your embodied responses, and return your nervous

[31] If you don't feel like you need behavior change, then this might not make sense to you as a reader. I followed established pathways of feelings, thoughts, and actions straight into burnout. It was clear to me that I needed behavior change.

[32] See Appendix A: Reflective Practice in ILR for details about my approaches to creatin space, how much time I spent in reflective practice, my personal goals for reflective practice, etc.

[33] For an introduction to somatic practices visit the Ergos Institute of Somatic Education.

system to a relaxed state. Still, they only work if practiced consistently over time.[34] That's why in using them as a research method I practiced consistently for 2+ years (and still do). The core of my practice was mindfulness through seated meditation supported by reflective reading and journaling.

Finally, there was reflection (the subject of my system) which was to use mindfulness and other somatic practices to learn something about how colonization, trauma, and ILR was impacting my wellbeing and how to change it. At the center of my reflection was a recognition that much of what needed to change was my embodied responses or how my mind, body, and spirit react to the world around me based on individual and collective experience.[35]

To start to change my embodied responses, I had to increase my awareness of the pathways that my feelings, thoughts, and actions were following. Why, for example, did I feel like I hadn't done enough to help my community? Why did I feel shame that I had burned out? Why did it feel like it was my fault? Where did those embodied responses come from? How could I start to recognize, and then change, my responses? How could I exercise agency over my feelings, thoughts, and actions?

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[34] In any good yoga class, an instructor will inevitably say something about the hardest and most important part of yoga being "getting to the mat". In ILR practice, you need to "get to the mat" of your own wellbeing or it won't be sustainable.

[35] Reflection, as I use it here, isn't simply thinking about your experience. It's the observation of your embodied responses as they happen in real time. Thoughts might follow but often embodied responses are visceral and wordless. Like the way my body tenses every time somebody exercises power over me in an educational setting.

In exploring these kinds of questions much of what I discovered, and the system I used to get there, is specific to me, but the practices are widely accessible.[36] Yoga and meditation classes can be found in many communities or accessed online.[37] There is a huge diversity of existing methods, systems, classes, training, and practice groups for increasing wellbeing. My personal system of reflective practice included reading, journaling, meditation, yoga, therapy, listening to podcasts[38], and exploring other mindfulness and somatic practices for wellbeing. I tried some things only once. Other things I practiced consistently for 2 years (and continue to do so). I practiced daily, weekly, monthly, and quarterly depending upon the activity. I practiced both as an individual and within communities of practice.[39] I set aside time daily, weekly, and monthly for rest, recovery, and reflection as part of the research process.[40]

I followed this system of reflective practice for over two years because the methods I used, like meditation, only have an impact if practiced consistently over a long duration. Through this system of reflective practice, I recovered from burnout and rebuilt much of my lost resiliency. I wrote consistently about my experience and the insights it gave me into ILR practitioner wellbeing. I had hundreds of conversations with friends, family, colleagues, and

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[36] For an introduction to creating systems visit the Focus On section of the website and/or read Atomic Habits by James Clear (2018).

[37] For example, Spirit Rock Meditation Center has free online meditation groups meeting weekly including one specifically for BIPOC practitioners.

[38] The *Becoming the People Podcast* with Prentis Hemphill is a good example. See Episode 1 on the Body with Sonya Renee Taylor.

[39] The East Bay Meditation Center is an example of a community of practice that uses mindfulness to support healing and social justice for underrepresented people.

[40] For an introduction to the importance of rest both for wellbeing and social justice visit the Nap Ministry.

other ILR practitioners.[41] I also continued to collect, analyze, and synthesize resources from a wide range of sources as I sought to deepen my understanding of the interaction between trauma, wellbeing, and colonization.[42]

As a research methodology, the most important lesson I can share with you is how profoundly different using methods that engage the body, mind, and spirit was from the exploratory phase of my research. The exploratory phase of my research was analytical. It was about connecting theories, methods, and practices to my experience as an ILR practitioner. It was insightful, but it didn't help me exercise agency over my thoughts, feelings, and actions. In contrast, a system of reflective practice centered in the body, and engaging me as a whole person, positively impacted my wellbeing.[43] It also gave me insight into aspects of my experience, specifically my embodied responses, that analytical thinking had not helped me understand or address.

If that sounds a bit mysterious, that's because it is. It's hard to explain to somebody what happens if you learn to, for example, increase your mindfulness through meditation.[44] The change happens slowly; literally a breath at a time. It's also highly personal. While I've included

[41] I talked about it constantly. I was obsessed and a little desperate because colonization felt unstoppable. It was a tough time to be in my inner circle.

[42] In my experience, some of the best resources on understanding the interaction between trauma, wellbeing, and colonization are being created by practicing therapists like Resmaa Menakem, Jacob Ham, or Jennifer Mullan.

[43] See this Rethink Revitalization website blogpost for a specific example of how reflective practice impacted my wellbeing.

[44] I recommend meditation because it simultaneously builds your internal awareness and helps calm your nervous system. I like Balance as an introduction to meditation.

a description of how I designed a system of reflective practice in the appendix[45], it is important to note that the system I designed was specific to me. I focused on my "messy" reality and then *afterwards* I had to figure out how to translate my learning into knowledge sharing on wellbeing for ILR practitioners.[46]

I have a healthy skepticism about the replicability of the system of reflective practice I used for most ILR practitioners. I didn't just place this system at the center of my doctoral research. I reorganized my entire life around it. I made choices and sacrifices that many ILR practitioners might be unwilling or unable to make. I removed myself from toxic environments. I ended unhealthy relationships. I cancelled contracts with dysfunctional organizations. All these choices and sacrifices had mixed consequences. I gained certain things, and I lost others. I created more space for reflection, but I lost space for personal language study. I released myself from internal pressure and in doing so gave up a huge source of motivation. I rested more and I got less done. I set aside projects that really mattered to me. I set boundaries that hurt people's feeling. I spent more time alone and in doing so lost some of the comfort of connection. Reflective practice doesn't resolve contradiction or eliminate consequences. It simply helps you reach towards balance with intention and clarity. Yet, the results are always mixed, and the only constant is change.

After two years I had an immense body of data; including over 400 pages of reflective writing. I had notebooks filled with observations, stories, events, reflective exercises I had

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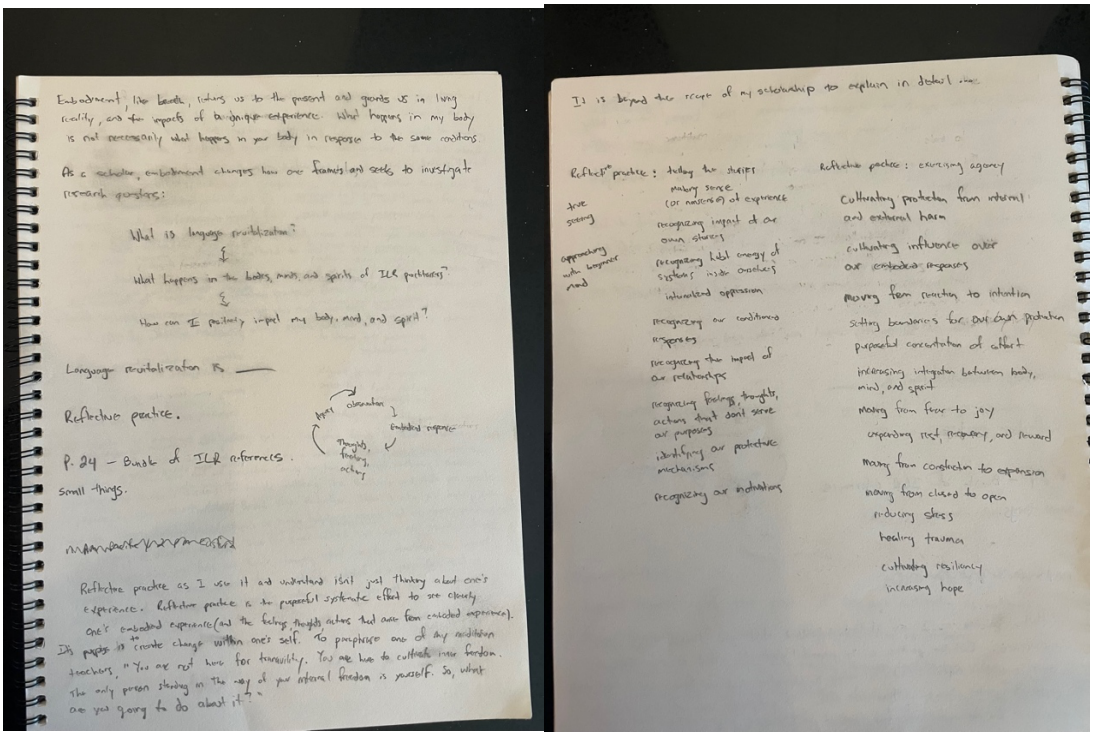
[45] See Appendix B *Reflective Practice in ILR* for a more detailed description of the system I created and its structure, purpose, concepts, and practices.

[46] I hesitate to make specific recommendations about how to expand wellbeing because I think every ILR practitioner needs to find both methods and communities of practice that are specific to them.

completed, design notes, drawings, etc. both about my personal experience and my attempts to connect those experiences to larger issues in the field of ILR. I did most of my reflective writing in bound, blank sketch books that freed me from linear text, typing, and screens. I did most of my reflection sitting outside, next to my wood stove, on my meditation cushion, or while taking a hike. I carried a notebook around with me and I often stopped what I was doing to write observations about my embodied responses in real time, or to capture what was happening as I experienced it. Here's a couple samples of what those notebooks look like:



Initially, I had no clear sense of how to organize my research into a demonstration of learning. I knew I had completed a process of rigorous research, reflective practice, and experiential learning. Yet, I had no plan for how to translate that process into an outcome. Personally, I thought the process *was* the demonstration of learning, and that the results were

visible in my own wellbeing. My mental and physical health had substantially improved. I felt calmer. I had more energy. I regained much of the focus I'd lost to burnout. Still, I could not submit *myself* as a demonstration of learning.

In the absence of a means to winnow my body of data, I stalled out. I knew I'd done significant research, but nothing felt satisfying for how to present it. I was not comfortable presenting, as I discussed earlier, a system of reflective practice that felt highly personal and likely unusable by other ILR practitioners. I also didn't want to write a traditional dissertation. Everything seemed to connect to everything else. Linear text couldn't hold what I wanted to share. I don't know how I landed on the idea of a website. It was a dynamic interaction with my supervisor. I was looking for a platform that freed me from the limitations of conventional scholarship. It's a surprising choice for somebody who doesn't like technology. Still, it makes a lot of sense in terms of being able to reach other ILR practitioners, and it helped lessen my dependence on linear text. A website also gave me the means to sift through my large body of data, and a container for my demonstration of learning. The website became the last step in the research process. It forced me to hone my insights down to the things that might be the most helpful to ILR practitioners, and to make hard choices about what to focus on within the broad areas of colonization, trauma, and wellbeing.

As I'll discuss more in Chapter Six, I went through multiple rounds of revisions to both website design and content. It was a long arduous process of translating hundreds of pages of reflective writing into key insights that I wanted to share with other ILR practitioners, and then figuring out how to communicate those in digital space. Much of what I thought I was going to discuss or felt like it really mattered when I started the process ended up on the cutting room

floor. Much of what I thought I wanted to communicate depended on the reader being fully proficient (which many are likely not) in multiple sets of terminologies: mindfulness, trauma, wellbeing, counter-colonial scholarship, metaphysics, ILR, etc.

Website development as a research process brought me full circle to the original intentions of my doctoral work. It guided me back to trying to create a demonstration of learning that was useful to ILR practitioners. It was a humbling process. To be useful, I had to learn to set aside most of my complicated terminologies, my complex analysis, and my nuanced descriptions. I had to learn to communicate concisely, using accessible language, and give the reader all the building blocks they need to reflect on wellbeing within ILR practice, not expect them to arrive with prior knowledge. What I'll discuss in the next chapter is what the website design process, as the last step in a research method, helped me identify as the basic building blocks for wellbeing within ILR practice.

Chapter 4

The insights of my doctoral research: rethinking revitalization as wellbeing.

For this section, it's especially important to go look at the website. It took an immense amount of effort to develop the content of the website to make information clear, accessible, and concise. The bulk of the "raw" data for this phase of my doctoral research is hand drawn illustrations, concept maps filled with squiggly lines, groupings of images, piles of highlighted notes, and large collections of digital bookmarks. It would be impossible to replicate into linear text the things I spent months translating into graphic, visual, and non-linear digital space. What I will focus on here is what I consider to be the "bones" of the website; the core insights of my research running in the background but not always stated explicitly. I will share these insights largely through storytelling to provide more context to *why* I feel it's necessary to Rethink Revitalization as ILR practitioner wellbeing.

In the field of ILR, many of the practitioners I encounter have been conditioned to think about language as existing outside of themselves, and to be greater, and more important, than their own wellbeing.[47] They have not been taught to assess the impact of language revitalization upon their health. They have also not been taught to consider that the negative impact might be too high or the positive impact too low for their ILR practice to be sustainable in a specific context.[48] Nor do most ILR practitioners receive specific training in self-care, have access to

[47] The reasons that ILR practitioners struggle to experience wellbeing is many and varied. This is just the one that stands out the most for me.

[48] See the annotated bibliography prepared by Danielle Sullivan (2018) on behalf of NEȾOLNEW for a sampling of the small body of research on the connection between wellbeing and language revitalization. What I would like to reiterate is that much of this research focuses on presenting evidence and/or theorizing the importance of ILR for

information about how colonization impacts their minds, bodies, and spirits, or have opportunities for skill development to help them stay healthy in challenging circumstances.

In my research, three interrelated things emerged as core to creating a healthy, sustainable ILR practice: safety, connection, and wellbeing.[49] Safety, as I discussed early, emanates from the human nervous system, and it impacts cognition, stress levels, and a host of psychobiological processes. Safety is not easy to define, or socially engineer. While stressors in our environment have a huge influence, safety is ultimately an internal experience. Only ILR practitioners know if a given language revitalization effort feels safe for them.[50] Not ILR practitioners as a collective, but every single individual practitioner whose lives encompass a vast number of variables that might expose, or protect them from, the impacts of personal or historical trauma, the stressors of daily life, and the many challenges of being an Indigenous person. Still in general terms safety, or its absence, have a major impact upon the sustainability of language revitalization efforts, and on ILR practitioner wellbeing.

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health and wellbeing. While I agree both ethically, and in my personal experience, that language revitalization can be healing, it can also be harmful. On-the-ground ILR practice is often complicated and messy. I'd also note that the pressure to prove the value of Indigenous languages for health and wellbeing is a colonial construct. Indigenous people have a right to their languages regardless of evidence. Colonial nation states need to be accountable for the intentional psychological and physical harm they inflicted that broke the healthy relationship between Indigenous people and their languages. The situations where ILR is not healthy doesn't have anything to do with language; it is the result of colonization.

[49] My definition of a healthy, sustainable language revitalization effort is one where ILR practitioners experience more healing than harm in an environment where people generally feel safe, connected, and well. It doesn't mean the environment is free of stress, but that overall, the positive impacts aren't outweighed by the negative impacts.

[50] English forces me towards binary expression. Safety is a spectrum and not all risk, adversity, or even hostility necessarily feels unsafe. The issue is that continuous exposure to a lack of safety is bad for your wellbeing, your personal relationships, and ultimately, your language revitalization effort.

Connection, as I use it, comes from wholeness. Wholeness, as I described in the introduction, requires relationships where you feel safe, and can get help. This includes help with emotions many of us as ILR practitioners often hide like trauma, shame, fear, or anxiety. This kind of connection can be difficult to find in ILR environments filled with other people who also carry trauma, shame, fear, anxiety, etc. and who cope with it in a multitude of ways.[51] Trauma-responsive practice makes it abundantly clear that one must walk an uncomfortable path through difficult emotions to arrive at healing.[52] This means there is an important distinction that one must learn to make inside one's own internal experience between safety and comfort. The necessary journey is uncomfortable, but it can't happen if you feel unsafe. Learning to make that distinction requires a lot of practice and help from other people.

If all this sounds overwhelming, what can you do about it? In my experience, every single ILR practitioner can benefit immensely from working with a mental health professional. It's the absolute number one thing you can do for yourself and those around you when it comes to healing. I've heard thousands of reasons why people don't go to therapy, and I made all those excuses for years. It needs to be somebody you trust and, in my opinion, someone with trauma responsive training, but it gives you a place, and a relationship, where you can practice wholeness safely, and that is critical to your wellbeing as an ILR practitioner.

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[51] Connection, like safety, is a spectrum. It's when you have no or very few relationships where you feel safe showing up with your wholeness that is bad for your wellbeing, your personal relationships, and ultimately, your language revitalization effort.

[52] Resmaa Menakem (2017) refers to this part of healing process as the difference between "clean" pain and "dirty" pain. Clean pain refers to facing trauma and moving through it. Dirty pain refers to hiding from your trauma and being stuck inside it.

Wellbeing, a state of balance in the mind, body, and spirit in which the adversity of your ILR practice is not outweighed by the reward, is interwoven with safety and connection. The greater the amount of safety and connection you experience in your language revitalization effort, the less energy is required to explicitly bring rest, recovery, and reward to your ILR practice. When safety and connection within your language revitalization effort are low, then the more energy it takes to create spaces, relationships, and moments where you experience rest and reward, and to develop practices that help you recover from stress.

All three of these interrelated things—safety, connection, and wellbeing—happen within a multilayered set of interpersonal relationships. If your interpersonal relationships start with some baseline safety, connection, and wellbeing then there's higher potential to navigate colonization, historical trauma, and community conflict to create a sustainable ILR practice. If interpersonal relationships start with an absence of safety, connection, and wellbeing, then the chances of successfully overcoming challenges to create a sustainable ILR practice drop exponentially while the level of stress, exhaustion, and other negative impacts increase.[53]

While I can confidently say that safety, connection, and wellbeing—not acquisition—are foundations of a healthy ILR practice, I continue to struggle in helping ILR practitioners find safety, connection, and wellbeing. I also continue to struggle to experience safety, connection, and wellbeing within my own ILR practice. As I stated earlier, as a scholar I can create theoretical models of what a healthy, sustainable ILR practice or language revitalization effort looks like, but

[53] Wellbeing isn't a constant fixed state. Like a pendulum swinging back and forth a healthy nervous system moves between activated and resting. Some adversity is good for your wellbeing. It helps you build wisdom and resiliency. Too much adversity is bad for your wellbeing. If your pendulum doesn't swing back enough to the rest, recovery, and reward side of your ILR practice then it's harming you. Only you can assess the extent to which your ILR practice supports and/or harms your wellbeing.

those models feel absent of lived reality. In my advising work, the common challenges all center around building relationships strong enough to endure colonial systems and challenging human dynamics to create healthy learning environments. What I continually come up against is that it's difficult to describe, must less implement, the interpersonal relationships found in a healthy learning environment. I recognize it when I see it, and I can tell you when it's absent, but I can't necessarily help anybody do anything about it. Each group of people attempting language revitalization together have relationships that are unique and specific. You can't engineer healthy relationships into existence from a theoretical model, and you can't impose them as an outside advisor, or even within one's own language community.

As an advisor, scholar, and practitioner I often find myself amid conflict with groups of traumatized people experiencing language loss. Many are frustrated, angry, and hurting but they don't know what to do. They often feel (and it's often true) that they don't have any control over external conditions. I have lived most of my life as an ILR practitioner in this zone of extreme challenge, low success, limited capacity, and high negative impact. Changing that reality for myself remains a work in progress. What I can say with confidence from my doctoral research is that the change, at least in my own life, will not come from external conditions. It comes from expanding wellbeing *regardless* of external conditions.[54]

After two years of following a system of deliberate practice, four skills emerged as central to expanding wellbeing within my ILR practice. These skills are **internal awareness**, **reflection**, **setting boundaries**, and **creating systems**. It is these four skills, practiced with the

[54] A reminder to the reader that these external conditions come from colonization, historical trauma, and systemic oppression. All of which have an ongoing impact upon ILR practitioners and none of which are going away.

intention of nurturing safety and growing connection, that helped me start to recover from burnout. To create space to practice these skills, I had to release myself from the narrative of urgency, crisis, and extinction narrative? that is still so powerful in the field of ILR. Many ILR practitioners that I work with, facing directly imminent language loss, move through life with a sense of constant threat to their languages, cultures, and communities. This sense of constant threat contributes to ILR practitioners operating in survival mode.[55] The problem is that living in a state of constant threat sends our psychobiological responses into high alert. Our nervous systems do not distinguish between dangers when it comes to threats. Your nervous system doesn't distinguish between a physical grizzly bear attacking you, a colonial grizzly bear attacking you with a bureaucratic system, or a tribal member grizzly bear attacking you because their kid didn't get into the immersion school.

That means that *you* as an ILR practitioner must develop your **internal awareness** to distinguish between what constitutes an actual real threat to your safety, and what *feels* threatening. It's confusing because the colonial bureaucracy *is* trying to destroy you, but it's not a grizzly bear. Going into a highly activated state every time a colonial system does something bureaucratic is appropriate moral outrage, but it's also *bad* for your wellbeing. It's for your own health that you must grow your internal awareness, and agency, over your embodied responses.[56] Nobody taught me about embodied responses, and I walked around for two decades fighting colonial systems with a highly activated nervous system. My moral outrage was

[55] Survival mode can be described as the psychobiological experience of the fight/flight/freeze response. It can also just be described as a deeply ingrained habit of sacrificing your own wellbeing to engage in language revitalization.
[56] The premise is that over time you can teach yourself to have a different embodied response and/or choose healthier ways to regulate your embodied responses.

appropriate, but the negative impact on my wellbeing was too high. Internal awareness is a skill that you develop through mindfulness practices like meditation. Those practices allow you to develop awareness of things like:

a. I am aware of how my body, mind, and spirit respond to stress.
b. I can feel in my body when I feel safe or unsafe.
c. I can observe my nervous system reaction when I feel safe or unsafe.
d. I can observe thoughts, feelings, and embodied responses arise when I feel safe or unsafe.

Internal awareness creates the opportunity to **reflect** on your embodied responses. Reflection is what you do with internal awareness once you've learned to observe your embodied responses. Reflection helps you understand how you react to the world and why you have those reactions. Reflection for this purpose is often best done in a therapeutic setting. It can be difficult to recognize embodied responses from inside your own experience. In reflecting on embodied responses, you can consider things like:

a. What are my embodied responses telling me about my safety?
b. What are these embodied responses telling me about my wellbeing?
c. Where do these embodied responses come from?
d. Why am I reacting in this way?
e. What do I want to do about it?

In understanding your embodied responses, you create space for yourself to *change* them, and to develop new responses that better support your wellbeing. Instead of, as I describe myself doing earlier, stuffing a cookie in your face when you feel anxiety, you can go for a walk. Every time you choose the walk, and a purposeful moment of reflection about what you're feeling, you take a small step towards embedding a different embodied response, and a

new neural pathway, that comes from your own intentions about how you want to be in the world. That's the pathway to increased wellbeing in your ILR practice.

To create the space to develop skills for internal awareness and reflection, you must practice **setting boundaries**. Many ILR practitioners live in a boundless world in which coworkers are also your aunties, uncles, grandmas, and grandpas. The separation between what stays at work and what goes home can be non-existent. For some of us, our homes are also literally our offices. We wear ten hats, and we never take any of them off. What all this lack of boundaries does, is make you *tired* because there is little space to rest and recovery, and those are baseline conditions for expanding wellbeing. In the absence of sufficient rest and recovery not only is it difficult to develop skills for internal awareness and reflection, but you might be walking the path to burning out as an ILR practitioner. To not burnout, the first boundaries you must set is with yourself, and to recognize that an ILR practice with insufficient rest and recovery is not sustainable.[57]

I understand why ILR practitioners work themselves into burnout. I did it. I lived for decades with feelings of loss, urgency, and crisis. It can feel like the life or death of your language rests upon your shoulders. Yet that feeling, and the behavior it creates, negatively impacts you're your wellbeing. No single person should feel responsible for the fate of a language. Feeling like you are solely responsible for the fate of a language is an embodied response. It's not a decision. It's an emotional reaction to what colonization has done to Indigenous people. It's the feeling of loss, grief, and fear that what matters to you will cease to

[57] To self-assess your risk, I strongly recommend reading *Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle* by Emily Nagoski and Amelia Nagoski (2019). To read more about the importance of rest and recovery also visit Trisha Hersey's "Nap Ministry".

exist. The need to do something, to revitalize your language, makes sense because the threat of loss is real.

I'm not suggesting giving up on language revitalization. I'm suggesting that you need a **system** to practice self-care. This system needs to help you form new neural pathways and new behavior that helps you develop skills for wellbeing. Even if you know that growing your internal awareness, practicing reflection, or learning to set boundaries is important, in the absence of a system that supports learning those skills, human beings tend to just go back to the old way of doing things. It's not so much feeling solely responsible for the fate of your language that's the problem. The real problem is letting that feeling drive your behavior in ways that are unconscious and unhealthy.

Thankfully the world is filled with systems like meditation, therapy, or Buddhism that were created for developing internal awareness, practicing reflection, setting boundaries, and other skills for expanding your wellbeing. Many of these systems are a series of small, repeating actions accessible to anybody who creates space to follow them. For example, while they might have deep philosophical roots, mindful breathing practices are also embodied. It takes just a minute or two of mindful breathing to begin to calm your nervous system. These techniques are something you can do anywhere, at any time, and in response to any kind of stressor. You don't even need to know the science, philosophy, or history that supports the practice.[58]

In closing, I'd say the hardest part of developing these four skills was giving myself permission to create space for them. The cost to my personal language learning, and my

[58] It's probably better if you know something about the science, philosophy, or history that supports mindful breathing but if all you have time for right now is to Google it and start practicing, go for it.

contributions to collective ILR work, has been high. I replaced much of the effort I expended on those two areas with practices to expand wellbeing. While I've achieved some integration, I had to make a difficult choice to prioritize wellbeing. Over time, as I continue to recover from burnout and revitalize my life force, I hope it will balance out again, but in the present when push comes to shove, I'm still prioritizing wellbeing, and accepting what that means for my reality. The space you need to start addressing your own wellbeing doesn't necessarily have to be as big as the one I created, but it must allow you to slow down. You can't grow your internal awareness or develop reflective practice while moving fast in high-stress environments. You can't create emotional space between your embodied responses and how you want to be in the world without setting boundaries that allow you to practice self-care.

If your ILR practice is anything like my own, there's just a lot of colonial baggage to wade through, and much of it is difficult to make visible within one's own internal landscape. Telling yourself that you shouldn't feel shame at all the things colonization destroyed or fractured is one thing. Fully releasing that shame from inside your being is something else entirely. Especially if you, like me, used shame to fight your way through difficult circumstances to create your ILR practice, to learn language, or to help your people. When you've depended on an emotional response, it's difficult to let it go even when it is harming you or the people around you. I know it's not comfortable to talk about, but that's reality.[59]

What I hope the website can do is give you some information, concepts, and language to Rethink Revitalization as wellbeing, so that you can start to recognize, like I did, that sometimes

[59] Colonization is not warm and fuzzy. Colonization sucks. You can feel warm and fuzzy later. Right now, I want you to get pissed off. Don't stay that way but take a moment to be angry at what colonization is doing to your people and how it manifests in your life, your ILR practice, your family, and your community.

the things you do, or the circumstances you find yourself in, or the emotions you feel are harming you, draining your life force, or negatively impacting your relationships. While it's uncomfortable to talk about, it also creates the possibility of change, and that is what creates hope, not ignoring reality. In Chapter 5, I'll talk about why I chose a website as the vehicle for sharing how to Rethink Revitalization as wellbeing.

Before you read Chapter 5, take a break.

Take some deep breaths. Go for a walk. Slow it down. You can start practicing right now.

You don't have to wait for the website to start expanding your wellbeing.

Chapter 5

Designing a website for ILR practitioner wellbeing.

In creating the website, I worked with three key perspectives that guided the design process:

1) Scholars, like everybody, work within systems that have both constraints and opportunities. What scholars imagine those constraints and opportunities to be comes from each of us, but also the institutions, relationships, and environments that we inhabit. Like ILR practitioners, the choices we make depend upon our perception. My intention was to try to perceive an honest, useful purpose for my scholarship.

2) ILR, scholarship, and life on planet Earth requires *feeling*, and *reflecting upon*, powerful, and often uncomfortable emotions and experiences to arrive at how to create change that positively impacts individual, familial, and collective existence. My intention was to introduce practitioners to some perspectives, concepts, and practices that help them face the challenges of ILR practice in a dynamic, globalized world.

3) If ILR, as a field of scholarly study, is to emerge out of the shadows of its Western origins that will happen because scholars learn to place grassroots ILR efforts at the center of scholarship. Not to study them, or describe them, but to *help* them. My intention was to *try* a more direct pathway to assisting ILR practitioners.

The next step in my design process was to develop a set of design principles, website aesthetics, and an overall conceptualization of the digital space.[60] Because the content of the website is emotionally challenging, I wanted the aesthetics to "feel" calming, contain largely positive imagery, and use natural elements. Working with my supervisors and a graphic designer, I went through three major revisions to the look of the website before the aesthetics

[60] See Appendix C for final version of the "Inspiration Deck" used to create the website.

started to feel right. I also did three major content revisions. At this point I can't imagine anything more clarifying or humbling as a scholar than translating doctoral research into a website for ILR practitioner wellbeing. I had hundreds of pages of complex, nuanced narratives that on a website looked like dense piles of textual gobbly gook. In digital space, it is how things look visually that matter most, and how clearly one can communicate information with the least amount of text.

In terms of content decisions about what to include on the website I worked from the position that to be able to Rethink Revitalization as wellbeing ILR practitioners need the following:

1) ILR practitioners need to understand what wellbeing, and most importantly safety, looks and feels like.
2) ILR practitioners need to understand that colonization is inherently harmful and creates challenging conditions within ILR that impact their minds, bodies, and spirits.
3) ILR practitioners need vocabulary and concepts that help them think about those challenging conditions, the impacts on their wellbeing, and how they can exercise agency over those impacts.
4) ILR practitioners need skills that help them look honestly at themselves and reflect on how to expand wellbeing within their ILR practice.

Taken as a whole, the website content is designed to give ILR practitioners the "building blocks" needed to Rethink Revitalization as wellbeing in a way that's personal, specific, and not

dependent on external conditions.[61] The overarching design is to present these "building blocks" in a manner that allows ILR practitioners to use the information presented to reflect on their own practice. The content was revised multiple times to make it concise, clear, and accessible with an eye towards not overwhelming the reader with too much information. Below is an example of the kinds of revisions that I made as I sought to translate doctoral research into website content:

Website Content Redesign

1. Simplify language to 5th grade reading level.
2. Simplify the message.
3. Speak directly to the reader.
4. Reduce verbiage.
5. Gentle, nurturing, inviting language and images.
6. Use question headings.
7. "Breathing" and "contemplation" spaces.
8. Speak plainly.
9. Make it personal.
10. Give people agency to do things.

Finally, in terms of design decisions, I also let the visual space tell me when I was trying to present too much information. I cut probably 75% of the verbiage that I originally thought I needed. I cut 85% of the lexical entries that I originally thought of as essential vocabulary. I

[61] What I mean by "not dependent upon external conditions" is that I wanted to create content than any ILR practitioner could use regardless of location, age, skill, type of ILR effort they are involved in, proficiency level, etc.

returned over and over to the needs I'd identified and have talked about throughout this paper. Restated as something translated from doctoral research into website content those needs might look like:[62]

ILR practitioners understand wellbeing as an embodied experience.

ILR practitioners have vocabulary to talk about colonization and its impact upon them.

ILR practitioners have opportunities to reflect on their ILR practice and how to sustain it.

ILR practitioners have skills to expand wellbeing and protect their life force.

Despite all the content that ended up on the cutting room floor, I ultimately didn't feel like I had to discard anything critical. I just had to learn how to communicate and present information in a more concise and accessible way (or at least try to).

The final website content.

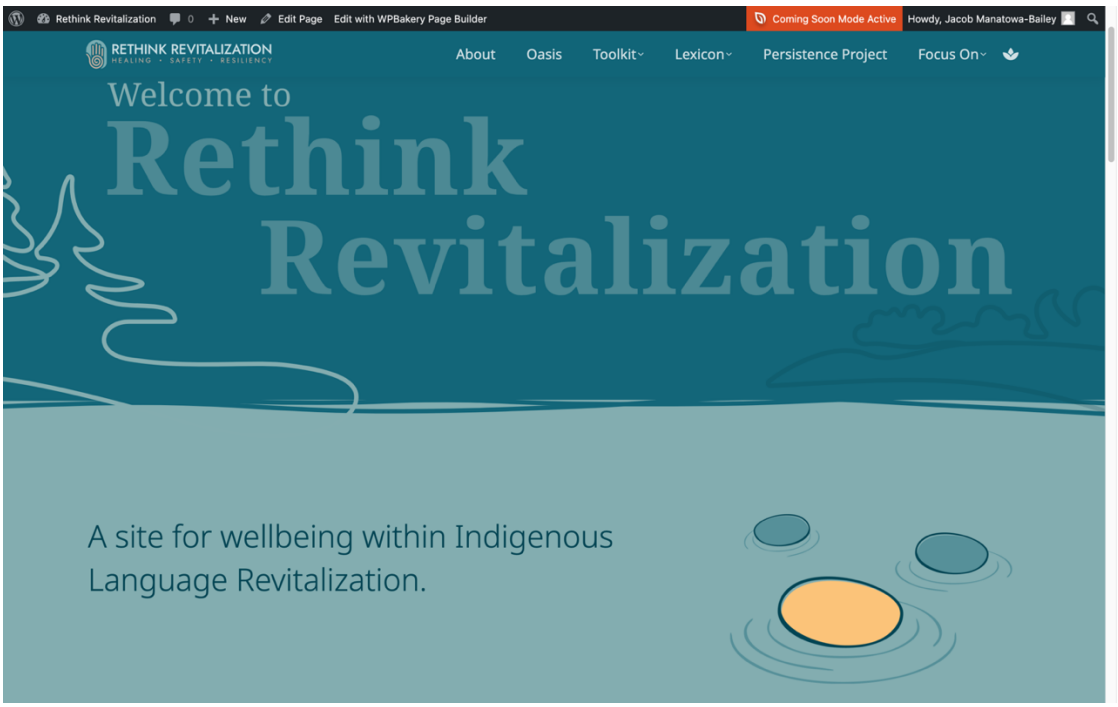
In this section I summarize the content of the website. First, the **Landing** page introduces the idea of Rethinking Revitalization as wellbeing for ILR practitioners. It introduces the guiding concept of the website design (and of my scholarship) which is that language revitalization impacts the bodies, minds, and spirits of ILR practitioners, that we must better understand those impacts, and figure out what to do about them. It communicates the central tenet of my research which is that language revitalization cannot be sustained without wellbeing for its practitioners. The **About** page introduces the idea of practitioner-based research and creating scholarship helpful to other ILR practitioners. The **Oasis** page introduces safety as a core concept for understanding the impacts of colonization, historical trauma, and internalized

[62] This would just be a starting point for translation into website content. The full translation would happen in visual space with images and the information would not necessarily be communicated directly or in a linear sentence.

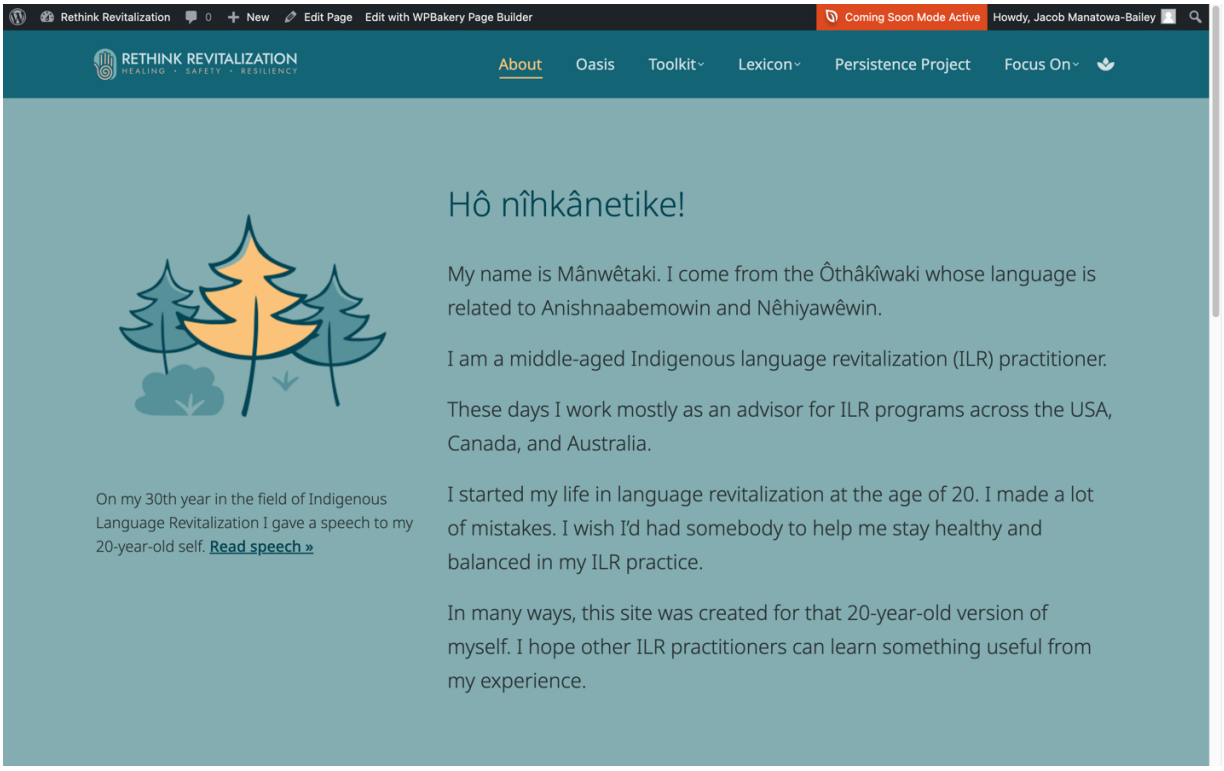
oppression on ILR practitioners. The **Toolkit** page introduces the four skills: internal awareness; reflection; setting boundaries; and creating systems to expand wellbeing in your ILR practice. The **Lexicon** pages introduce trauma-informed vocabulary to help practitioners better understand the impacts of ILR practice on body, mind, and spirit. The **Persistence Project** page introduces the idea of exercising agency over how your ILR practice impacts your wellbeing. The **Focus On** page introduces a blogspace that allows practitioners to dive deeper into wellbeing for ILR practitioners. The blogspace is organized into the subcategories of Colonization and Trauma, Safety and Healing, Internal Awareness, Reflection, Setting Boundaries, Creating Systems, Persistence and Resiliency, and My Scholarship. The blog subcategories were selected to represent general themes that are found across the website and/or specific areas where in the future I might want to develop more expansive content.

Below, website, are screenshots of its main pages:

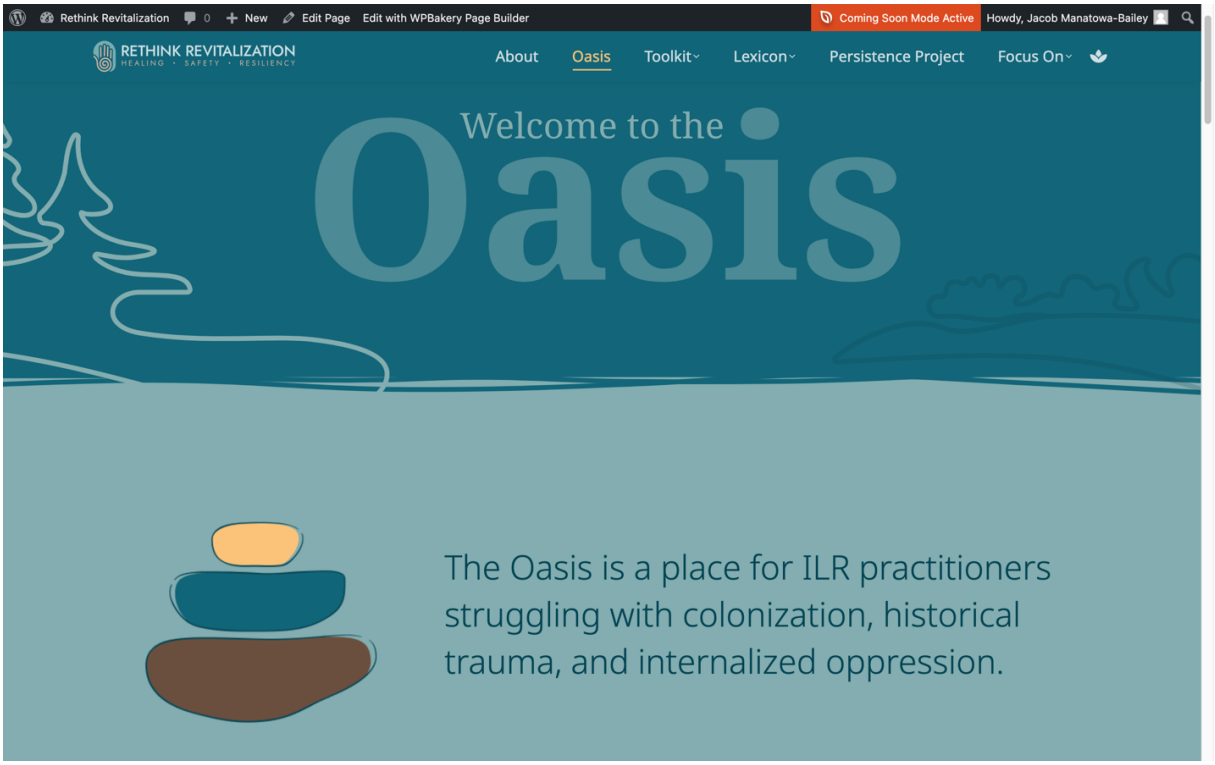
The **Landing Page** introduces the perspective of Rethinking Revitalization as wellbeing.



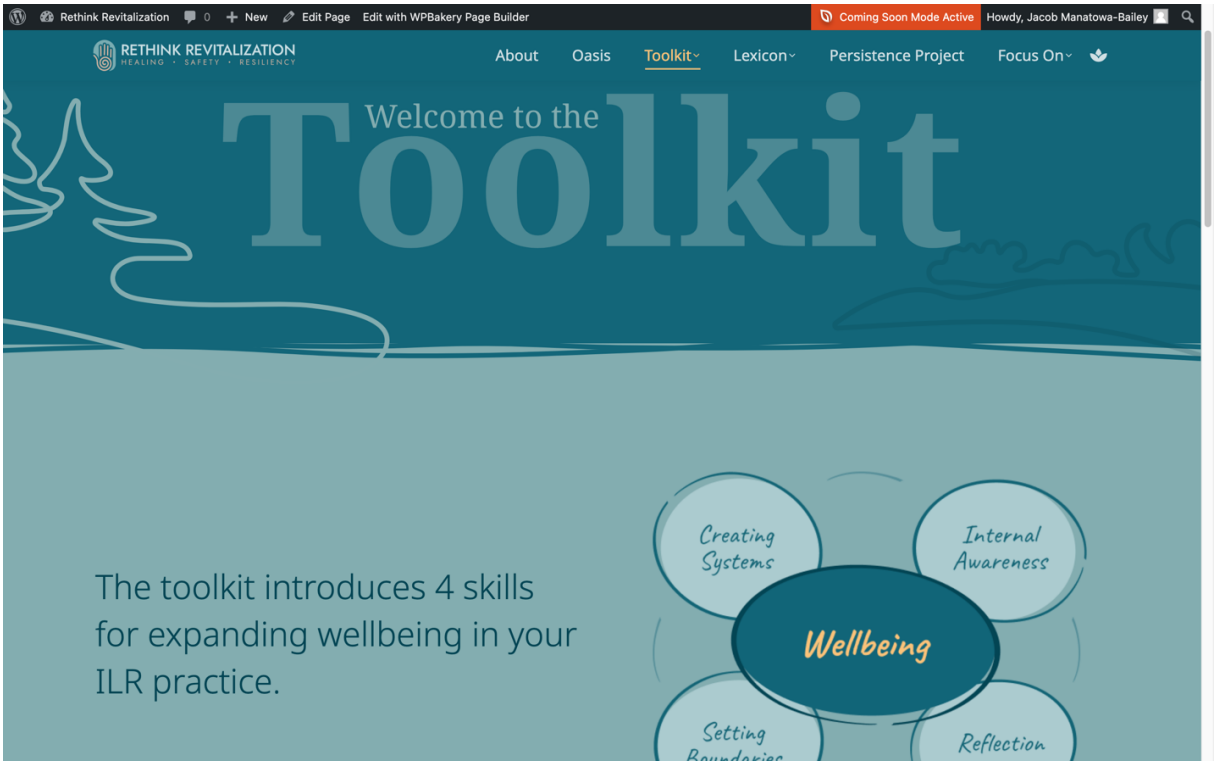
The **About** page tells you a little bit more about me and my perspective on scholarship.



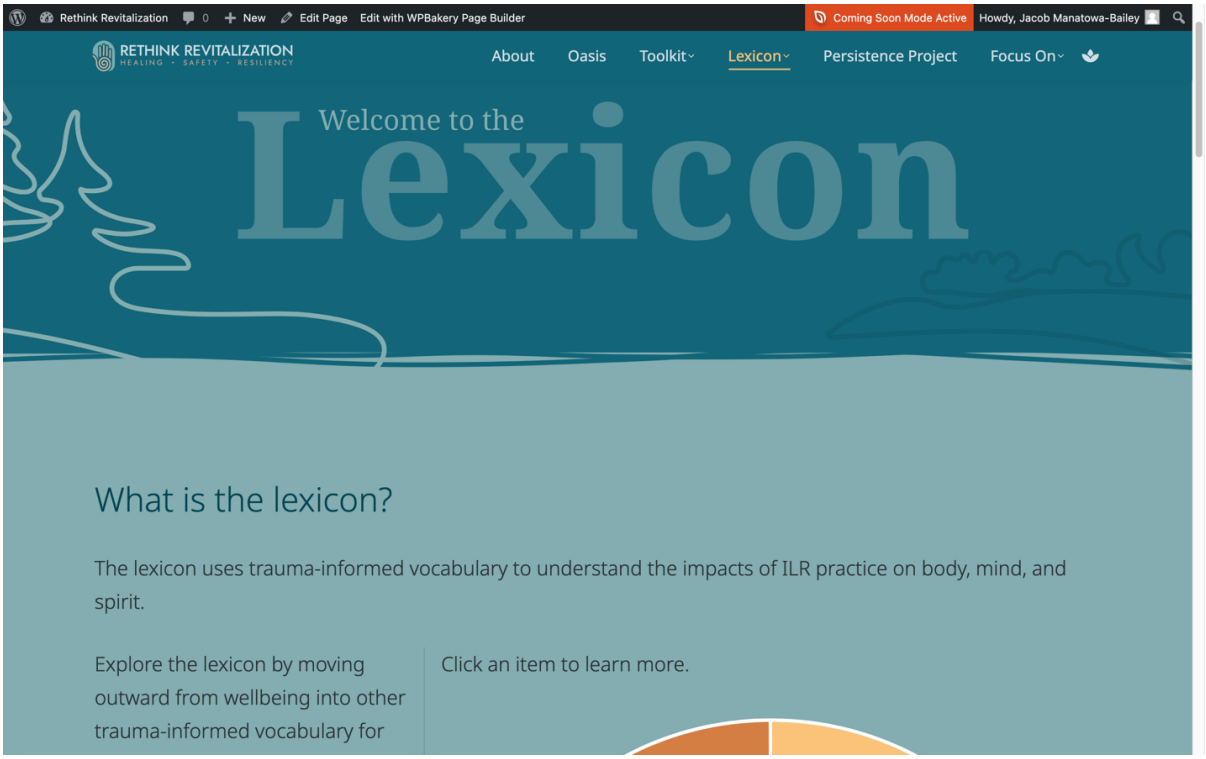
The **Oasis** uses a metaphorical place to present visualizing safety within ILR practice.



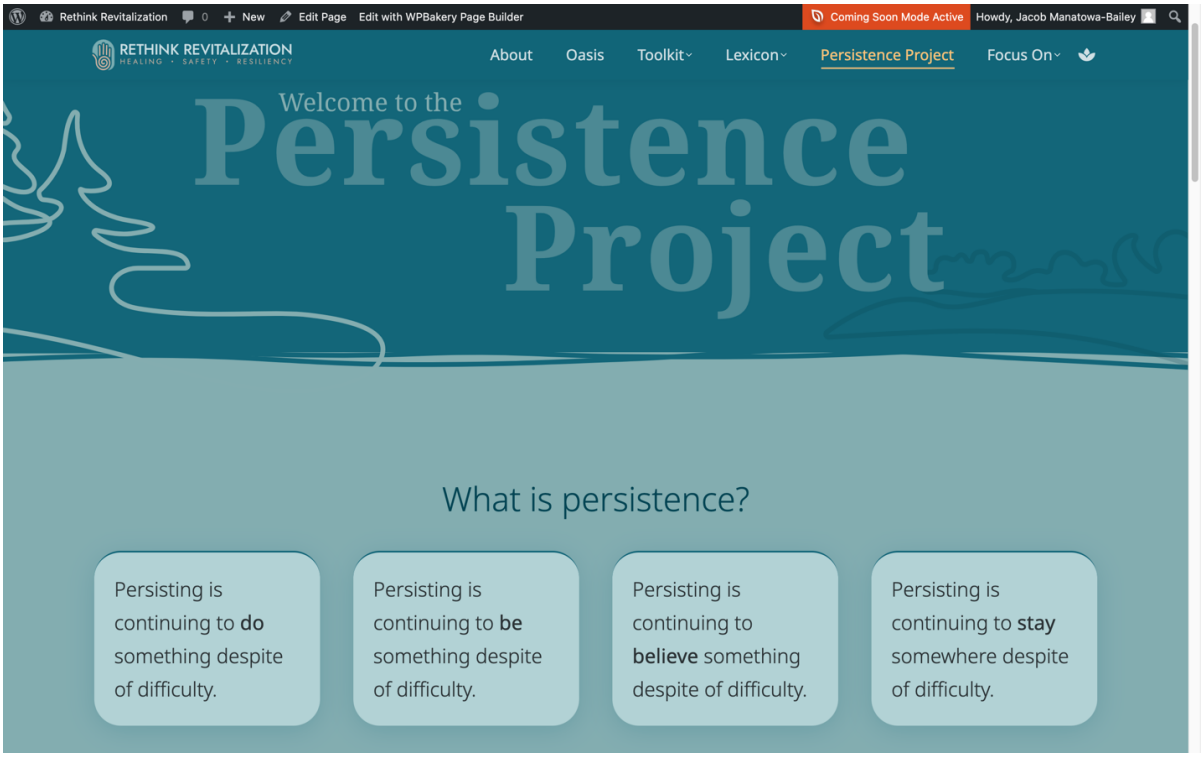
The **Toolkit** presents the four core skills for expanding wellbeing within your ILR practice.



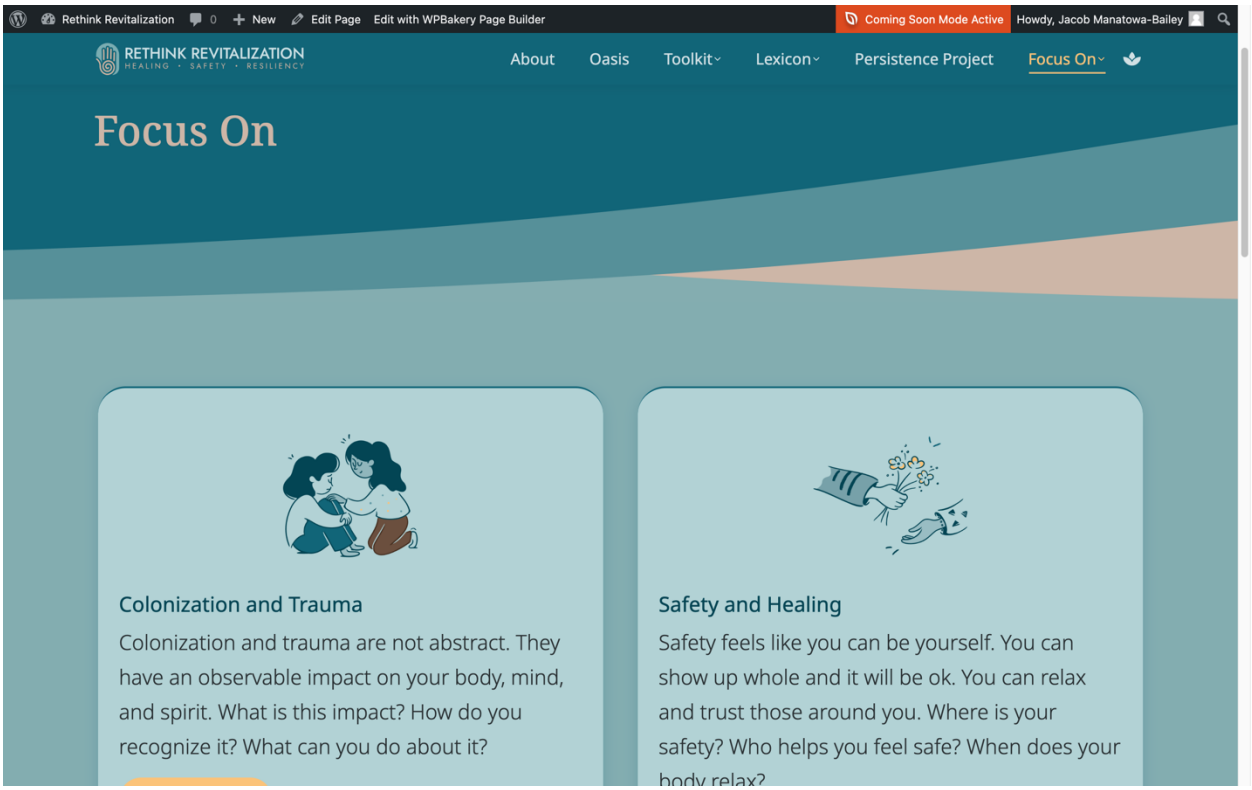
The **Lexicon** presents key vocabulary for talking about ILR as wellbeing for its practitioners.



The Persistence Project introduces exercising agency over your ILR practice.



Focus On presents a space for greater exploration into themes found across the website.



Final thoughts on website as scholarship:

I often feel uncertain that information, without hands on support on how to apply it, is very useful to ILR practitioners. It's like the difference between trying to learn about mindfulness by reading a book and learning about mindfulness under the guidance of an experienced teacher. I have worked with language programs where, for example, information on immersion methodologies didn't help ILR practitioners let go of English. It didn't help because the barriers those ILR practitioners were experiencing weren't primarily technical or methodological. They were emotional and relational. I taught them the technical skills, but I didn't address the emotional and relational barriers getting in the way of using immersion methods.

I feel the same uncertainty about the website. I'm unsure how useful its information is without support. I can generally say that, in the context of ILR, the benefit of growing one's reflective practice is at least two-fold. First, a reflective practice helps one sustain wellness, balance, and clarity in the difficult circumstances of ILR work. Second, the process of following a series of repeated actions is essential to any kind of *intentional* behavior change.[63]

To stick with the example of letting go of English, what I mean is that the difference between a student who successfully lets go of English in an Indigenous language environment and one who does not let go of English is a series of repeated actions. The student who successfully lets go of English does it once, then they do it again, and then they repeat this

[63] I emphasize the world *intentional* to acknowledge that change can come from many places, can be unexpected, and is often beyond an ILR practitioner's ability to control. Despite this, I take the position that ILR practitioners are never *completely* without agency. In other words, *anybody* can learn to respond to a dynamic world with intentional, deliberate action.

action until they have a new behavior. In the context of adult immersion learning, this student letting go of English can ripple outward to impact others.[64]

The other student, trapped in their old behavior of talking English, never forms a new one. In the context of adult immersion learning, their behavior also ripples outward to impact others. Inside the nitty gritty complexities of this student's emotional landscape is a lived experience that is preventing a new behavior from growing. Likely, nobody has ever talked to them about it, and yet in ILR it is these lived experiences that drive processes and create outcomes.

Things are stalled out in a language revitalization effort because two old ladies got in a fight back in 1973. A woman doggedly spends 20 years as language learner because her grandmother spoke it to her when she was little. A young mixed race Indigenous man enters an adult language learning program to strengthen his identity. A whole range of social, emotional, and cognitive processes both underlie, and are created by, specific ILR contexts. There are likely complex reasons why, in the example above, one student can set an intention to let go of English and then reinforce it with repeated action and the other cannot. What ILR practitioners need to do, both individually and collectively, is understand the landscape that creates their behavior, and then try to exercise some agency over it. I think the best I can do with a website is point in that general direction.

[64] Behavior, and emotions, ripple in all directions. I'm just choosing one oversimplified example to illustrate why I think reflective practice is important. In any ILR context, there are dozens and dozens of potential variables that influence what is happening, and an equal number of potential solutions. All I'm suggesting is that generally-speaking, ignoring emotional landscapes will inhibit growth.

A final moment where I talk directly to ILR practitioners:

I do not know if the website I created will help you. The digital world moves so fast. It's impossible to know if you can slow down enough to process information and turn it into action. Especially given that what I'm suggesting is that you **stop** and look deeply at your own feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. It took a global pandemic and total burnout before I finally slowed down enough to listen to my overworked, stressed, tired body. I'm still struggling to follow my own advice. Life, our relationships, our values, our experiences, push and pull at each of us. Sometimes the best you can do is to just follow where life takes you.

If you made it this far, if you're still wading through all these words, I hope it is because you've arrived at the necessity of change. When I imagine who comes to the website, you're an ILR practitioner like me. You're somebody struggling with how to balance your life (maybe feeling overwhelmed) but not sure what to do about it. Maybe your caught in the tough place between what you feel you *should* do and what you *can* do. Maybe your values are telling you one thing, and your body is telling you something else. Maybe you don't even have words for what's happening, but something just feels off. I hope you go to the website, and it helps you Rethink Revitalization. I hope it helps you create change, develop new skills, revitalize your life force, and expand your wellbeing. Yet I think it's important to say that there isn't anything magical about the website. It's just a doorway (one of many) to walk through into possibility. What happens after that, is up to you.

Chapter 6

Conclusion: Reflective Essay

As I come to the end of my time as a doctoral student, my mind spins an expansive web of thought. I can't even follow each thread as they loop, twist, and overlap. It seems artificial to pull them apart. My life as an ILR practitioner has not been separate from my research. This research has changed my life, as I've moved deeper into understanding how ILR has impacted my wellbeing, and then outward again into communicating those insights to other ILR practitioners. In the research statement for the admission's process for this doctoral program five years ago, I wrote "As an Indigenous language revitalization activist, I have often felt like a lone stone set against the vast tide of colonization." Mostly I do not feel that way anymore. Part of that change has come from new relationships, but the larger part comes from learning to see myself differently, and in teaching myself to Rethink Revitalization. I committed learning new behaviors, setting new boundaries, and expanding wellbeing in my ILR practice. While my doctoral journey is ending, these commitments towards change will continue, because growth is a process without conclusion, and I hope to sustain my ILR practice over my lifetime. As I write this it's 2024 and I am turning 50 years old. I have been an ILR practitioner for 30 years. To go another 30 years, I must care for my wellbeing in ways that I did not when I entered the field of ILR.

The "field of ILR" is just another way of saying life as a human being, who's trying to fully **be**, inside systems designed to grind us to dust, inside countries built on oppression, inside worldviews manifested to justify subjugation. Much of what we have been taught in colonial systems about teaching, learning, and being is at best not useful, and at worst, harmful to

ourselves and life on planet Earth. While this is true for all human beings, Indigenous people, and their languages, stand on the knife's edge of those systems. I think this means that many ILR practitioners see more clearly, and feel more deeply, the wounds of colonization. The burnout from which I continue to recover links directly to the ongoing impacts of colonial systems. I've learned to acknowledge those impacts and then choose not to be overwhelmed by them. "Choice" as I use it here isn't a decision. It's a practice of focus, centered in the body, of being able to observe my own embodied responses. In doing so, I give myself agency to change them, not to deny colonization, but to create resiliency within myself, one calming breath at a time. Over time, mindfulness has emerged as central to expanding wellbeing within my ILR practice.

Yet I also discovered that mindfulness cannot stand alone in expanding wellbeing within ILR practice. No amount of mindfulness will save you from unsafe, toxic environments laced with lateral violence. As I've encountered lateral violence across a broad spectrum in the field of ILR, safety emerged as a central concept for expanding wellbeing within my ILR practice. Specifically, safety as seen through a trauma-responsive lens that acknowledges traumatic retention over multiple generations. What that means, is that every one of us carries trauma in our bodies, because we are from marginalized communities living inside colonial nation states built on violence, and that violence is going to manifest in our lives, relationships, and communities.

Many of our embodied responses as ILR practitioners, and as human beings, happen below the level of conscious thought. People can walk around carrying traumatic retention and be completely unaware of how it impacts their thoughts, perceptions, and behavior. For some people, touching their own trauma, or being exposed to other people's trauma without

professional help is unsafe. Sometimes the best you can do is set boundaries around what you allow yourself to be exposed to, and that leads to hard choices about when to stay engaged with language revitalization.

Finally, to be clear, I have worked no miracles or solved how to be well within ILR practice. I continue to struggle to help ILR practitioners nurture safety, connection, and wellbeing. I also continue to struggle to experience safety, connection, and wellbeing within my own ILR practice. What I have done, through a system of reflective and somatic practice, is tried to face the reality of my life as an ILR practitioner and to create space within it for rest, recovery, and reflection. Then I've tried to share my insights and experience with other ILR practitioners through a website. That is the sum of my original contribution to the field of ILR, and it feels like enough.

In piles of handwritten notebooks, there are other potential contributions to ILR. Everything from 'trauma-responsive ILR planning models' to 'assessment tools for wellbeing' to research on the role of shame in ILR. Thinking about these potential contributions makes me tired.[65] There is so much that needs to change, both in scholarship, and in the field of Indigenous language revitalization. ILR practice can still feel heavy and hopeless. Colonization is still a vast tide trying to sweep us all away and intergenerational trauma is a powerful force in Indigenous communities. Yet what my research has taught me, is that what matters most is not being alone. Instead, to focus on being connected with other people in ways that bring you joy, excitement, curiosity, calmness, kindness, empathy, and other things that help give life meaning, reduce suffering, and repair harm. I don't know yet if I have a future as a scholar. If I do, I think I

[65] All this struggling over text has me feeling frazzled and irritable.

might turn my scholarship towards how to expand wellbeing into interpersonal relationships, and to creating spaces that allow ILR practitioners to speak openly about their experiences and learn skills for wellbeing.

In closing, I return to the humility with which I started this research process. Before I was a scholar, I was an ILR practitioner. Before I was an ILR practitioner, I was just a young person who wanted to learn language. Five years ago, I wrote a speech to my 20-year-old self to celebrate the 25th anniversary of my entry into the field of Indigenous language revitalization. It's a raw, honest speech. I used to think about it as one of the best things I ever wrote, but upon recent reflection it fails to acknowledge almost everything that matters to me in the present moment. So, I revised it. Life, and my ILR practice, has changed. Yet I still need to be reminded of what matters. Because, as I said in the introduction, language revitalization is not ultimately about *language*.

I want to say it again because it's so important to grasp. Language revitalization is about *everything* related to being human. Language revitalization connects to our identities, our values, our beliefs, and our relationships. It connects to our sense of place, purpose, and belonging. Language revitalization connects to all our emotions and our capacities to feel, express, learn, and heal. That's what ILR practice has been for me; the consistent attempt to lead a meaningful life, and the necessary struggle to be a good person. It doesn't have to be language revitalization. It could have been something else I used to bring meaning to my life. It's also not the only thing and it's not everything. The point is that for those of us who dedicated ourselves to ILR practice it plays a central role in our lives, and sometimes we haven't really considered its impact upon our bodies, minds, and spirits. Turns out those impacts are not all

good, so some of us must Rethink Revitalization. Rethinking revitalization begins by letting our vulnerable selves tell the stories, by refusing to focus just on the mechanics of language acquisition, and to turn instead to how we *feel* about Indigenous language revitalization, and what happens in our interpersonal actions, our emotional landscapes, and our embodied experiences.

So now, I'm going to close this doctoral project by practicing what I preach. I'm going to give this raw, honest speech that's about how I feel. Some of you will be uncomfortable. Some of you will be confused. Some of you will want to give this poor kid a hug. Some of you will wish I was kinder to myself. Some of you will get it. Some of you won't. All of you will have responses that happen first in your body, and then become feelings and thoughts. All those feelings and thoughts will come from your experience. Try to observe them. Focus on what this speech brings up for you. Reflect on what your response tells you about yourself. Don't push it away to make it about something else. If you can do that, then you have taken the first step towards bringing mindfulness to your ILR practice. You just keep doing it literally one small moment at a time and that is how you eventually Rethink Revitalization as wellbeing. Ok, let's take a break before trying it.

Please step away from this paper and take a few moments to take some deep breaths.

You already waded through a ton of information to get this far.

Maybe go outside. Don't power through to the speech.

Give yourself a little space to rest first.

A speech given to my 20-year-old self on the 30th anniversary of my entry into the field of Indigenous Language Revitalization.

Well, kid, nothing turned out the way you thought it would. You didn't become a super NDN or start a revolution. You are still mostly the same Heinz 57 oddball who moved home and wanted to learn our language. You did that. Not as fluent as you wanted, but you did it. It took way longer than it should have. There's just no way to recount all the mistakes you made. Or all the obstacles you encountered. There were lots of unintended consequences along the way. Some good and some bad. Language broke some relationships, but it gave you others. That keeps happening and you've gotten used to it. It still hurts though.

You experience a lot of struggles working in the field. I use the word "field", not like a field of scholarship, but like a worker in a field toiling away in the hot sun. A bent back and bloody hands. 30 years labor and you're still just paying the bills. Or sometimes it's a field of battle and it seems like there's just a handful of people who want to stand against the forces that seek to turn the whole world into a data stream. Some days you feel hopeless. Some days you are bone tired. Still, you've finally learned to pace yourself. That also took way longer than it should have. There are still times when you wake up and wish you had been interested in something easier like becoming an astronaut or a marine biologist. Something with training, resources, and support. You know job security and all that. The light-skinned, green-eyed cowardly version of you still pushes for a more comfortable life. He reminds you that you have the privilege to just fade into the crowd. Put on the blinders and do something easier. "Unchoose this life," he says, "let's do something else."

You’re not a very good model of the ideal language revitalization activist. You’re not brown enough. You’re not traditional enough. You’re too loud and too direct. Sometimes, people look at you and they get pissed off. You are like a window into a future they don’t want.

Well, I started this speech with the idea to say something encouraging. So far, it's not going very well. I thought maybe I'd tell you what to do differently. Give you some tips to make it easier. Strategies so you don't waste so much effort. I keep thinking of things, but they only make sense if you’ve lived through it. So, I guess I’ll say this:

You weren't wrong. What you want to do, do it. Don't fade. Don't give up. Don't make excuses. Keep going. Keep trying. Keep doing.

Except be more compassionate with yourself. Don’t put the whole world on your back and try to carry it. Find people to help you and depend on them. Give yourself space to rest, reflect, and recover.

That’s really the only encouragement you need.

Well, kid, I feel like maybe you aren’t going to listen to me. That you are just going to jump off the cliff without a parachute. Then 25 years later you will hit the ground, and I’ll have to deal with the consequences. Then I’ll have to spend the next 5 years trying to figure out what to do about it.

You're going to cause me a lot of pain. You overconfident little shit ass.

Well, I don't think this speech turned out very good. I had this whole part about a mountain that I forgot. I think my PTGSS (Post Tribal Government Stress Syndrome) kicked in and I confused myself. Then I got mad at you about being a shit ass. Sorry about that.
I love you and I just want good things for you. Let me know how the whole jumping off the cliff thing works out. Ok, I'll see you later. I'm going to go take a nap. I'm exhausted. Plus, my sciatica is acting up and I've got another migraine.

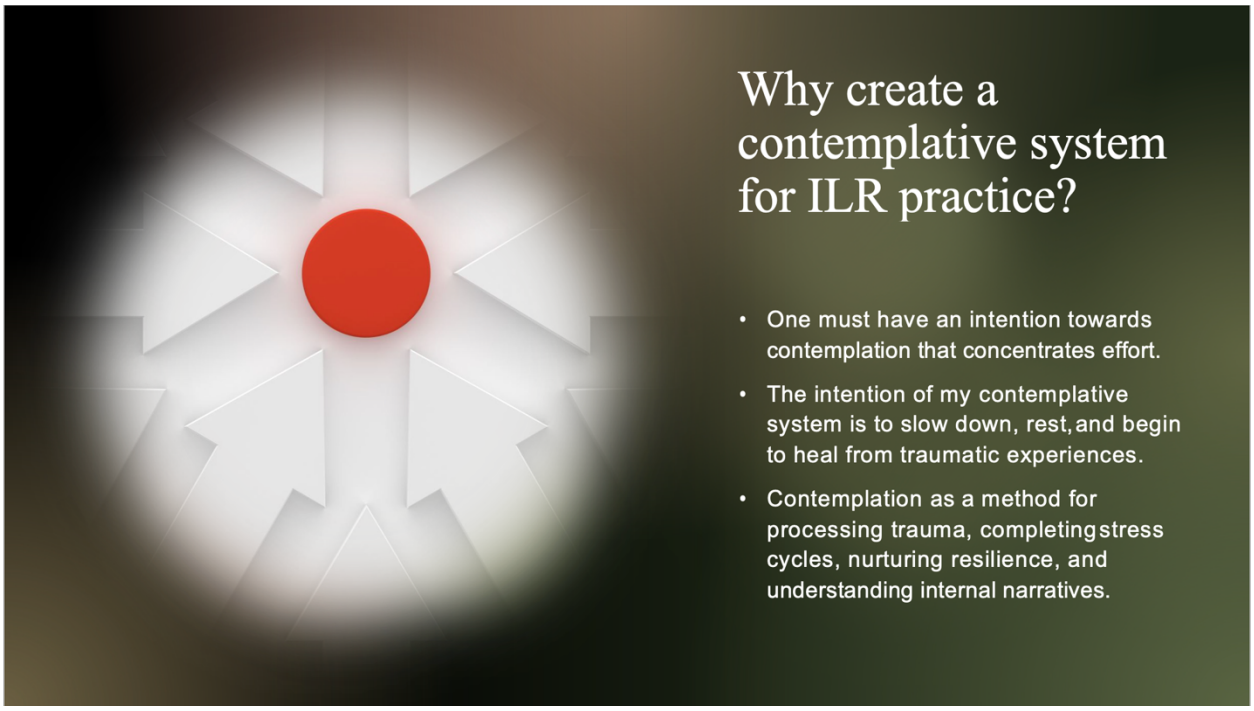
Oops. Kinda got off track again. Anyway, Happy Anniversary! 30 years in the field of Indigenous Language Revitalization. Kâ, that's a long time! Congratulations!

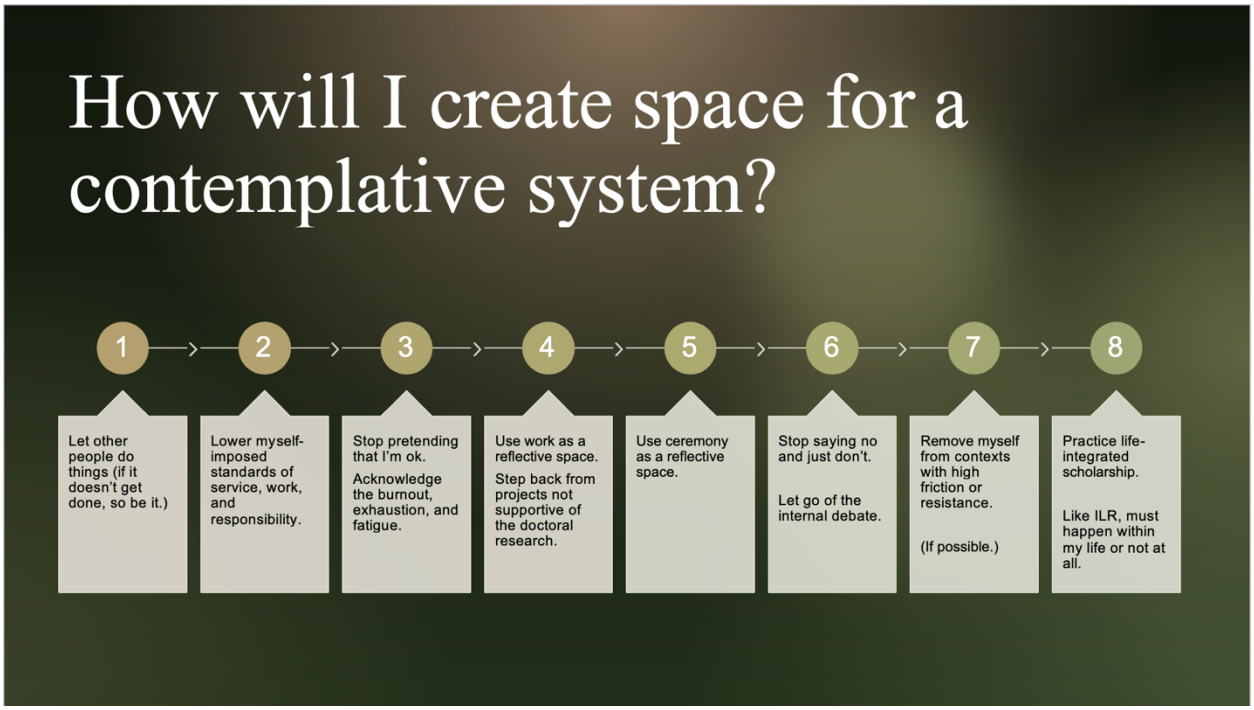
This sentence fictionalizes an ending.

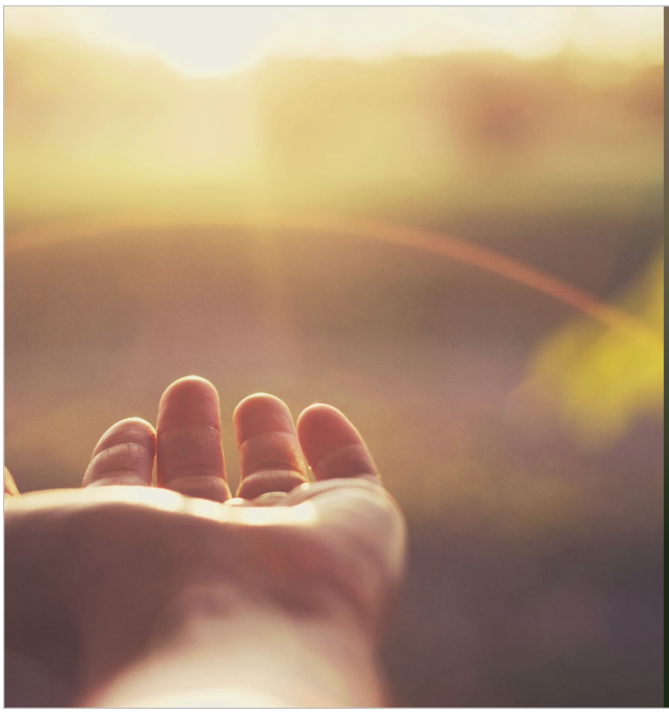
Appendix A: Reflective Practice in ILR

Below are images of the "roadmap" I designed to help me build a system of reflect practice to better understand, and address, the impact of colonization, trauma, and ILR on my wellbeing. Using this design guide, I identified how to create space for reflective practice, set intentions about the purpose of my practice, and identified the places, concepts, and methods I'd use for inquiry into my life as an ILR practitioner.[66]

[66] See Chapter 3 for more detailed discussion of a system of reflective practice as research methodology.


Why create a contemplative system for ILR practice?
• One must have an intention towards contemplation that concentrates effort.
• The intention of my contemplative system is to slow down, rest, and begin to heal from traumatic experiences.
• Contemplation as a method for processing trauma, completing stress cycles, nurturing resilience, and understanding internal narratives.


How will I create space for a contemplative system?
1
Let other people do things (if it doesn't get done, so be it.)
2
Lower myself-imposed standards of service, work, and responsibility.
3
Stop pretending that I'm ok.
Acknowledge the burnout, exhaustion, and fatigue.
4
Use work as a reflective space.
Step back from projects not supportive of the doctoral research.
5
Use ceremony as a reflective space.
6
Stop saying no and just don't.
Let go of the internal debate.
7
Remove myself from contexts with high friction or resistance.
(If possible.)
8
Practice life-integrated scholarship.
Like ILR, must happen within my life or not at all.



What is the focus of my contemplative system for reflective practice in ILR?

1) Paying attention to one's body and nervous system.

2) What is manifesting in one's psychobiology (state of being)?

- a) Constricted or tense.
- b) Calm or relaxed.
- c) Activated or alerted.
- d) Energetic or open.

3) The body sends one messages that are clear and direct.

4) These messages might contradict our own mental models.

What arises from attending to one's state of being?

- Insight into the relationship between one's being and one's experience.
- Insight into the relationship between one's being and one's internal narratives.
- Insight into the relationship between one's being and one's behavior.
- Insight into the relationship between ones' being and one's thoughts and feelings.

When will I engage in contemplative practice?

Unstructured contemplation
(general mindfulness)

A) When I have the energy.
B) When it's possible to stop (even for a few minutes).
C) When things arise.
D) When somebody else creates an opportunity.

Structured contemplation.
(systematic reflection)

A) 20-30 minutes somatic practice daily.
B) 30-60 minutes reflective writing daily
C) 5-10 minutes contemplation breaks 4-6 times a day.
D) 2-4 hour contemplation break weekly.
E) Reflective reading for 30-60 minutes 3 times a week.
F) I full day month.
f) 5 full consecutive days a season.

Where will I engage in contemplative practice?

OFF SCREENS.

OUTSIDE.

QUIET PLACES.

SANCTUARIES.

WITH PEOPLE I CAN DEPEND UPON AND TRUST.

COUNSELING.

POWERFUL PLACES.


Core concepts for my contemplative system.
Trust, safety, and vulnerability.
Rest, peace, and stillness.
Mess acceptance.
Observational distance.
Internal focus.
Constructed knowing.
Slowing down and creating reflective space.
Diversity within structure.

Appendix B: Website Inspiration Deck

Rethinking Revitalization

proposed domain name: rethinkingrevitalization.org

Website Development 2023

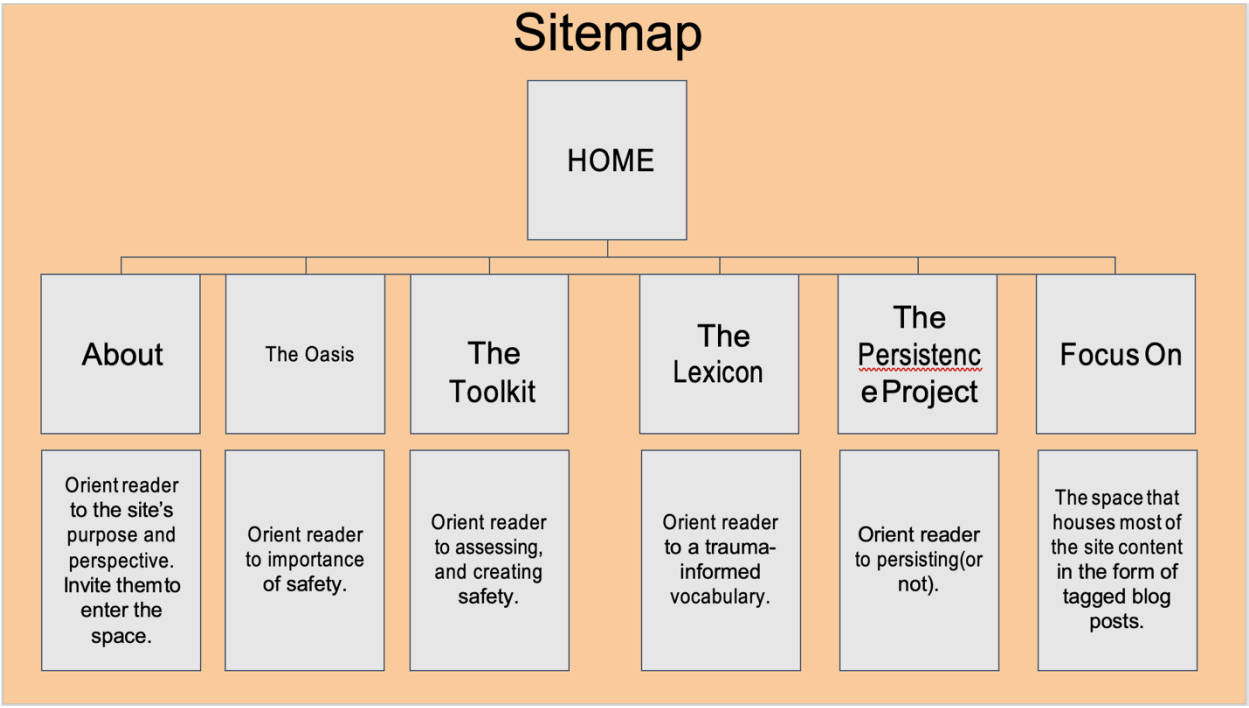
Trauma-Informed Website Aesthetics

- Limit visual complexity.
- Reduce cognitive load.
- Simple and easy to navigate.
- Cool color schemes in green, blue, or purple.
- Clean, neat, and open spaces.
- Avoid stark white backgrounds.
- Small details that add visual interest without being overwhelming.
- Pleasant, beautiful, light, and balanced.
- Earth elements that increase connection to nature.
- Line drawings, stick figures, rock art, and sand paintings.

Rethinking Revitalization Website Conceptualization

A space for ILR practitioners that helps them encounter, feel, and move through difficult emotions. I conceptualize the website as entering a meditation sanctuary with good feng shui. As ILR practitioners enter this sanctuary, they arrive at place of tranquility with space to explore their minds, bodies, and spirits. Tranquility, in this sense, isn't peace. It's a place free from disturbance and distraction. What they feel, the fire and metal of my words, will be uncomfortable, not peaceful. So, we must balance the fire and metal of hard, hot realities with the wood, water, and earth elements of visual and spatial design. We are not trying to make people feel good. We are trying to make them feel safe enough to face tough realities, deep pain, and the arduous work of getting spiritually and emotionally free. I want to create a sense of stability but also of choice, movement, and potential. Stability is the demystification of colonization's traps and tricks. Choice, movement, and potential is the ILR practitioner's agency in how to respond to colonization in their mind, body, and spirit.

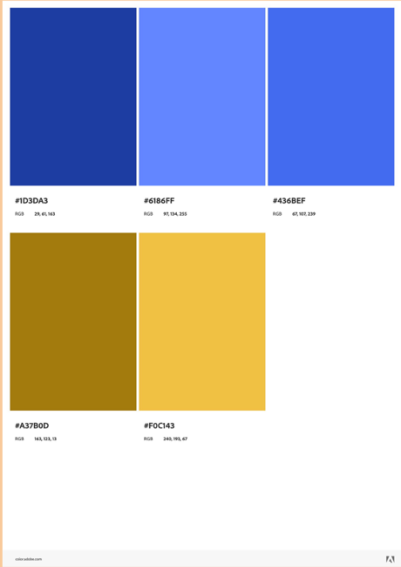
https://www.webdesignbooth.com/does-feng-shui-influence-web-design/



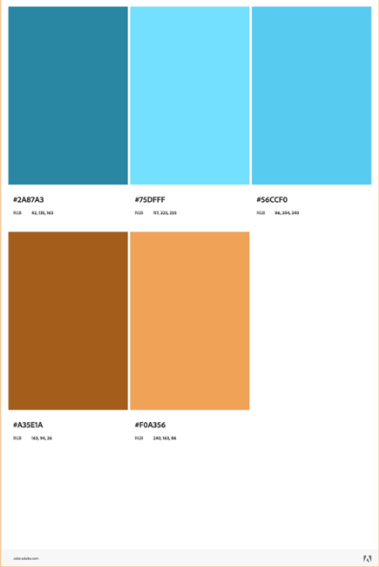
Other issues related to site organization.

- I'm leaning towards "housing" most of the content in the **Focus On** section with limited content for the other pages whose main purpose will be to orient the reader to how to explore the site/blog posts.
- I was imagining that the **Focus On** section would have a drop-down menu of some key topics but I don't know what those are yet. I was thinking that I would create a bunch of blog posts and decide later how to tag everything.
- The content for all the "orientation" pages will contain links on key words that create an organic "web" connecting disparate things together.
- In this way site navigation can happen either by following the path that I created through "click this button" options or more fluidly by what the reader wants to follow.

Colour Palettes



I'm not really sure until I see samples but I like the idea of a simple 3 color palette in blue, green, or earth tones with black text.



LOGO

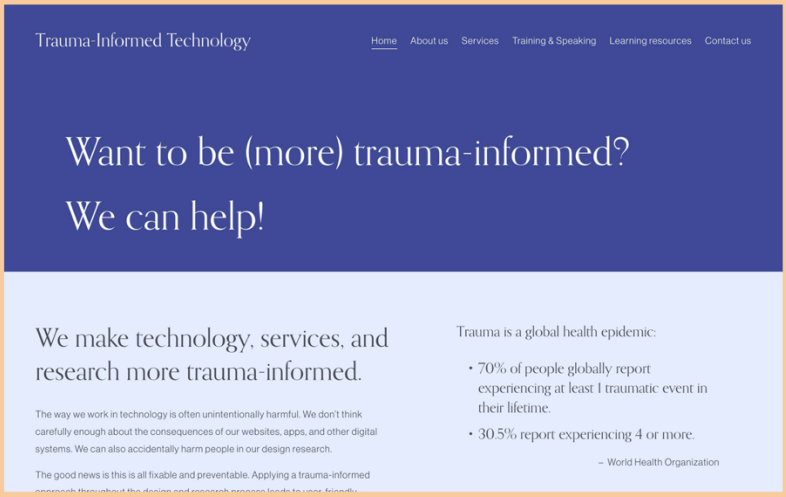
I'm not sure yet. I made this one on Canva using a standard template. I want people to understand that ultimately we aren't really rethinking LANGUAGE revitalization. We are rethinking the purpose of revitalization and giving it meaning greater than the sum of its parts.

FONT:
Clean, Readable, Spacious

- I don't have a clear sense of fonts except that they need to match with the overall look of the site.
- I think readability issues like spacing, no mirroring, difference between capital height and ascenders, letter distinguishability, etc. are important.
- https://medium.com/the-readability-group/a-guide-to-understanding-what-makes-a-typeface-accessible-and-how-to-make-informed-decisions-9e5c0b9040a0
- I like the BBC Reith Sans font that was designed for readability described in the above article but it's not commercially available.

Rethinking Revitalization
BBC Reith Sans

Inspiration Site



https://www.traumainformedtech.com/

Clean, simple, elegant. I like the differing use of fonts and the background color change between sections which provides differentiation without breaking things up

Inspiration Site

https://www.monographcoms.ca/

Clean, spacious, bold. Great use of multiple large and small fonts. Love the minimalist layout with the sidebar for the main message.

Inspiration Site

https://www.estherperel.com/focus-on-categories/communication-and-connection

Clean, visual, communicative. Great use of multiple large and small fonts. Love the centering of a visual combined with a concise quote for the main message.

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