

I Hear My s-kix-ze? (Mother's) Voice
Empowering Me to Relearn Nle?kepmxcin

by

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Abstract

For the purpose of this paper, Aiona, of Nl̓eʔkepmx ancestry, will share her sp̓iləx̄m (personal story). Her sp̓iləx̄m consists of a journey of self-reflection and sharing her sp̓iləx̄m as she learns to tell her late mother's sptékʷl̓ (traditional teaching story) of s-kelúleʔ (owl) in Nl̓eʔkepmxcin, her first language. The sptékʷl̓ (story) is a recorded version from 1979. Learning the sptékʷl̓ from a recording came with many challenges. Through this experience and process, the author hoped for a transformative healing experience to help overcome many childhood fears and traumas that were brutally imposed on her at residential school for speaking Nl̓eʔkepmxcin. The author's belief is that the learning process will facilitate the unblocking of old memories and fears that have for years prevented her success in past efforts to speak Nl̓eʔkepmxcin. Through her journey, she was moved to reconnect more strongly with ancestors by practicing the smudging prayer and cleansing ceremony. This seemed to mitigate many of the fears that had been triggered through remembering her language interruption in residential school. She also discovered that in a daily routine of ceremonial prayer and painting, she found safe places to continue her sp̓iləx̄-m. During months of an agonizing but liberating journey of writing, painting, crying, laughing, sleep deprivation, recurrence of health issues, new insights, and reconnection with Nl̓eʔkepmx identity, family, community, and culture, the author has written an emotionally intimate and courageous sp̓iləx̄m. The journey is not over but the beginning of language revitalization for the author.

Dedication

I dedicate this research paper to my late mother, Cíycetq^{wú}? Mary Anderson, my late father, Jacob Anderson, my children, my existing grandchildren and the generations yet to come beyond seven generations, my siblings and my ancestors, and all ancestors of our people, who have carried the Nl̓eʔkepmx and other Indigenous languages, cultural knowledge, and worldview for thousands of years. I want to thank and recognize the ancestors of all Indigenous people who have carried and shared their teachings that have touched my life.

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I also would like to say how much I appreciate the University of Victoria for offering the Masters of Indigenous Language Revitalization (MILR) program, and staffing it with such incredible Indigenous language champions and professors. I thank all of the MILR professors for their outstanding work. I am honoured and indebted to you for sharing your profound inspirational knowledge. Special thanks to my advisor and professor, Dr. Trish Rosborough, and Dr. Peter Jacobs, professor and committee member. Thank you for being so patient, gentle, and encouraging. I also would like to thank all of the MILR students who have been on this journey with me for sharing their knowledge and giving unconditional love and support.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to share my spíləx-m (personal story) as I experience my journey, through ceremony, self-reflection, journaling, and painting. My hope and prayer is my project—learning to tell my mother’s sptékʷł (traditional teaching story)—will give me further healing and strength to overcome my mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual blockages as I continue relearning Nl̓əʔkepmxcin. To set the background for my paper, I begin with an introduction to myself as taught by our Nl̓əʔkepmx Elders. I locate myself traditionally with family history and geographically. I then give a brief history of colonization and residential schools as background to assist the reader with a clearer perspective on the effects of these experiences on my life as well as the lives of other Indigenous people in Canada.

I am a survivor of the residential school system. Indigenous scholar McIvor (2012) suggests that the children of residential schools “psychologically lock their language away” (p. 25) as a result of separation from their families and punishment for speaking their first languages. One deliberate goal of both colonization and residential schools was to directly attack our Indigenous languages. A direct result of colonization and imposed residential schools is the decline and loss of many of our first languages (McIvor, 2012; Rosborough, 2012; Smith, 2012). The summary of the final report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1997) puts it succinctly:

In their direct attack on language, beliefs and spirituality, the schools had been a particularly virulent strain of that epidemic of empire, sapping the children’s bodies and beings. In later life, many adult survivors, and the families and communities to which they returned, all manifested a tragic range of symptoms emblematic of the silent tortures that continue in our communities. (Vol. 1, p. 376)

In this introduction to my master's project, after I provide an overview of this paper, below, I introduce my late mother, who has been my inspiration and strength to walk with her in spirit on this challenging journey. I introduce my late father, who has been there supporting my personal and academic journey in spirit. Next I discuss decolonization as a part of my journey. Decolonization has been a subject of many Indigenous scholars (e.g., Absolon, 2012; Kovach, 2012; Smith, 2012) who believe that we are engaging in decolonizing by reclaiming our true history, languages, stories, lands, rights, and culture. Kovach (2012) argues that it is complex for an Indigenous person to do research in a Western academic setting because one experiences a dichotomy of Western and Indigenous values, and constantly living in this contradictory system can be arduous. Therefore, one can become lost in the Western system, which hinders decolonization. I have experienced some of this difficulty on my journey despite having excellent Indigenous professors. Finally, my research question asks whether learning to tell my mother's *sptékʷł* (traditional teaching story) will assist in unblocking my mental, spiritual, physical, and spiritual blockages that I believe are a direct result of colonization and residential schooling.

Overview of This Paper

The methodology I have chosen for this paper is Indigenous, and, more specifically, Nłeʔkepmx. My eldest sister, Telahah Beatrice Marie Anderson, (2011), identifies in her doctoral dissertation eight principles for teaching and learning that form the basis of an Nlakapmux developing wisdom theory—all of which have been important information and a guide for my work. Another holistic theory, called social cultural theory (SCT), has helped me to understand my language revitalization journey. These methods are described in Chapter 2, my methodology section. Also in Chapter 2, I continue to introduce some Indigenous language scholars who have

in their research dissertations supported the idea that there is a correlation between language revitalization and healing. Next I introduce my mother, who was fortunate to avoid residential schooling, therefore became a role model in our language and cultural teachings, not just for myself but also for many others. I introduce myself as the researcher of my journey and the reasons I have chosen to walk this path through my *spíləx-m*. I share what I have learned throughout this process as I come closer to finalizing this journey and reexamine my mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual blockages. I summarize my *spíləx-m* by reviewing my motives for going on this journey and how I used some of my sister Telahah's defined *Nłeʔkepmx* developing wisdom theories (Anderson, 2011). I conclude my *spíləx-m* by describing the essence of my residential school experiences and some of the effects on my language interruption and remembering.

Chapter 3 consists of entries from my journal from September 2015 to June 2016. Chapter 4 is my analysis of observations I made of my process and progress releasing the spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical blockages to my language learning. Here I apply the lens of *Nłeʔkepmx* wisdom theory. I summarize my language-learning journey in Chapter 5. I have also included an appendix that presents a conversation between my child self at residential school and my teenage, young adult, and adult selves.

Who I Am

I introduce myself in our traditional *Nłeʔkepmx* way, as our Elders taught me. My name is Aiona Anderson, and I am an *Nłeʔkepmx* woman. I begin my *spíləx-m* (personal story) in our traditional way of introduction. My parents are Jacob Anderson and CheeChee-etcooh (Mary Edmunds Anderson). My maternal grandparents were Whutpalksh Clara Edmunds and Nicola Edmunds. My paternal grandparents, who raised and adopted my father, are Tiilaah Beatrice

Anderson and Willie Anderson. My biological paternal grandparents are MaryAnn Lulu and William Patterson.

I am a mother, wife, grandmother, sister, aunt, great-aunt, and great-great-aunt, a role model, and an educator. I feel I have a responsibility to contribute to language revitalization for our people—past, present and future.

My spíləx-m begins for this project as I relearn my first language, Nl̥eʔkepmxcin, through a sptékʷł, a Nl̥eʔkepmx traditional teaching story, shared by my late s-kíx-zeʔ (mother).

I was born in January of 1951. During my formative years, I was loved and nurtured by my parents, grandparents, and older siblings, who all spoke Nl̥eʔkepmxcin, our first language. I grew up speaking Nl̥eʔkepmxcin, living a subsistence lifestyle on a forty-acre plateau next to the Thompson River, accessible only by horse trail, by train, or by boating across the river. I grew up playing with and riding horses. I remember my mother wrapping me to her on the horse because I was too small to hang on tightly as we rode the trails. We lived in a two-room log cabin without electricity or running water. I learned the importance of gathering and hunting our traditional foods, such as deer, grouse, and pheasants, fishing for trout and salmon, and gathering wild plant foods and berries in season. These cultural ways of being were a part of a healthy, balanced emotional, spiritual, mental, and physical lifestyle.

Mother would take us to the river when she fished with a rod and reel for trout, steelhead, and mameet (a white fish). She would take a branch and tie on a line with a hook for each of us to fish alongside her. She talked to the fish and thanked them for giving themselves to us and, as birds flew over the waters, she would talk to them about assisting us in a successful catch. Sometimes I would sit watching the beautiful changing colours of the water as it flowed over the

rocks and listen to the songs of the river, completely mesmerized, imagining what it was like to live and swim under water.

When the salmon were “running,” as we called it, my mother and father would take us to the river at night when they would dip-net for salmon. We would ride horses to the river. I have many memories of lying on the rocks where they made our bed when we were tired so we could sleep. I loved falling asleep enveloped by the hypnotic sounds of the river. They woke us after dark and we made our way back to the horses with their catch. Often, as we rode through our fruit orchard, we would startle a bear or two and hear them crashing through the bushes, which always frightened me. My parents would make noise by banging on something or yelling to scare the bears away. Their concern was for the fruit and also the salmon. We had no refrigeration, so mother would dry the salmon and we would jar what we did not immediately eat. During the summer we often ate salmon three times a day. Today I am fortunate if I get a bite of salmon once a month.

My parents were also farmers who raised chickens, cattle and horses, and they planted most of our nontraditional foods. The life we had before residential school reinforced how important our connection was to the land and to healthy traditional foods and lifestyle. First Nations people knew how to care for our mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical wellbeing. These teachings of our reciprocal relationship to the land exemplify Nłeʔkepmx worldview.

My sister Telahah, Dr. Beatrice Marie Anderson, called her dissertation *Nlakapmux Grandmothers' Traditional Teachings and Learnings* (2011). She identified eight Nlakapmux principles of Nlakapmux developing wisdom theory (NDWT). I can apply one of her identified NDWT principles, “ChaaChawoowh, celebrating people and land joyously” (p. 104), to teachings from my childhood. I was taught to love and respect all living beings and I now

acknowledge that, as a child, I was living and experiencing a holistic healthy life with my family on the land before we were taken to residential school. Parker (2012) shares that, “for Indigenous peoples, knowledge, identity and culture spring from the land itself, and thus land and place are the foundations of education” (p. 83). This is one of many quotes that affirm for me the importance of the land to Indigenous peoples’ wellbeing.

My great-aunt Lameenak told my oldest sister, Telahah, “We are called Nl̓əʔkepm̓x because “Nmeemlph a shyatkimwhaaw weahh na kooui” (Anderson, 2011, p. 3), which translates as “we are the people living along the pure river.” She is referring to the Thompson River of British Columbia, but unfortunately, the river today is no longer pure due to modern industry using the river for dumping its toxic industrial and human waste.



Figure 1: The place I call home—**n̓k̓əx xeʔe** (Dry Creek): Situating the Nl̓əʔkepm̓x.



Figure 2: Current map of Nleʔkepmx territories.

Source: Nleʔkepmx Nation Tribal Council (2012).

This map shows today's location of the 15 Nleʔkepmx bands identified by First Peoples' Cultural Council (2014). Prior to European contact in 1808, the Nleʔkepmx people were greater in numbers and dispersed over a larger territory.

Nleʔkepmxcin belongs to the Salishan linguistic family and the Nleʔkepmx Nation is one nation of the Interior Salish. The 34 First Nations languages of British Columbia are in danger of disappearing in the next couple of decades, according to First Peoples' Cultural Council (2014). The language of Nleʔkepmx (Thompson People) is listed as nearly extinct in the *Report on the Status of B.C. First Nations Languages* (First Peoples' Cultural Council, 2014), as are many other First Nations languages of B.C. This is a deeply concerning issue. The Nleʔkepmx people and our Nleʔkepmxcin language are but mere fragments of who and what we once were.

History

To give context to my spiləx-m (story), it is important to consider the history of colonization of the Indigenous peoples of Canada and Indian residential schools. Colonization took place after the arrival of the Europeans on the shores of Turtle Island (North America). My

sister shares how Nl̓eʔkepmx Elders described these times: “Our history of European contact and colonization holds many negative experiences and traumatic memories which are still preventing our full participation in mainstream society. This period is defined as dark times for us” (Anderson, 2011, p. 5). The effects of colonization for the Nl̓eʔkepmx and all First Nations is succinctly described by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015):

Canada has a long history of colonialism in relation to Aboriginal peoples. That history and its policies of cultural genocide and assimilation have left deep scars on the lives of many Aboriginal people, in Aboriginal communities, as well as on Canadian society, and have deeply damaged the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. These scars have become intergenerational as one affected generation, more often than not, perpetuates the traumas from experiences of colonization and residential schools. (p. 237)

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1997) shared their findings on the impact of colonization. According to their research, the results of 400 years of interaction between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people are relationships built on misinformation (Vol. 2, p. 1). Aboriginals were displaced, suppressed, and subjugated. Cultures, language, and identity were undermined. According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015), residential schools started in the late 1800s for Indigenous people in Canada and continued until the last residential school closed in 1996. These schools were a result of collaboration between government and churches to systematically destroy relationships with children and parents to prevent children from learning their languages, culture, and spiritual ways. My ancestors, grandparents, and parents lived through years of colonization and I am the first generation that

experienced the residential school system. Therefore, I turn to the supporting academic papers to give the reader a glimpse into our history.

Colonization led to cultural trauma for Indigenous people, which has been defined by Yellow Horse Brave Heart (1998, as cited in Palma, 2013) “as cumulative collective and compounding emotional and psychic wounding—both over the lifespan and across generations” (p. 1). Palma builds on this definition and says that the results of historical trauma (HT) have culminated in health issues for Aboriginal people too numerous to mention, which originally manifested from the socio-political-historical context of this historical environment. Many health challenges stand out, such as sexual abuse, suicidal ideation, violence, addictions, and post-traumatic stress disorder, as a direct result of HT. Palma (2013) refers to residential school syndrome, which

is considered to be directly linked to the historical context of colonialism, oppression, and intergenerational trauma or Historical Trauma Transmission (HTT) (Kirmayer et al., 2007; Chansonneuve, 2007; Bopp et al., 2003; Dumont-Smith, 2002; Hylton et al., 2002; Tait, 2003; Corrado & Cohen, 2003; Gagne, 1998; Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004; Myran, 2008; Elias et al., 2012; Crey & Fournier, 1997). (p. 1)

These points are only a few in the massive complexity of how colonization and residential schools have, since contact, purposely destroyed the original inhabitants of Turtle Island.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) describes residential schools as the government’s systematic effort to assimilate and obliterate us by taking away our languages, cultures, and identity. In these residential schools, students were cruelly and relentlessly punished for speaking their Indigenous languages.

My spíləx-m specifically addresses how I was impacted as a student of the residential school and living in a colonized world, past and present. I discuss effects of residential school throughout my spíləx-m because the destructive impact that residential schools have had on my life and my story still affects me today. I became physically, mentally, spiritually, and emotionally broken. My worldview and connection to my identity, culture, family, land, spirituality, community, and language were decimated.

Parker (2012) shares in her thesis teachings of the Elders she interviewed and discusses how language loss directly affects our reciprocal relationship with the land, sacred teachings, spiritual teachings, and the important teachings of our cultural values that contribute to identity and worldview. When we lose our Indigenous languages, we lose that relationship with the land, and our languages are “the voice of the land” (p. 73). This quote also reminds me that we are all related, when we say, “all my relations.” Anderson (2011) discusses how Takemshooknooqua in our language literally translates to “all my relations” and says that, “therefore, inherent in those few words in our language resides the understandings we have about all our relationships, seen and unseen” (p. 105). I believe this refers to all the living beings on this planet and in the universe, animate or inanimate. Unfortunately, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) suggests that these relationships have been decimated since contact with Europeans.

Residential schools forever changed the health of children—not only those who were forced to attend the schools but their children and grandchildren as well. Many children became ill with infectious diseases such as tuberculosis. Trauma of separation from families and communities and sexual and physical abuse were all contributors to the intergenerational trauma that continues today. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) states that the

disregard for First Nations health is a long-established pattern of colonialism throughout history. These traumas have also been a contributing factor to many mental health issues of First Nations people. The loss of traditional lands and food have deprived First Nations of the connection to a way of life, such as places for sacred ceremonies, place names, community gathering places, and traditional food gathering and hunting that directly affected First Nations people's well-being.

Many of the losses discussed in this section continue to adversely affect me. The atrocities of colonialism that have been imposed on me, including the disruption of my first language, Nl̓eʔkepmxcin, continue to haunt my dreams and daily life. The traumas that I have experienced are seemingly forever imprinted in my psyche.

My Inspiration

My greatest inspirations are my s-kíx-zeʔ (mother) and sqáczeʔ (father), who were fluent Nl̓eʔkepmx speakers and amazing role models of unconditional love. Many teachings of Indigenous and non-Indigenous language scholars have resonated with and inspired me throughout my (MILR) program at the University of Victoria (UVic). Some of the papers I have chosen to support my ideas are autoethnographic, and the scholars mention the importance of Indigenous language revitalization (ILR) as a contributor to healing. These papers portray the scholars' passion while learning their Indigenous languages and contribute to the field of Indigenous language revitalization.

I felt supported to start talking my first language, Nl̓eʔkepmxcin, when I began the MILR. I felt I had permission to speak Nl̓eʔkepmxcin as I learned and listened to others speaking and learning their Indigenous languages, most for the first time as second language speakers. I realized I have much to be grateful for as a first language speaker of Nl̓eʔkepmxcin, even though I am no longer fluent and now fell into a category called re-emergent speaker.

Rosborough, a First Nations Kwakwaka'wakw scholar, states in her dissertation that to be successful at learning Kwak'wala, her language, healing and decolonization need to be a part of language revitalization (2012, p. 1). She shares her journey through language revitalization with her teachers, including both the challenges and the positive outcomes. I hope that by reflecting on these scholarly journeys as I begin my spiləx-m I will contribute some new ideas and thoughts about ILR from a re-emergent Indigenous first language speaker's perspective. I have no doubts about the importance of ILR for my own healing as I relearn my first language. Basham and Fathman's (2008) study of Athabascan second language learners in regards to healing highlights the experience of an adult latent speaker, a second language learner who was exposed to their first language as a child but never spoke the language and stated that "I firmly believe that to become a whole person, I have to find my heritage, and it is in the stories, the names, the history, and the language" (p. 593).

I share my heartfelt spiləx-m for everyone to hear, including the academy, my family and community, the community of residential school survivors, and latent and re-emergent speakers. My prayer is that my spiləx-m will encourage re-emergent speakers to relearn their first languages and help them on their healing journeys. I also hope to reach out to latent speakers and anyone who wonders if they should learn their Indigenous language. I bare my heart and soul for the love of all people, Indigenous and non-Indigenous. I pray every person may learn and take whatever they need to from my spiləx-m.

Decolonizing

Through telling my spiləx-m I am reminded by Indigenous scholar Kovach "story works as a decolonizing action that gives voice to the misinterpreted and marginalized" (2012, p. 98). I am happy, but feel uneasy to be on this decolonizing journey.

My decolonizing journey began about 35 years ago when I began the Native Human Service (NHS) Program in Kamloops, B.C. This two-year program was developed by my sister Telahah and two other First Nations women and was delivered in classes for one week a month. Unfortunately, this program no longer exists. My healing journey began as I learned more about my culture and as I began to realize how the trauma I experienced through colonization and residential school had changed who I had become or who I was meant to become. The NHS program taught Indigenous perspectives that supported the Nłeʔkepmx cultural teachings of my childhood that were holistic, spiritual, universal, and earth based.

During the program I began the slow, arduous journey of reawakening from my anesthetized state. This two-year period began my challenging, sometimes painful but at the same time exciting healing journey of decolonizing many of my indoctrinated negative values and beliefs, not only of myself but also in how I saw my family, my community, and all “Indian people.” I now realize, 35 years later, that this decolonizing journey is a lifelong journey. Many scholars have written and continue to write about decolonization. Smith (2012) asserts that “part of the critical pedagogy of decolonization is getting to know the past” (p. 36). She argues that when we tell our stories, we are using one strategy to reclaim what was taken from us in history as we struggle against injustices of the past and present, “and yet,” she says, “the need to tell our stories remains the powerful imperative of a powerful form of resistance” (p. 36).

Absolon (2011), an Anashinaabe scholar, argues in her doctoral dissertation “we are practicing decolonization in all areas of our lives, for example by learning and practicing our languages and our cultures, which ultimately leads to our healing” (pp. 18–19). Shirley Flowers made the following statement to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015):

The whole part of the residential school was a part of a bigger scheme of colonization. There was intent; the schools were there with the intent to change people, to make them like others and to make them not fit. And today, you know, we have to learn to decolonize. (p. 47)

I agree with the statements of Flowers and Absolon above, and I believe that decolonizing is imperative. I experienced my worldview change dramatically from a child living a near-idyllic life in natural, holistic, and nurturing conditions, to being in residential school, where abuse was the prevalent way of life. The effects of this type of trauma are almost impossible to describe, but I can say that they were insidious and devastating. I think Absolon's (2011) use of the word "dismembered" to describe how we were "severed" (p. 15) from our families and homes when we were taken to residential schools demonstrates a powerful portrayal of a disconnection that so many of us experienced from our families, communities, language, lands, and childhood identities. I agree with Alfred (2009), a Kanien'kehaka (Mohawk Nation) scholar, who asserts that language is connected to our identity, and therefore language needs to be revived and taught to everyone in our communities, including governments.

Rosborough (2012) agrees that decolonization needs language revitalization as a crucial component for a successful outcome, and she suggests that healing and decolonization work together as important to this success. She argues that revitalizing our languages is vital for our identities and crucial to assist in decolonization.

I believe decolonizing, for me, will be a lifelong challenge. When I think I have healed to a point of overcoming some of the traumatic abuses, something inevitably will trigger me and the old fear and terror jolts my heart and invades my psyche yet again. Flight and fight responses take over and anxiety rules. The more I learned, the more the process of healing continued.

Learning about Indigenous cultures and the true history of our people helped to facilitate my decolonization, which renewed my worldview to my Nl̓eʔkepmx cultural beliefs and values. Once reminded, I understood where I come from and who I am as an Nl̓eʔkepmx woman. I felt empowered to begin decolonizing and deconstructing my colonizer beliefs and values. Loving and accepting myself, my family, friends, communities, and all Indigenous people, including non-Aboriginal people, became easier. These holistic teachings gave me the confidence to further my academic studies.

Rosborough (2012) argues that “we are our languages” and cites Sto:lo scholar and educator Archibald (2008) as demonstrating “that stories have the power to educate and heal the heart, mind, body, and spirit” (p. 10). If I did not believe this, I would not be sharing my story and working to revitalize Nl̓eʔkepmxcin.

Research Questions

How will learning to tell my mother’s sptékʷł (traditional teaching story) help reclaim my Nl̓eʔkepmx voice? How will learning to tell my mother’s story in Nl̓eʔkepmxcin assist me on my healing journey in helping to unlock:

- i) my mental blockages,
- ii) emotional blockages,
- iii) physical blockages,
- iv) spiritual blockages.

These blockages are buried deep in my psyche. My hope is that this project and story will be an important catalyst in removing these blockages and thus allowing me to speak Nl̓eʔkepmxcin once again. Do I dare dream that I might be capable of relearning Nl̓eʔkepmxcin and through the pursuit of this dream unblock the mental, emotional, spiritual and physical

blockages that I have experienced whenever I made attempts to speak Nl̥eʔkepmxcin? I feel urgency, not only in my life cycle coming full circle, but also for other Elders who carry the knowledge of our languages and the need to heal the traumatic wounds that have prevented me from becoming a fluent Nl̥eʔkepmxcin speaker once more.

Chapter Two: Methodology

For the purpose of this paper, I will draw from the methodology of autoethnography, which embodies the Nle?kepmx idea of spíləxm or personal story. Autoethnography, as I understand it, is a method of journaling and personal research through self-reflection. Mohawk scholar Brant (2016) states:

Auto-ethnography is defined as describing and analyzing personal experience in order to understand a cultural phenomenon; a process and a product that will change the author and the world they live in for the better (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). (p. 11)

Most importantly, I use Nle?kepmx methodology. Spíləxm can also lead to a profound, transformative personal experience through sharing. Through reading my reflective experiences, the audience may be inspired to reflect and relate to their own stories, which can lead to a similar transformative experience (Adams, & Bochner, Chase, Ellis, 2011 all as cited by Brant, 2016).

My eldest sister, Telahah, is now the carrier of our family's traditional teachings and Nle?kepmx worldview. She discusses that spíləxm has been a method for sharing personal teachings, even more so since Indigenous people have been subjected to colonialism (Anderson, 2011).

I recall spíləxm being used by Elders as one way of teaching many life lessons to children, families, and communities through their personal experiences. Anderson (2011) states that "our Speta'kl (teaching stories) are complex and have many different functions, and a fundamental belief we hold is related to the concept of transformation that is noted in the quote below" (p. 100). She then cites Laforet and York (1999):

In myth times, humans and animals were said to have the same faculties. Not only were they capable of communicating with each other, but also they were also able to exchange

physical forms. Typical transformations include changing from being dead to being alive, being sick to being healthy, being poor to being rich, being animal to being human, being human to being animal, being animal to being things. (as cited in Anderson, 2011, p. 41)

Anderson (2011) then states, “The process of transformation in our stories offers profound meanings and the process of passing on of these stories illumine the capacity and power that is given to us to transform” (p. 10).

I am using Indigenous methodology—specifically Nl̓eʔkepmx research methodology. I am practicing one of Anderson’s (2011) identified Nlakapmux principles for teaching and learning, which is Peteenushem, or reflecting on learning and relearning lifelong lessons.

I will be using myself as the methodology, as described by Absolon (2011): “Some researchers are going back into their memory and retelling stories they heard or traditions they’ve witnessed. Again the relationships revealed in that method of going into our memory are directly related to use of self as methodology” (p. 132). Absolon (2011) also suggests that we are Indigenizing our methodologies just by the fact that we are Indigenous, and that “the Indigeneity of our re-search is held within our own Spirit as our search for knowledge is regarded as a sacred process” (p. 118).

I am telling my spíl̓əx-m through writing based partly on colonial academic methods but still using the Nl̓eʔkepmx way of knowing through an oral story that embraces my Nl̓eʔkepmx worldview. I am honoured to be sharing and learning a sptékʷł (teaching story) of my mother’s in our oral tradition and respect this sacred process.

I believe that others can benefit from my story. As Wilson (2008) argues,

Indigenous people in Canada recognize that it is important for storytellers to impart their own life and experience in the telling. They also recognize that listeners will filter the

story being told through their own experience and thus adapt the information to make it relevant and specific to their life. (p. 32)

I will practice my Nl̓eʔkepmx cultural protocols by respecting and honouring my family's, ancestors', and Elders' knowledge. Maori scholar Smith (2012) describes using respect, responsibility, and reciprocity as Indigenous protocols of research while collecting and sharing information (p. 125). I will uphold and honour Smith's teachings and our Nl̓eʔkepmx sacred teachings.

I feel fortunate that my older sister Telahah has shared her knowledge and wisdom in her research (Anderson, 2011). She uses a phonetic version of our language, which explains the different orthographies. Through her research she has identified eight Nlakapmux principles for teaching and learning that form the basis of an Nlakapmux developing wisdom theory. These principles include:

- (1) Takemshooknooqua, knowing we are connected: land, animals, plants, and people;
- (2) ChaaChawoowh, celebrating people and land joyously;
- (3) Huckpestes, developing lifelong learning and wisdom;
- (4) Huztowaahh, giving lovingly to family and community;
- (5) Choownensh, succeeding in endeavours;
- (6) Choowaachoots, utilizing Nlakapmux vision-seeking methods;
- (7) Nmeenlth coynchoots, incorporating Nlakapmux knowledge; and
- (8) Peteenushem, reflecting on learning and relearning lifelong lessons. (p. 104)

Throughout my story, I will incorporate some of these principles as I continue to shed some of my colonial conditioning and embrace more of my Nl̓eʔkepmx values. These teachings inspire me and affirm the invaluable purpose of language revitalization. Language connects us

with spirit through prayer, and who we are Nl̥ɛʔkepmx with our environment and all “our relations,” with whom we share the universe.

As mentioned in my introduction, I also use Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory (SCT) as a reference to support my experiences. Vygotsky (1896–1934) was the founder of SCT. He believed that “the individual cannot be studied or understood in isolation but only as part of history, of a culture and of a society” (as cited in Swain, Kinnear, & Steinman, 2011, p. x). According to Swain, Kinnear, and Steinman (2011), Vygotsky developed six main theories of SCT. I use several in my paper that apply to my sp̥l̥əx-m and language acquisition. Vygotsky’s six social development theories are, in short:

- i) mediation;
- ii) zone of proximal development;
- iii) languaging through private and collaborative speech;
- iv) everyday concepts and scientific concepts;
- v) interrelatedness of cognition and emotion;
- vi) activity theory and assessment. (as cited in Swain et al., 2011, p. xiv)

In my analysis, I refer mainly to “private speech,” also known more commonly as self-talk, and the relationship “between cognition and emotion” (Swain et al., 2011, p. 23).

Context

I am a Nl̥ɛʔkepmx first language speaker who, through the disruption of my first language due to colonization and residential school, is no longer a fluent speaker. I am relearning to speak Nl̥ɛʔkepmxcin by learning a sp̥t̥ékʷl̥ from a version recorded by my late mother. I have been journaling my sp̥l̥əx-m and writing about my experiences since I began this journey of language revitalization. I have struggled over the years to relearn Nl̥ɛʔkepmxcin through formal

and informal language classes and by spending time with Elders in our community and my parents and older siblings.

I have experienced many emotions and thoughts about relearning my first language. The most difficult of these experiences are the feelings of shame, inadequacy, and anger at the people and system that prevented me from continuing to learn and use Nl̓eʔkepmxcin. Other factors that have interfered with my relearning Nl̓eʔkepmxcin include having very little access to fluent speakers due to living off the reservation and away from the Nl̓eʔkepmx community since 1983, and the fact that many of our fluent speakers are no longer with us. I still live in an urban area where I have little access to fluent speakers, but I have access to recordings and the resources on the First Voices website (<http://www.firstvoices.com>). I continue to visit and connect on the phone with some of my sisters who are proficient and fluent speakers. I visit fluent Elders in some of the Nl̓eʔkepmx communities for help with relearning Nl̓eʔkepmxcin.

What We Already Know

The purpose of my research is to determine the correlation between my language revitalization and my healing from the effects of colonization and residential schooling. The reason for this is that existing research on Indigenous language revitalization (ILR) for re-emergent learners (whose first language was their native tongue, but was disrupted by unforeseen circumstances and are in the process of relearning their first language) and healing seems to be lacking, indicating an evident gap in ILR literature. In my research, I have come across scholars who do acknowledge ILR as a possible means to healing from the devastating language loss through residential schooling. Tahltan scholar Thompson (2005) believes that language revitalization can promote healing and address identity issues of the Tahltan people. Many Indigenous scholars worldwide have written their theses and dissertations about Indigenous

language revitalization. Some of them make reference to the correlation between health and healing as language revitalization methods and argue that students can become successful second language learners of their Indigenous languages. Hampton (1995, p. 562, as cited in Wilson, 2008), for example, states that

feeling is connected to our intellect and we ignore, hide from, disguise, and suppress that feeling at our peril and of the peril of those around us. Emotionless, passionless, abstract, intellectual research is a goddamn lie, it does not exist. It is a lie to ourselves and a lie to other people. Humans—feeling, living, and breathing, thinking humans—do research. When we try to cut ourselves off at the neck and pretend an objectivity that does not exist in the human world, we become dangerous, to ourselves first and then to the people around us. (p. 52)

Therefore, because I share my emotions throughout my paper, my research comes from a very subjective point of view. I feel I have been cut off at the neck, numbed from the neck down for years, searching for something to fill the void. I believe the loss of Nl̓eʔkepmxcin is a contributing component to the feelings of emptiness and disconnection that I continue to feel. Challenging myself to relearn my mother's sptékʷł̓ is what I need to face these imposing fears and eliminate them, once and for all. I believe the healing process will begin with the removal of the blockages and that this process can catapult me into a cathartic healing process.

Swain et al. (2011) share that, according to Vygotsky, “emotion and cognition are integrally related” (p. 23). In my story of continued abuse and punishment of myself and other students by residential school staff, the above statement is relevant. Swain et al. cite Bailey (1991), Shumann (1998), and Steinman (2004) when they state that “emotion (affect) can impede rather than advance learning” (p. 23) and that “being unable to speak in the face of fear or

ridicule is a strong theme in much of the research on anxiety and failure in language development, and frequently appears in first person accounts of language and culture learning” (p. 23). Understandably, this statement supports a strong mitigating factor in my unsuccessful efforts to relearn Nl̄eʔkepmxcin.

Introducing My Skíxzeʔ (Mother)



Figure 3: My mother Cíycetqʷúʔ and I in 1975

My late mother Cíycetqʷúʔ Mary (1909–2009) was an amazing teacher, matriarch, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, and great-great-grandmother of approximately 100 descendants. She passed into the spirit world in 2009 in her hundredth year of life, four months before her 100th birthday. She had an arranged marriage at the age of 15 and she gave birth to three children from that marriage, with two returning to the spirit world as young children. Years later, she married my father and gave birth to eight more children, of whom I am the second youngest. My mother was, and still is, my role model. She was strong, healthy, and had an incredible work ethic. She was honest, loving, and kind, yet stern when necessary, and she embodied our Nl̄eʔkepmx ways of knowing. She walks with me daily, deep within my heart and soul.

I can feel and hear my mother's spirit guiding me, and I can hear her voice and her wise words daily and in my dream life. I believe this demonstrates one of Anderson's (2011) Nlakapmux principles for teaching and learning: Choowaachoots, utilizing Nlakapmux vision-seeking methods. Anderson writes, "To tell stories, and to make learning connections between past and present, as in Speta'kl and Spilehem and our transformational stories in educational contexts, would be a welcome change [to Euro-Western dominance]" (p. 120).

Mother never went to school, but her English was very good. Most people would not know she did not read or write by listening to her talk. When asked by a researcher during one of her many visits from university students to interview her for their theses whether she went to residential school, she quickly replied, "No, that is why I know so much!" Hearing her response gave me a feeling of appreciation for her conviction and the confidence she always carried, yet in a humble way. I even had a quiet chuckle to myself at the surprised looks on the student researchers' faces. My mother then quickly added, "If something were to go wrong in the world, I can walk into the mountains behind my house and survive and live off the land with no problem. Can you?"

I cannot mention my mother without mentioning my father. He was loving and gentle, wise and ahead of his time in many ways. My father used to say he "communed with the universe and the creator as he spiritually traveled throughout the universe." I witnessed his conversation many times with our ancestors' visiting spirits. My father did not have a formal education and was able to avoid residential school—another story for another paper. He did learn to read and write and loved books. He felt it was so important for all of his children to get a Western education to survive in this world and make changes to help the First Nations people.

My Personal Spíləx-m

Through my spíləx-m I hope to inspire re-emergent speakers who are survivors of residential schools to relearn their Indigenous languages and recognize the healing power of the languages for recovering our culture and identities. I begin with humility and prayer in thanking the Creator and my ancestors for being with me and giving me the courage and strength I need to continue on this journey of healing through relearning Nl̓eʔkepmxcin through retelling my mother's sptékʷł.

Anderson (2011) says, “Language expresses our oral teachings through stories and songs. Sptékʷł creation stories, ancient transformation trickster stories and spíləx-m (personal stories)” (p. 9). The story of skelúleʔ (owl) I have chosen to learn is one my skíxzeʔ (mother) has told many times. I have heard her tell several variations of this sptékʷł. I never asked her why, but looking back I believe she would adjust the sptékʷł for her audience. In this particular case, her audience was families of all ages, mostly adults.

I recall that when I began to learn English, my older siblings were studying at home through correspondence courses, and they knew how to read and write English. I was an eager four-year-old who wanted to learn as much as my older brother in first grade. I sat by him when he was doing his studies and reading his books. I excitedly and eagerly learned along with him as our older sisters took turns teaching him. I remember when my older brother would read out loud his ABCs, Dick and Jane stories, and numbers, I was learning along with him. Learning English as a second language was a very positive and fun experience for me. I learned to read and speak English very well by the time I started first grade. These formative years of my child development were steeped in my language, culture, and Nl̓eʔkepmx worldview.

My parents were coerced into sending us to residential school. I had completed second grade at home before the Indian agent descended upon us and forced our parents to bring us to residential school when I was eight years old. I recall when our parents told us we were going to go to school away from home I became excited that we would be going to a “real school.” I did not understand that we would be away from our parents for months at a time.

Once in the residential school, my life changed drastically. Absolon (2011) uses the word “dismembered” to describe how we were “severed” from our families and homes when taken to residential schools (p. 15). The staff constantly admonished us, especially our supervisor (the person in charge of all the children age five to ten, the juniors). There I became an “Indian child” with brown skin, and all the implications that came with the stereotype, as a student at a residential school. The traumatic events began in the residential school and changed my identity and life forever. My formative years were steeped in Nl̓eʔkepmxcin, love, joy, living off the land, and being connected to mother earth and all other living beings of the land. My worldview was holistic, including all aspects of our mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual being. Indigenous scholars remind us that language connects us to the land, the past, the present, the future, to our ancestors and spirit (Absolon, 2011; Gardner, 2002; Parker, 2012; Rosborough, 2012; Wilson, 2008).

The staff at the school told me that “I am an Indian,” and that I was bad, my language was bad. I was “dirty, dumb, stupid, lazy, and useless.” The life of mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual abuse was beginning. I was constantly and violently ridiculed, and told that my parents were drunks, and that I would be a drunk too. Every time I spoke Nl̓eʔkepmxcin or when other students spoke their First Nations languages, we were punished by strapping, slapping, having our mouths washed out with soap, and we were given extra demeaning chores, always in

front of the other children. I tried many times to help the younger children learn English. I would translate to the supervisor when one of the younger children would speak Nl̥eʔkepmxcin, hoping to spare the child punishment. Instead, I would get punished as well. I began to help the younger children learn English whenever possible when we were on the playground and were out of hearing distance of a supervisor.

I became extremely afraid and withdrawn and began to work harder at learning English. To survive, I was very silent, trying very hard to be invisible to avoid conflict, attention, and punishment. I was also trying to prove I was not a dumb Indian by excelling in the classroom in all subjects. The verbal and physical assaults continued, despite my efforts to please the teachers and supervisors. There was no escape. In recounting my story of continued abuse and punishment of myself and other students, I am reminded by Vygotsky (1994, p. 339, as cited in Swain et al., 2011) that

the emotional experience arising from any situation or from any aspect of [a child's] environment determines what kind of influence the situation or this environment will have on the child. (p. 82).

Swain et al. (2011) continue: “Certainly these past emotions and memories of these emotions follow an individual into their present” (p. 82). I relate to Vygotsky’s belief that when a child has a negative emotional experience from a situation, this will influence their memory and the emotion later on in life. During these challenging times at residential school, I recall doing a lot of self-talk, which I believe helped me decipher what was real and what were untruths. Having reviewed private speech in SCT, I concluded that my private speech, or self-talk, is one of the helping tools on my healing journey, even today. Through learning about self-talk, I can transform destructive self-talk acquired as a child from residential school to positive private

speech. Through the abusive, demeaning language of staff at the residential school, I learned to have private speech thoughts of being dumb, stupid, dirty, unworthy, despicable, unlovable, and ugly. I do recall at one point when I was about 11 or 12 years old saying to myself that the supervisors were wrong, so my private speech became, "I will prove them wrong." I said to myself, "I will graduate, I will not be a pregnant teenager, I will not be a drunk." I was very confused about these deceptive messages I absorbed into my vulnerable and impressionable mind, heart, soul, and psyche. Somehow by that age, I began to decipher the truth about my parents, who never drank alcohol. They were not drunks; therefore, my conclusion was that neither was I, nor would I ever be.

The staff at the school continually oppressed and demeaned everything about us. They sexually abused children and shamed us because of the colour of our skin and our perceived lack of intelligence. The abuse affected our emotion, which affected our identity of who we were as children and as First Nations people. The only way I could be defiant at 11 and 12 years old was through my private speech of "I will prove them wrong. I am not all those horrid things they call me, and someday I will prove it to them." I became a very confused child, and that confusion continued into my young adulthood questioning of "Who am I?"

I was impressed to see Vygotsky describe private speech as the speech we use to address ourselves, and to emphasize that private speech is used as a means to organize and develop our thoughts, which is often the case with children. Private speech can be quietly spoken either internally or out loud to the self. Swain et. al (2011) state that

Vygotsky argued that during a child's development (otogenesis), language use in the child's environment is internalized to become tools for self-regulation and mental

functioning in general. Vygotsky also argues that inner speech is a result of a child's private speech and that private speech is also known as "self-talk." (p. 37)

Unfortunately, negative private speech is not easy to change. Even after years of counseling and education on healing and using positive affirmations, when cognitively challenged in school or around people I view as authority or my superiors, such as teachers and bosses, I still need to reaffirm through my own private speech that I am good enough, smart enough, and so on. Sometimes when I am triggered this way negatively, I quickly acquiesce and retreat quietly back to my imagined corner of fear and silence.

As an adult learner, my private speech becomes audible at times when I converse with myself to understand what it is I am learning. I also like to read out loud because that seems to be helpful. My earliest memories of private speech go back to my childhood in residential school, as noted above, where private speech helped me survive to overcome some of the abuse that I endured. I have come to realize that private speech is consistently a helpful common experience in my everyday life.

When I turned 15, I left the school to go live with my oldest married sister in Merritt, no longer to return to "that jail" as we called it. Reflecting on this time stirred emotion and brought tears of sadness to my eyes—I finally got free! Or so I thought. Unfortunately, the indoctrination and acculturation lived on and burned deeply in my body, memory, soul, and spirit. My heart and spirit broke, my identity was lost. "Who am I?" my entire being screamed in unison so much of my young life.

The thought "I will prove them wrong" rose to the surface at times. It took years, but I continue my education today as another part of my healing journey. I know I can relearn. I finally realized much later as an adult that I was not trying to prove to them

(staff at the residential school, who were no longer around to witness my accomplishments), but I needed to prove to myself that they were wrong.

Swain et al.'s (2011) research determines that the connections between negative emotion and learning do not always hinder learning; this can be called "learning for revenge" (p. 84). I can apply this theory to my case of "I will show them."

According to Holzman (2009, as cited in Swain et al., 2011, p. 87), we all have multiple identities, which we engage in different social situations. I relate loss of identity with my story as I have struggled over the years to clarify, overcome, and understand the negative emotions that I allow to determine my identity, and how that loss of identity has affected my language acquisition, self-regulation, and other-regulation in many aspects of my life, not only language acquisition. According to Swain et al.'s (2011) research, these theories are of the utmost importance in understanding oneself and others in language learning. They suggest that a person's "language (ego) can be very fragile and one's confidence easily undermined. Someone considered a competent user of a language may nevertheless evaluate him/herself quite harshly" (p. 88). In my situation, I still evaluate many of the things I do through the eyes of my oppressors and need other-regulation to affirm my worth.

My research includes thoughts from my journal writings and feelings about my experiences and the impacts of colonization and residential school on my life since deciding I would do this project. I reflected more deeply on how my worldview and life changed dramatically through these experiences, especially the impacts on my first language, Nl̓eʔkepmxcin.

As previously discussed, my first language was interrupted by my residential school experiences, and I have struggled to relearn my first language since. In the MILR program at

UVic, revitalization of our First Nations languages is emphasized for many reasons, one being the near-extinction of many Indigenous languages. McIvor and Napoleon (2009) suggest that “first of all, language is a living history and cultural institution that if not preserved and practiced, like anything else, will die. Language is the link that connects us to our past and therefore to our core Aboriginal values and world-views” (p. 17).

The Nl̓eʔkepmx language is no different, according to the First Peoples’ Cultural Council’s 2014 status report, where they state that “the Status of B.C. First Nations languages are critical, but the report recognizes that there is considerable work being done in communities to revitalize languages” (p. x). Michel (2005) asserts:

The loss of the world’s Indigenous languages is a problem shared by us all. Indigenous languages represent thousands of years of accumulated knowledge of the plants, medicines, resources, and wildlife within traditional territories. The loss of these languages would be equivalent to a worldwide disaster. (p. 1)

In my reflective journey I have had many challenges as I listen and work to relearn mother’s sptékʷł (teaching stories) about Skelúleʔ (Owl) in Nl̓eʔkepmxcin. At times, I have to dig deep to find the barriers that I have built to keep myself safe and break through them and to block out the memories of the pain and suffering so I could continue living my life as “normally” as possible. I still fight the ever-present conflicting self-talk that seems pervasive today. Rosborough (2012) describes the complexities of learning her language, Kwak’wala, and identifies some of the many reasons she experienced barriers to learning her language, many of which are related to the history of colonization (p. 237).

Chapter Three: Journal (September 2015 to June 2016)

I have kept a journal of my reflections, emotions, and experiences as I began this project to relearn my mother's spték^{wł} and share my spíləḡ-m of language revitalization.

September 2015

I am very excited about finally making a decision about my master's project. I will be learning my mother's spték^{wł} (teaching stories) about Skelúle? (owl). The goal feels intimidating and somewhat daunting. I am reminded that I have so many unresolved feelings about learning Nle?kepmxcin. I am excited though and nervous and still trying to decipher my feelings. I believe as I go through this process of learning and listening to the recording that I have of mother's spték^{wł}, I will clarify my feelings. I am hoping that this process will unravel so many of these issues and help me with my healing journey.

The first day that I decide to sit down and listen to my mother spték^{wł} for the purpose of learning the spték^{wł} in Nle?kepmxcin I am surprised that I sit at my computer and cannot turn on the recording of mother's spték^{wł}. I have listened to this spték^{wł} many times before and have enjoyed the story and listened intently to the language being spoken by my mother. So what is different about me listening to mother's spték^{wł} today? I have to think more about this, definitely a conundrum, and maybe not so much of a surprise; what is holding me back? I need to spend more time processing.

October 2015

Again, I sit at my computer for the fifth time to listen to mother's spték^{wł}. I am unable to listen to mother's spték^{wł}. I haven't given it much thought since the last time I tried, avoidance? So what am I avoiding? I begin thinking and talking about my feelings and fears through self-talk. Remembering the old traumas does not seem to be an option because the thoughts become

pervasive. I am afraid of facing the old memories. I do believe that it is necessary and unavoidable to face these feelings. Identifying them will give me the courage to move forward. So is this block mental, emotional, physical, or spiritual? Probably all of them!

So many old memories and fears returning when I put myself in front of my computer to listen to mother's story. I realize I am still eight, nine, ten years old not only in my fears but reaction to those fears. Grief runs deep, the loss of so much, my way of life, my worldview. I now have a deeper understanding of what is happening. I am barely breathing, I am holding my breath, as a whisper begins to push through the lump in my throat, I realize the familiar pain resurfacing. I have to stop and pray; I need to pray and smudge more, remembering Creator, and my ancestors are here with and for me. I need a break to process all the emotions that resurface, some old and some new.

November 2015

I had old issues return, anxiety, old fears associated with PTSD, migraines, insomnia, bad dreams, weepy, irritable self-doubts and lack of confidence. I gave myself affirmations and pep talks. I did not think my break would be so long before I could listen to mother again. Old self-defeating thoughts hounded me, contributing to confusion and my blockages. I cannot do this. Why am I doing this? I should change my project. I am not smart enough. I will never remember the story or relearn my language. I had to give myself permission to take more time than I originally planned to complete my project, so I altered my timeline and completion date.

February 2016

I believe I am a very spiritual person and practice what I have learned about praying, respecting all of creation I share the planet, and with whom I share the universe, teaching from Elders is "not to harm anyone or anything." I have immense respect and gratitude for all of

creation, all creatures, plants, water, air, mother earth, and the cosmos. I have a daily morning and evening prayer of gratitude that I have practiced for as long as I can remember. On occasion when I am overtired, I might fall asleep without prayer, then wake up in the middle of the night then give thanks. Something about this, writing and learning mother's spték^{wł}, seems unachievable. I talk to my ancestors and my late mother, father, late siblings and grandparents during my prayer time. "Where are they," I wonder? "I need your presence."

March 2016

One morning I looked at my prayer table next to my bed all covered up by a beautiful cloth that belonged to mother at one time. I took the cloth off, and there was my abalone shell, sage, sweetgrass, other sacred items for smudging and communicating with the ancestors and Creator. There is a photo of my mother smiling back at me and on my table is her eagle fan that I was blessed with after her passing. It is time, a voice deep inside reminded me to smudge before going to write and learn, also to smudge my environment, even my computer.

After smudging I started to search my memory and thought, I have read somewhere about technology being a part of mother earth. Everything on mother earth comes from the earth, but once manipulated and altered by humans then becomes unrecognizable as a part of mother earth. We as humans also come from mother earth and will eventually go back to mother earth.

I go searching and reading, yes I find it: Indigenous scholar Wilson's (2008) "Research is Ceremony." He does say that machines are made from the mother earth as he refers to a friend's computer. He suggests that the machine has a spirit and is sacred like anything else that is on the earth, even man-made objects. I interpret from what I read that I consciously need more ceremony in my research and to remember that I as the researcher and researched I am walking a fine line between my adult reality and my reality as a child. As I "re-member" I think of Absolon

(2011) referring to “re-membering” as we retell our stories in this way: “When we remember, we actually become re-membered and reconnected with our history, family members, identities, language, culture and ancestors, and our open wounds begin to heal” (p. 77). I also am reminded, as Wilson (2008) discusses, that ceremony is research. I tell myself I need more prayer to open my mind, heart and spirit, spiritual ears, spiritual eyes to messages of the Creator and ancestors as I remember.

May 2016

After some prayer and contemplation, more journaling—thoughts and feelings begin to emerge. I think about my mother’s spték^{wł} and our oral tradition. If I put her spték^{wł} into print to be forever recorded in black and white for any eyes to see, how does that feel? I had to look at what this would mean to my mother, my ancestors, my siblings, my grandchildren, future generations and my community and ultimately to myself.

How can I resolve some of the issues that seem insurmountable? Such as, I need to feel this is appropriate, writing and sharing the spték^{wł} with academia and others. Some of my avoidance to listening to the mother’s spték^{wł} is also about not wanting to look back at the pain and sadness that has lived deep in my heart and soul for so many years, unresolved issues in particular about language loss, not wanting to remember. I have been through years of therapy off and on and dealt with many of my other traumas as a result of colonization and residential school. I thought I had dealt with most of it. I am over most of it, and I’ve put those traumas aside. We have all heard it: “Well, get over it!” I thought I had.

I recently remembered being interviewed by Indigenous scholar Dr. Lee Brown for his doctoral dissertation *Making the Classroom a Healthy Place: The Development of Affective*

Competency in Aboriginal Pedagogy (2004). I decided to look back at some of my healing processes at the time. The interview took place in 2002. In this excerpt Brown (2004) writes:

Aiona (2002) describes her residential school experience as a process of shaming included emotional and psychological abuse that including the denial of her language. In the statement she defined a dual process of healing and learning that was necessary for learning to occur [. . .] she states: I realized that I had a lot of issues and hurt that I had to really deal with from the boarding school and let go of a lot of that before I could move on, and free myself from the pain and the anger and the blame. (p. 96)

Amazing this was 2002, and I have been triggered through this language relearning journey. This is what I mean by insidious. I think I have dealt with many of these traumatic issues and many years later seem to be at the same place.

In another excerpt, Brown (2004) shares my words during our conversation about language and spirituality:

Aiona (2002) says, something is missing (long sigh) I would say it was, who I was or who I am and that identity of my cultural and my ancestral heritage because I didn't have the knowledge of that although it was in there and had never been fed or brought to fruition and with the education I got from Native Human Services (NHS) that all came alive for me and gave me a lot more confidence in who I was and what I could accomplish and it got rid of the shame. And I couldn't believe we had been so deprived that they had taken away from us. . . . (More crying sobbing) I guess even now I still have a hard time that the language, all those things had been taken. (p. 99)

So I thought I had "gotten rid of the shame." So I ask myself how is this different, how is the loss of language different than the loss of all the other things that I have lost due to

colonization and residential school traumas and my inevitable assimilation of the Eurocentric way of life. I started to realize I'm still in the process of grieving the loss of Nl̓eʔkepmxcin! I am still angry and resentful! No, I am not! I worked on my anger, but not when it came to language disruption and loss, I now realize. I am stuck mourning many losses and this story is about processing the feelings of language loss that is everything to Indigenous identity! Language is our identity and everything that is cultural! Rosborough (2012) reminds us “we are our languages” (p. 10). I have already used this quote but feel I need to use it again.

During the process of learning to recover my language I now have a deeper understanding of a quote cited by Kathryn Michel in her *You Can't Kill Coyote: Stories of Language Healing; From Chief Atahm School Secwepemc Language Immersion Program*: “The language is an expression of the culture—it is the backbone, the identity of the people. When the language is lost the culture is crippled. And so it was the language that was the first target of the residential schools” (York, 1990, as cited in Michel, 2005, p. 37).

As I search for answers for healing my blockages, I am surprised I have an issue of betrayal. Who did I betray or who am I about to betray? Myself, my family, my parents, my ancestors, my children, grandchildren and the next seven generations, for accepting the colonizers' way of life and turning my back on my Nl̓eʔkepmx culturally rich values. Blaming myself is nonproductive. In fact, writing my mother's sptékʷł on paper was not as easy as I thought.

These traditional sptékʷł are oral and have never been put to paper. It is through colonization that First Nations people continue to lose language, culture and identity and traditions, yet here I am thinking of trusting the Western academic world to honour and respect

my work as I am about to present an ancient oral *sptékʷł* that has been a part of teaching Nłeʔkepmx children for centuries.

Archibald (2008) articulates what I am thinking:

Indigenous stories have lost much educational and social value due to colonization, which resulted in weak translations from aboriginal languages to English, stories shaped to fit a western literate form and stories adapted to fit a predominantly western education system. The translations lose much of the original humor and meaning and are misinterpreted and/or appropriated by those who don't understand the story connections and cultural teachings. I did not want to perpetuate this loss. Instead I wanted to find a way to respectfully place First Nations stories within the academic and educational milieu. (p. 7)

How paradoxical and how do we do that, I ask? Archibald (2008) talks about trust and patience when we are preparing ourselves to listen to an oral story. She says visualization is key as well as letting our feeling emerge. She shares that Elders have taught her that it is important listen with our ears as well as our hearts (Archibald, 2008). According to Sto:lo scholar Gardner (2002), we learn from stories, where we come from, who we are, and how we must live a good life, respectfully developing relationships with all with whom we share our world (pp. 47–48).

I believe some of the benefits of listening to an oral story, adults or children, without a book in front of them filled with pictures of someone else's imagination, or focused on reading the words on the page, we are free to imagine our pictures. We feel the feelings and live in the imagination of all the subtle sounds, nuances, as the story unfolds in our Indigenous languages. The experience is phenomenally more enriching.

The audience is listening with all five senses, and I add our sixth sense, or intuition. We are listening with our whole being: mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual. How can I justify the writing and freezing in time of this beautiful oral story? According to Swain et al. (2011), once we can change our thoughts to words, they become objects of reflection (p. 36). I believe this reflection made visible in writing is an important part of my healing journey.

Looking at the translation of mother and father's recordings, I began to see what a challenge it is translating or re-languaging stories across linguistic and cultural borders. Swain et al. (2011) say there are so many words that almost have no translation, as well as phrases that hold meanings or concepts that are difficult to say in a different language (p. 57). I got a sense of this by witnessing many translations from Nl̓eʔkepmxcin to English. Vygotsky (1986, pp. 180–181, as cited in Swain et al., 2011) argues that “written speech is a separate linguistic function, different from oral speech in both structure and mode of functioning” (p. 59)

The audience can experience not only the storyteller's narratives but also a sense of their emotion that is relayed, as Swain et al. (2011) suggests that one can develop conceptual understanding of two languages if one consciously works with meaning and not just words, but also with emotional equivalency. In “Language and Emotional Experience: The Voice of Translingual Memoir,” Bsemere (2006, cited in Swain et al., 2011) reminds us “the emotional experience, represented by the words is not simply transferable across the linguistic and cultural landscapes. Rather we must look for equivalents between the two experiences and work to find the closest linguistic equivalencies” (p. 64).

Vygotsky (as cited in Swain et al., 2011, p. 82) argues that the interrelation between cognition and emotion is important. He continues to discuss that when a child has an emotional experience from a situation or experience this will influence the memory and the emotion later in

life. Much of what I have learned from SCT has been so helpful towards my understanding the barriers that I am encountering as I go through this process of learning mother's spték^{wł}.

I feel it necessary to explain how this recording came to be in my possession in the form of a cassette tape that was recorded in 1979 by my late sister and I at a cultural gathering. My sister took possession of the tape, and I had long forgotten about its existence.

One day in 2002 when I was taking care of my sister just months before she travelled on to the spiritual world after years of illness, she asked me to look in a particular area of her home for a cassette tape. I found it and we listened to it together. Father and mother were both recorded on the cassette from the same event. We shared the memories of this day together. She told me to take the recording and take care of it if anything happened to her. It took a couple of years for me to remember it after her passing. When I did remember, I asked my brother-in-law if I could look for the tape. I found the tape but not in the greatest condition. After powerful prayers, my son and I played it and he took it to make copies for everyone in the family.

It took time, but I have come to some resolve on the issue of writing mother's oral spték^{wł} for this project, with the help of other scholars' perspectives. Dauenhauer, Dauenhauer, and Holthaus (1986, as cited in Archibald, 2008) explain:

It is important to note that the oral tradition still lives and the written tradition is growing within it, not exempt from it. The one will never replace the other. The elements of old stories, of the spoken language, the myths and narratives that sustained the culture, and the speech patterns of the elders occur over and over again in the new writing, (p. 13).

One of Archibald's (2008) concerns was "the negative influence of literacy on oral traditions—the text limits the level of understanding because it cannot portray the storyteller's gestures, tone, rhythm and personality" (p. 17).

Days go by as I continue writing my proposal for my project and reading other scholars' writings. I need the inspiration. Once my proposal and ethics were approved, I began to feel more successful, more like "yes I can do this!" Then the subject of painting came up with my advisor; she suggested that I could be painting through this experience. I liked the idea since I do paint with watercolours and consider myself an artist. I think all people are artists and creative in some form or another, and there are many ways to be creative using different forms of art expression. I believe Indigenous people have in the past and some today incorporate artistic creativity as an integral part of all areas of everyday life. In my opinion, how we relate or interrelate with our environment becomes the inspiration for art. The recognition of beauty in life, in nature, in the plants, animals, sunsets and sunrises, in a waterfall, in the ocean, in the stars and moon that shine in dark skies at night and so on. When I recognize beauty in ourselves and others, and our heart and souls are feeling the connection and permeated with awe at the mysteries of the universe, I experience an innate need to express, in some method, my otherwise inexpressible feeling of connection to spirit and the cosmos. I do experience therapeutic effects of these feelings of connection expressible in many art forms. In my case, painting is one art form that through the process has been therapeutic in my life.

I excitedly put out my paper and paints and went to the art store to buy more supplies to begin painting since it had been some time since I had not done any painting in the technique that I use, of layering pale washes of watercolour paints on paper and allowing the paint to dry before continuing. I brushed up on my watercolour theory and began to relax and enjoy the process. I begin painting with no preconceived idea or image of what might evolve out of this beautiful process of allowing connection to the energy of colour and my higher self, trusting what is meant

to manifest through many layers of colours will be what Creator and myself as co-creator will tell its story.

McIvor and Napoleon (2009) state that “fine arts” is another area that is easy to overlook as a protective contributor because contemporized art forms are sometimes not seen as traditional activities. Most Aboriginal languages do not have specific words for the Western concept of “art.” However, there were many concepts to describe beauty or the creation of things in a beautiful manner and even the living of life in a beautiful manner (p. 17).

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) states, “The arts help to restore human dignity and identity in the face of injustice. Properly structured, they can also invite people to explore their world views, values, beliefs, and attitudes that may be barriers to healing, justice, and reconciliation” (p. 1).

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When not writing or painting, I did a lot of self-talk, quietly and out loud, a lot more praying and talking to my late mother, father, brother, sister, ancestors, and Creator for any support they could offer. I recreated in my mind, remembering the day these tapes were recorded at a storytelling community gathering at the beautiful Nicola Lake outdoors with hundreds of people gathered to participate in many cultural activities. I began to relax more and was able to listen to the tape. I have a tape of my father recorded at the same time at the same cultural storytelling gathering in 1979. My father spoke first in Nl̓eʔkepmxcin, addressing the people in a good way. He said a blessing for all our people and all people. I realized listening to father’s soothing voice first was grounding, and his prayer prepared me to listen to mother’s sptékʷł.

After contemplating on father’s words of reverence and wisdom, I began to experience tangible relief from my overthinking and fearful feelings about writing; his tone and love were a

welcome relief that prepared me for writing and listening to mother's spték^{wł}. I was at that point able to connect with a deeper inner sense of confidence and acceptance of a greater imagination of my innate creative visions. Exactly what I needed. I began to feel an indescribable shift. I received the gift of an undeniable affirmation of approval from my ancestors.

I think at first I played father's tape to procrastinate. So I would not have to face the daunting task of listening to mother's spték^{wł} to learn it. I even played father's recording many times without continuing to listen to mother's story. I finally got to a point where I could listen to mother's story immediately after listening to father. Soon I was following along with mother, quietly repeating the words and phrases. I had a difficult time keeping up with her. She speaks quickly, and my father speaks more slowly. Father's speech content is serious as he talks about how we were once a reverent and humble, knowledgeable people living as community, caring for and helping one another and always being thankful to the Creator. He implores since the arrival of the Europeans we have lost our ways and our health and connection to who we are and to each other. He ends with a profound prayer.

Mother then tells her spték^{wł} of the Skelúle? (owl). She is a natural storyteller. She is animated, and one can tell she loves what she is doing. She brings joy and laughter even though this is a serious teaching story. I hear my mother's voice. I want you to hear my mother's voice, too, the way she tells stories in an undulating, rhythmical, and song-like voice. How can I make that happen, I wonder?

Gardner (2002) shares Dr. Brent Galloway's words from his dissertation, *A Grammar of Upriver Halkomelem*, published in 1993, which confirms my thoughts about the importance of oral storytelling as it provides so much more to the listener:

We can see how different Halq'eméylem appears compared to English. One can only imagine the stories as they might have been told in Halq'eméylem with the use of body language and performance, and in its natural context. It would be wonderful to hear the story in Halq'eméylem with all its unique sounds strung together like music and spoken like song. I imagine the original tellings as theatrical events, maybe like an opera, where our language sings the universe. (Galloway, 1993, cited in Gardner, 2002, p. 83).

Gardner Stelórrethet, a Stó:lo scholar, educator, and Halq'emeylem language champion, quotes Mithun (1998) in her PhD dissertation (2002):

Language represents the most creative, pervasive aspects of culture, the most intimate side of the human mind. The loss of language diversity will mean that we will never have the opportunity to appreciate the full creative capacities of the human mind. (Mithun, 1998, p.189, as cited in Gardner, 2002, , p. 22)

This new knowledge from Gardner (2002) inspires me to forge on. I listened to both father and mother's recordings today. It has been about five days since I last listened. I think it is amazing to hear their voices and words of wisdom and teachings. Amazing how technology can hold their voices for so many years, since 1979. My father moved on to the spirit world a couple of years after this recording. I love listening to the Spték^{wł}. It is rich with rhythmical and elongated sounds, bird imitations, Mother's laughter and my late sister's laughter. The more I listen to the spték^{wł}, the more it becomes evident that these are very important teachings.

I feel so much gratitude and joy for the opportunity to hear my skíxze? (mother) telling this spték^{wł}, and for my father's words. Embracing this experience has brought me closer to the invisible threshold of those who live in the spirit world. I sense their presence in my daily life and my dream life. I have started having more dreams about mother and father and our home

where I was raised. I do not always remember the dreams, but most of the time on waking I would have the feeling of their presence. I will try to describe my feeling; it is like a loving, warm, calm, light, and fluid multi-colour energy field enveloping me.

I dreamed recently that I was with a group of people in a circle, and I was praying partly in English and partly in Nl̥eʔkepmxcín. I felt very amazed and proud that I am relearning my first language and have the courage to continue on this challenging journey. What is reflected in my dream shows the progress I am making with relearning Nl̥eʔkepmxcin, however slowly it may be. I am practicing huckpestes, developing lifelong learning and wisdom (Anderson, 2011).

Progress! I am not hesitant any longer about listening to the recording of my skíxzeʔ. I have overcome many fears. I still cannot recite the sptékʷł orally in Nl̥eʔkepmxcín but I can tell it in English. The sptékʷł of the Skelúleʔ is a traditional teaching story that the storyteller is conscious of teaching age appropriately to the audience. This story tells of the power and transformation of not only the skelúleʔ and other birds in the story but also the humans. This sptékʷł also depicts the relationship that humans had with the animals and communicated with each other. Like all our Sptékʷł this one is complex and relays many teachings for children. According to Telahah (Anderson, 2011), our sptékʷł stories have relayed our history, worldview, creation stories, prophecies, transformation stories, our relationships with each other and the universe before contact for multiple generations (p. 9).

Sptékʷł teaches about our spirituality, the sacredness of all things: “The process of transformation in our stories offers profound meanings, and the process of passing on of these stories illumines the capacity and power that is given to us to transform” (Anderson, 2011, p. 10). Anderson continues: “These legends tell us about the vast and wealthy natural territory we inhabited and our complex, rich spirit and psyche” (p. 10).

In the *skelúleʔ sptékʷł*, place names and location are also part of the teachings; the birds in the story, owl, crow, and magpie, all inhabit pit houses as we the *Nłeʔkepmx*. The main teaching for the children is that if a child does not listen to their parents and grandparents, the *skelúleʔ* will be called to take the child away. Another lesson for children is to come inside before dark. The *sptékʷł* is not interpreted by the storyteller but interpreted by the listener.

I have come across a translation of the *sptékʷł* that may have been translated by my late sister, but I am not certain. There are small parts of the translation that do not match up with this story. An Elder I know is translating the story into the written orthography. The transcription has been challenging. Mother speaks quickly and there are some words that are difficult to hear. There are also words that the Elders I have discussed these words with no longer know the meanings to. I do not read the orthography of *Nłeʔkepmxcin*, therefore I am struggling with learning orally. I wonder if this is because memorization from orality is not something I have had to do for years. My mother had an incredible memory. I was always impressed when she would share her *sptékʷł* or *spíləx-m*. She would recall a *spíləx-m*—for example; in the fall of 1939 we did this—she then shared her *spíləx-m*. I am dependent on reading and seeing the written words for memorization or recall. I am dependent on technology and writing to remember. I also believe age may have something to do with a slower retention, and I have a health condition that does affect my memory. Now that I have analyzed my learning challenges besides the original blockages discussed earlier, I am excited because I know I am learning how to tell this *sptékʷł* and this will enhance my overall confidence in talking *Nłeʔkepmxcin*.

Once I started painting I began to feel less stress. I was definitely out of practice and had to let go and not be attached to a particular outcome and accept any mistakes. Letting go is a difficult concept for me. After approximately forty washes of various colours I began to see the

evolution of promising results. When I paint I am allowing whatever evolves out of the process to reveal itself. I am not trying to copy something that already exists, as imagery. I am not painting realism. I paint to capture and depict movement, light, and space with no preconceived pictures. Eventually images reveal themselves through ethereal layers of colour stimulating imagination that I honour. I believe every thing is in constant movement. Every object we see, whether we perceive it as animate or inanimate, is imbued with spirit. I was excited that images were starting to show themselves on the paper. My challenge is to now to visualize and compose what it is I see presenting itself, then help those images manifest through a little sketching and more paint. This process is very time consuming. I now have about ten hours invested in each painting. I started with four different paintings. But have chosen two to complete for this project. Painting one is evolving as an artistic rendition complement to mother's spték^{wł}. The spték^{wł} has many characters in the story, some that transform into other beings. The other painting is an interpretive glimpse of my spíləḡ-m. The ancestors have been with me during this journey of healing and slowly evolved in my painting. I am ever so grateful for their constant presence and their support throughout this healing time.

I have been photographing the paintings at different stages as I progress.

Watercolour. Size: 28 inches by 21 inches.

Photo 1: 150 colour washes.

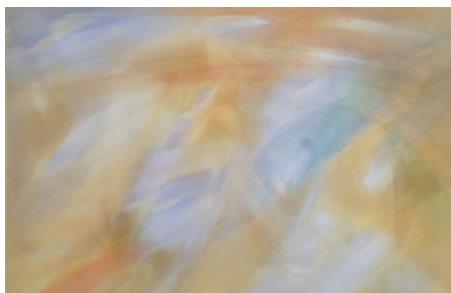


Photo 2: beginning to reveal imagery.



Photo 3: many small washes.

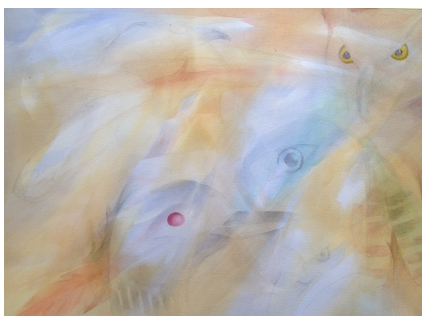


Photo 4: Final painting.

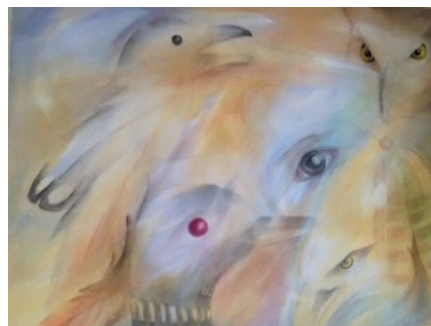


Figure 4: Photos of my painting process for Transformers -skelúle? spték"l.

Watercolour. Size: 19 inches by 23 inches.

Photo 1: 100 pale washes of colours.



Photo 2: Images evolving.

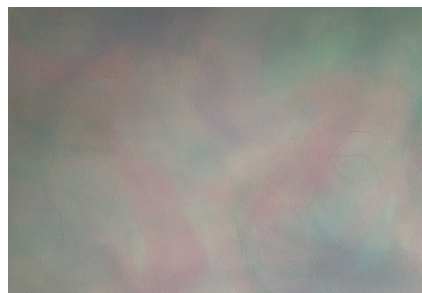


Photo 3: More hours of capturing imagery.

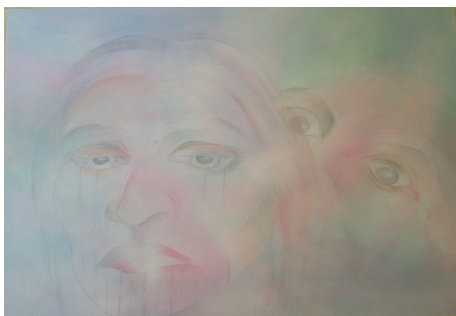


Photo 4: Capturing imagery.

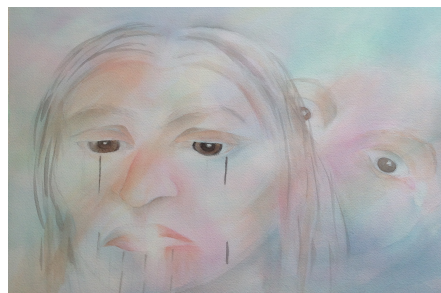


Photo 5: Final painting.

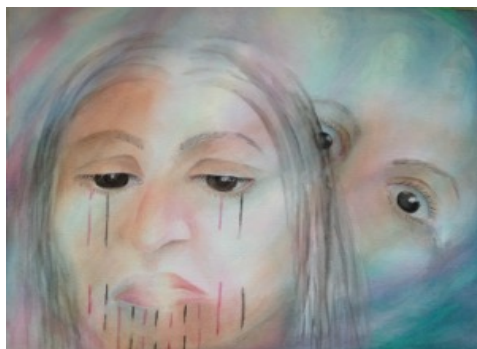


Photo 6: Myself, the artist.



Figure 5: Photos of my painting process for ski?kiye?! (ancestors).

Chapter Four: Analysis

This chapter is my analysis of observations I made of my process and progress releasing the spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical blockages to my language learning. I have applied the lens of Nl̓eʔkepmx wisdom theory, particularly Peteenushem, reflecting on learning and relearning lifelong lessons (Anderson, 2011, p.104). In my reflective journey I have had many challenges as I listen and work to relearn mother's sptékʷł about Skelúleʔ in Nl̓eʔkepmxcin. At times, I have to dig deep to find the barriers that I have built to keep myself safe, and break through them. I had to block out the memories of the pain and suffering so I could continue living my life as “normally” as possible. I still fight the ever-present conflicting self-talk that seems pervasive today.

Spiritual Blockages

Once I began my day with ceremony through prayer and smudging with sage and sweetgrass, and before beginning my writing, listening to sptékʷł of the Skelúleʔ (owl) and painting, I experienced inner calm and more optimism. I felt more connected to the spirit of Creator and the ancestors—especially my mother—through this sacred ceremony. Once this became a ritual, old destructive energy was slowly transforming my whole being and environment.

In my opinion, language is an integral component of culture, and my experience emphasizes that language learning should be considered as more than just linguistics but from a holistic viewpoint. Returning to sacred ceremony and incorporating the spiritual aspect has been important to grounding and removing blocks to relearning Nl̓eʔkepmxcin; therefore, I recommend reconnecting to one's spirituality and ceremony as an important component for other Indigenous language learners.

Mental Blockages

This journey of relearning and telling has given me some new insights that are helping me to be more realistic about my feelings, fears, anger, and frustration. When my fears are triggered by old memories, I consciously understand that no one is going to ridicule me, slap, strap or wash my mouth out, but that those old fears are a part of an old memory. I understand that the old programmed consequences of speaking Nl̥eʔkepmxcin in the form of punishment are not realistic today. Some of the fears are about perfectionism, being afraid to make mistakes and how others might perceive that. This is not always probable, but still possible. I believe changing my negative experiences into a positive experience as I learn is one of the keys for continuing to see positive results as I relearn Nl̥eʔkepmxcin. I have worked on this many times over the years, but not consistently enough to develop a new, healthy response every time I speak Nl̥eʔkepmxcin and not become sabotaged by an old memory. Instead, I am now empowered by new positive beliefs and I am proud and grateful to have the courage when opportunities arise to converse in Nl̥eʔkepmxcin with proficient and fluent speakers. Knowing something intellectually does not always mean the heart knows it as well. New knowledge can supersede old hurt feelings until it is constantly practiced to form new healthy patterns. This I believe can be a lifelong challenge.

Emotional Blockages

Through analysing my emotional responses, which represent blockages, that have begun to resurface throughout this relearning the sptékʷł, I realized that therapy for my traumas is very beneficial. On occasion I need the support of a good therapist, someone to talk to and bounce ideas off. Even though I believed that I was done with counselling, I am reminded again that

healing and learning (education) is a lifelong process. As Native American scholar Cajete (1994) reflects in his book *Look to the Mountain*,

Education is an art of process, participation, and making connection. Learning is a growth and life process; and Life and Nature are always relationships in process! Learning is always a creative act. We are continuously engaged in the art of making meaning and creating our world through the unique processes of human learning. Learning for humans is instinctual, continuous, and the most complex of our natural traits. Learning is also a key to our ability to survive in the environments that we create and that create us. (pp. 24–25)

Knowing that learning and understanding my process through this journey does not end after I complete MILR is a relief because I can accept where I am in this language-learning process. Emotionally I am over the most difficult stages, and I feel and see the dream and vision of becoming fluent once more in my first language, Nl̥ʔkepmxcin.

Physical Blockages

Physical responses to this journey of looking deeper into my very soul—spiritually, mentally, and emotionally—have manifested in many subtle and not so subtle ailments, some of which have been previously apparent for years. The impact of the residential school on my physical health has been a lifelong challenge of recovery, but high stress and confronting old wounds have exacerbated some of my health issues. I mentioned earlier about the recurrence of anxiety, nightmares, and symptoms of PTSD throughout the two years of my master’s program that culminated in very serious health issues. Through diagnosis from the medical system and treatments from alternative natural means of self-care (naturopathic doctors, nutrition, exercise, meditation, regular positive affirmations, yoga, counselling, prayer, and love and support from

professors, classmates, family, and friends) I have persevered and continue to heal my physical body.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

This journey has facilitated a greater reconnection with my identity through Nle?kepmxcin (my language), which is the foundation of my culture, traditions, and relationships with the land, the earth, and with all with whom we share this planet and universe. I continue to understand and accept holistically and love who I am as a descendent of my ancestors. This experience continues to foster a deeper love and respect for myself, family, friends, community, and all nations. My mother Mary's wise words are that "emotional ideals express the highest possible use of social values to develop our capacity to be loving and kind to all peoples" (as cited in Brown, 2004, p. 234). Brown (2004), when quoting these words of my mother's, said:

Elder Mary Anderson spoke on the need for people to regain capacity for loving one another that was lost in the residential schools (personal communication, January 30, 2003). She specifically identified schools as they exist now with cognitive-based breakdown as a source of problem. (p. 234)

Residential school teachings were so pernicious that sometimes recovery from these old wounds, especially the feelings of shame and internalized racism, seems impossible. Having said that, I know they are possible. I am an example of that healing. Have I unblocked and healed through this cathartic journey? Yes, but not as quickly or as easily as I imagined I would, and I have moved beyond my comfort zones. I believe that weaving new positive experiences and emotions that lead to positive outcomes equals success. The teaching I have learned, experienced, and witnessed over the years is that we cannot separate ourselves compartmentally, mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. We use this teaching symbolically to address the whole

human being. It is a model used by Indigenous people all over the world to bring balance in a holistic manner to our daily lives.

I look once more at what has motivated me to travel this road so late in my life, the road to UVic and to the MILR program. However, the answer is not as simple as one would expect. Seeking a master's degree in Indigenous language revitalization (ILR) is very personal and subjective. My first motive is for myself. This motive is to further my education and knowledge of ILR in hopes that, through this academic journey, I will discover the missing connection that has haunted me all my adult life and that will help reconnect me to my identity, family, culture, and community in order to help fill the void and remove it completely. My other motives are more altruistic. I have truly prayed every day for guidance, strength, and insights from the Creator and my ancestors that whatever I bring to my spíləx-m writing is helpful to many others in a similar situation. My hope for others to learn from my story addresses the Nl̓eʔkepmx wisdom theory of Anderson (2011): "Huztowaahh, giving lovingly to family and community" (p. 204). When I speak of motives, Absolon (2011) comes to mind. She articulated:

The researchers all stated that our motives are connected to our personal stories and experiences. Motive connects to recovering from colonialism. A search for roots then occurs to recover our people, land, languages, cultures and traditions. The journey back home is often a journey of returning to our roots. Motives are rooted in stories describing a search for identity, belonging and knowledge for who we are, where we come from and what we know. (p. 81)

I have been travelling the trail back home. I realize my old painful memories do not hold the power to hurt and control like they once did unless I give them the power. I learned this a long time ago but constantly need to relearn these truths as I relearn Nl̓eʔkepmxcin. Relearning

Nleʔkepmxcin is practicing the Nleʔkepmx wisdom theory choownensh, succeeding in endeavours (Anderson, 2011, p. 204).

To succeed, it is important to set goals and schedules. Self-discipline can be a struggle for people who have trauma issues, such as depression. Sometimes, determination or good intentions are not enough to get it done. A good support system is vital for a sounding board and encouragement. It is important to have someone to call for support—a friend or family member who is knowledgeable and supportive of one’s work. I have called more on the Creator, ancestors, and my family that have gone before me. Learning to tell my mother’s sptékʷł has been fraught with challenges made bearable by my belief in the importance and love of language revitalization for myself and all other Indigenous people in the situation of near language death. I accept that I still cannot tell the sptékʷł by memory, but I continue to learn daily.

What are some cultural/social impacts my spíləx-m could possibly have on my audience in language revitalization and Indigenous communities? I recall the words of one of my teachers, Phil Lane Jr. (n.d.): “The hurt of one is the hurt of all and the honour of one is the honour of all.” I understand that if I am hurting, I can continue to hurt those around me, intentionally or non-intentionally. Those around me who love me can see, feel, and witness my pain. They are affected by my hurt, whether I inflict it on them or not. The kinds of hurts that have been inflicted on me and other Indigenous people because of colonization and residential schools have intergenerational impacts. I believe we carry the pain of the last seven generations of our ancestors, and the future generations carry our pain and suffering.

I am honouring and challenging myself to find healing through language revitalization as I learn my mother’s sptékʷł. I also believe I am assisting my parents’ and ancestors’ healing. They suffered for us and kept as much of our teachings alive as possible, and given the times

they lived in, they did very well. When I heal, I am in essence impacting all people I have contact with as I begin to live and move through my life as a happier, more confident, healthy Nl̓eʔkepmx woman who is more balanced mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. My healing will directly impact my children and grandchildren and continue for the next seven generations. I believe my healing through language revitalization will impact all in my life and community in a powerful way.

I have learned that our Indigenous languages are imperative for our well-being and our cultural renewal as a people. My prayer is that I live long enough to relearn Nl̓eʔkepmxcin proficiently to speak around my children and grandchildren and that I can contribute to the revitalization of Nl̓eʔkepmxcin for our Nl̓eʔkepmx communities. I am currently working as a Nl̓eʔkepmx language nest coordinator for one of our Nl̓eʔkepmx communities and our goal is to open the language nest December 2016. Working in community honours the Nl̓eʔkepmx developing wisdom theory principle of “Huztowaahh, giving lovingly to family and community” (Anderson, 2011, p. 104). The last two years have prepared me for continued work in language revitalization in our First Nations communities. I am reestablishing my roots. I am re-membering who I am. According to Absolon (2011),

when we remember, we become re-membered and reconnected with our history, family members, identities, language, culture and ancestors, and our open wounds can begin to heal. Remembering fosters our recovery of our truth and roots. Remembering our truth is important for Indigenous searchers. (p. 77)

I understand we are all different—all of my First Nations brothers and sisters who have suffered the traumas of colonization and residential school. Many have survived; many have not. What we have in common as Indigenous people is that we are struggling to revitalize our

disappearing languages. Throughout my spíləx-m I have tried to emphasize the importance of language revitalization for all Indigenous people. I reiterate what the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) concluded in its summary report: There is a strong connection between Aboriginal languages and what the TRC refers to as a “distinctive world view, rooted in the stories of ancestors and the environment” (p. 152). I believe, as the TRC report states, that Aboriginal languages are a “tangible emblem of group connection with the past [and that] maintenance of the language and group identity has both a social-emotional and a spiritual purpose) (p. 152).

If my spíləx-m can touch and help those who can relate to some part of this spíləx-m, I believe I have accomplished a very important service to the greater Indigenous and academic communities. I am very grateful for the opportunity to share an important part of this language revitalization-healing journey as a student of MILR program at UVic.

Húmeł cúkw (alright finished)!

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Appendix: Conversation With My Inner Child

Child: (*crying child in bed at the residential school*) “Creator, God! Why am I being punished? Am I really a bad child? I must be a very bad child to be treated like this. They said God punishes us. Is that true?” (*more crying*) “I want my mom and dad to come see me and take me home, please!”

Teenager: “Hello child.” (*softly*) “No, you are not being punished by God.”

Child: “Who are you? Are you God?” (*child looks up*)

Teenager: “Look, look at me, look into my eyes. Do you recognize me?”

Child: “No.” (*softly and sadly*)

Teenager: “I am you!”

Child: “No, you’re not. How can you be me? I’m here, silly!”

Teenager: “Okay, pretend you are dreaming or watching a television story about the future.”

Child: “Huh?”

Teenager: “You know, look into my eyes. Do my eyes look the same as yours?”

Child: “Hmmm, maybe a little, but I am not sure.”

Teenager: “Now close your eyes and listen. I will tell you a story. You do like stories, don’t you?”

Child: (*hesitantly*) “Yes, okay. You aren’t going to hurt me, are you?”

Teenager: “Of course not. I am you, remember, but I am you when you are older. Close your eyes and think about what things could be like when you are older.

Child: (*reluctantly*) “Do I have to? I don’t understand.”

Teenager: “No, but please! Thank you. So we are going to go to the future five years from now. Imagine you are 15 years old and you look like me, because I am you.”

Child: “That’s hard to do! Besides you are kind of pretty and I am ugly.” (*pouting*)

Teenager: “You really think I am pretty? I don’t.”

Child: “I’m tired and hungry.”

Teenager: (*impatiently*) “I know, but just be quiet and listen. I want you to know that when we are 15 we will not be living there anymore. We will be living with our older sister who is now married and living in a small town and she has a baby. So, we are now an aunty, cutest baby ever, sometimes we even get to babysit. No more residential school. We can eat good food every day and go to school in the town and go home every day after school. There aren’t very many brown students at the school, but that’s okay because most of them don’t talk to me or bother me. Some of the teachers are okay, no big yardsticks or yelling. Guess what, I think we are even smart, we get good marks in school, and we are on the honour role. That means we are at the top of the class. I knew I was not dumb, at least not all the time. Just imagine! No more starving, no more punishments. No more touching that hurts. Things are going to get better, I promise! We don’t have to be afraid all the time.”

Child: (*impatiently*) “Why are you telling me this? I do not believe you. I don’t want to go to school anymore. I want to live with mom and dad! I want to go home!”

Teenager: “It is true! We can go home sometimes, but we have to keep going to school. I do not want you to be sad or afraid anymore. God does not punish, people punish!”

Child: “I don’t know.”

Teenager: “Okay, get some sleep. Try to be happy. Please be happy!”

Child: “I am not sure I remember how to be happy.”

Teenager: “Look, I am smiling, I can be happy now! We can be happy now! More than I used to be. It’s okay to be sad sometimes.”

Child: (*hesitantly*) “Thanks for visiting. I feel a little better; stories are always good, especially

pretend stories. Can you tell me a spték^{wł}? Oh no I did not say that word.”

Teenager: (*reassuring*) “It’s okay, no one else heard you.”

Teenager: “I have to go now. I’ll come visit again.”

(*fast forward 10 years*)

Young adult: “Hello, my child!”

Child: “Hello, it’s been a long time since you visited.” (*whining*)

Young adult: “I visited you a lot when I was teenager, but you kept reminding me of all the bad stuff. We have been so busy growing up, going to school, learning all kinds of things. Sometimes it has been hard and we still get sad and cry and even are afraid of people, especially people that aren’t brown or Indian. I rarely talk to you because I have tried to forget you and all that happened when we were in residential school. I don’t think of you that often anymore or that place. Sometimes I still have scary dreams, though less anxiety attacks, low self-esteem sometimes, suicidal ideation, rarely. We are getting better. We graduated high school! We got married!”

Child: “We graduated? Married, yuck! Why? Were we a pregnant teenager? Did we get drunk? No, I don’t want to know! You know I don’t like being touched!”

Young adult: “No! No! It’s okay, he does not drink alcohol or do bad things or hurt us that way.

We don’t have to be too afraid of people anymore; we have someone to take care of us.”

Child: “Most white adults, women and men, are mean. They hurt us and don’t like us remember. Have you forgotten?”

Adult: “That is not always true. I have one or two women friends that are not Indian and they like me and treat me nice. That was only at residential school. I mostly stay home with the children, though, and this is the best life.

Child: “We have children? I don’t know how to be a mommy!”

Adult: “I was told by doctors because I was so sick most of the time and after two operations that I would never have babies. So I started to take good care of myself. I eat good food and spend more time with mom and dad on the farm and eat all that good farm-fresh food and our own traditional food. I started to get better. The doctors were surprised, three miracles later, three children. Well, it is not that hard being a mommy, at first it was. I knew spanking and being hurtful to a baby that I loved so much was not right, so I went to parenting classes to learn to be a better mom.”

Child: “Did it help?”

Adult: “Yes! We are doing well, better than those people at the school told us we would. I love being a mommy.”

Child: “I know, we are happy now most of the time, aren’t we?”

Adult: “Yes, most of the time. I have to go now.”

(fast forward 10 years)

Adult: *(annoyed)* “Why are you bothering me, cùk^wus (stop) talking to me.”

Child: “You know our culture and language is bad. You believe those teachers that it is okay. We do not want to go to hell, do we?”

Adult: “The teachers at this program are mostly Indian like us, and they have taught us that it is good to be Indian. We have a lot to be proud of, even our languages, ceremonies, and our skin colour.”

Child: “I don’t believe them!”

Adult: “I do, most of the time, until you show up with residential school talk. You know you are just like them, the staff at residential school.”

Child: “No, I’m not!”

Adult: “Stop talking like them or I won’t ever talk to you again!”

Child: “OK!! OK! Maybe those new teachers in your new program are right after all.”

Adult: “I want to know more about our culture. They told us lies, all lies! I want to speak Nłeʔkepmxcin again.”

Child: You think so? (*hesitantly*) Okay, we can do this together. I will try really hard not to bother you with negative hurtful memories.”

Adult : “Ok, huṃeł (farewell).”

Child: (*timidly*) “huṃeł (farewell)”

(*many years later*)

Adult: “ʔéx k^w n̄ (Hello, how are you) ?”

Child: “ýe! Is it really okay to speak Nłeʔkepmxcin?”

Adult: “Nłeʔkepmxcin? Heʔay, né^wm ýe (Yes, very good).”

Child: “cə cuʔ cín̄ um̄ kn” (I am trying to learn to speak a language).

Adult: “né^wm ýe n̄ sx^wák^w uk^w ʔək p s tés m Nłeʔkepmxcin x^wúyceʔ” (I am very happy, we can learn Nłeʔkepmxcin again).

Child: “nám̄ ýe he nsx^wéwk^w (My heart is very happy)!”

Adult: “nám̄ ýe he nsx^wéwk^w (My heart is very happy)!”