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Mindfulness and Indigenous Knowledge: Shared Narratives About Reconciliation and Decolonization in Teacher Education

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This article discusses how shared narratives about mindfulness practices and Indigenous knowledge advance the reconciliation and the decolonization of Teacher Education curricula. We, the authors, experienced the beneficial impact of our personal mindfulness practices in nurturing and cultivating the harmonious balance of the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual dimensions of the self. Within the context of the Truth and Reconciliation's Calls to Action (2015), we observed the connections between mindfulness practices and local and place-based teachings of First Nation and Métis First Peoples in Northern British Columbia and in the Interior of British Columbia, Canada. Our experiences are informed by our personal mindfulness practices and from traditional and ancestral practices led by Elders and Knowledge Keepers. Our distinct narratives describe our learnings and our unlearnings as we participated in ceremony and listened and learnt from Elders and Knowledge Keepers of Syilx Okanagan Nation, Lheidli T'enneh First Nation, the Māori Nation, and the Métis Nation of Manitoba. By recognizing and respecting ancestral ways of doing and ways of being, we propose that contemplative practices like mindfulness can support a deeper understanding of how reconciliation and decolonizing are brought to the forefront of shared narratives in Teacher Education programs in the Okanagan and in Prince George.

Our voices

These are our narratives, Karen, Tina, Ross, and Brenda, of learning and unlearning, of storying and re-storying, of standing by and of witnessing our journeys pressing towards respectful, reciprocal, relevant, and responsible ways of being and doing. In doing so, we share our voices inquiring into mindfulness practices and Indigenous Knowledge from local and place-based territories. This narrative is based on a paper session presented at the Canadian Society for Studies in Education (CSSE) on June 2, 2019 at the University of British Columbia's Vancouver campus.

The lands we inhabit

This research was undertaken, with permission, on the unceded, ancestral territory of the Syilx Okanagan Nation and the traditional unceded territory of the Lheidli T'enneh. We, the authors, are professors and a student at The University of British Columbia's (UBC) Okanagan campus and the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC). We, Karen and Brenda, within the context of our settler and Métis identities working and studying at UBC's Okanagan campus, acknowledge and recognize the protocols and customs of the Syilx Okanagan People. Tina, a Māori Knowledge Keeper, and Ross, a settler, are professors at UNBC and acknowledge and recognize the protocols and customs of the Lheidli T'enneh People.

To set the context of our work, the 2015 release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) brought to light the detrimental impact of the Doctrine of Discovery (Assembly of First Nations, 2018) and the ensuing colonization of First Nation, Inuit, and Métis Peoples of Turtle Island. The TRC released an Executive Summary along with 94 Calls to Action to "redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation" (p. 1). The purpose of the commission was to document the history and intergenerational impacts of the [Canadian Indian residential school system](#) on Indigenous children and their families. While the Commission concluded that the Indian residential school system amounted to [cultural genocide](#), the recommendations focused on redressing the legacy of residential schools and advancing the process of reconciliation. As stated in the TRC, "Now that we know about residential schools and their legacy, what do we do about it?" (p. vi).

Our article responds to the question, *what do we do about it?* Framed as pathways for advancing reconciliation and decolonization practices in Teacher Education, we, within our Indigenous and settler identities, share ways of being and ways of doing for mindfully acknowledging the rich traditions and the diversity of languages cultures of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples on whose unceded lands we live, work, and play.

As noted, the TRC 94 Calls to Action sparked an urgency to decolonize K-12 and post-secondary educational institutions by re-conceptualizing curriculum, embedding holistic understandings of Canada's past with contemporary perspectives of Indigenous peoples, and co-constructing new pathways towards truth and reconciliation. This marks a time in Canada's history where omitted stories are acknowledged, pressing educators to re-imagine and re-story teaching and learning along with a shared responsibility towards social justice education through the revelation of truths and commitment to reconciliation (Ragoonaden et al., 2020). This is especially relevant as Canada and the world are, finally, coming to terms with the discovery of the undocumented mass graves of 215 children from the Tk'émlúps te Secwépemc Nation found at the site of a former residential school in the Kamloops, British Columbia. While the Tk'émlúps te Secwépemc Nation and many more First Nations across Turtle Island have long been aware of these undocumented mass graves, these crimes against children are only now being recognized by settler societies in Canada and across our collective humanity.

In the spirit of the TRC (2015), we, the authors, are taking action to reconcile with Canada's onerous history with colonization. Specifically, the TRC Call for Action 62, Education as Reconciliation, is the focus of our work:

62. We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to:
 - i. Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a man-

- datory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade 12 students.
- ii. Provide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms.
 - iii. Provide the necessary funding to Aboriginal schools to utilize Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods in classrooms.
 - iv. Establish senior-level positions in government at the assistant deputy minister level or higher dedicated to Aboriginal content in education.

Soon after the release of the TRC Calls to Action (2015), the Ministry of Education in British Columbia (BC) released a new curriculum (2016) specifically promoting the insertion of Indigenous perspectives into K-12 curricula and in Teacher Education. Part of this initiative was using a Land Acknowledgment as formal statement recognizing and respecting Indigenous Peoples as traditional stewards of the land and the enduring relationship existing between Indigenous Peoples and their traditional territories. To begin with, we wanted to move away from the concept of paying lip service to the land acknowledgement in our spoken and written words. Indigenous Elders, scholars, and educational leaders have been steadfast in claiming that Indigenous intellectual traditions and knowledge have an important place in contemporary learning environments, and perhaps more so in the context of the 21st century, as we rethink and reimagine sustainable relationships with each other and all life (Cajete, 2015; Bouvier et al., 2016; Styres, 2019).

Acknowledging the requests that Indigenous worldviews be incorporated into contemporary curriculum (Battiste, 2002; 2013; British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016; Donald, 2009; Fraser & McNeill, 2021; Hoffman, 2013; Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015), we were drawn to the discussion of relationships and reciprocities between mindfulness and Indigenous knowledge. Donald (2012) reminds us that settlers can begin to develop shared understandings of Indigenous his-

tory, content, and perspectives more ethically through ecological imagination, positioning communities as living, interconnected systems. Within this sphere of connectivity, balance, and reciprocity, conceptions of settler/Indigenous, insider/outsider, and us/them dissipate into “organic tensions in motion” (Donald, p. 105). Through tensions in motion, ideas, identities, and experiences collide, making new ways of being and new ways of doing possible. The call to include Indigenous epistemologies and pedagogies in Eurocentric coursework reflects these organic tensions in motion. These waves of ideas and experiences are contributing to the decolonization of normative discourses by supporting reconciliation efforts in K-12 and higher educational institutions (Anuik & Gillies, 2012; Battiste, 2013; Resotoule & Nardozi, 2019; TRC, 2015).

In the words of Little Bear (2000), as our “jagged worldviews (collided)” we referred to the literature discussing how contemplative practices weave through Indigenous Wisdom to the land, the heart, and the mind (Four Arrows et al., 2010; Yellowbird, 2013). In acknowledgement of the strong voices of *Warrior Women: Remaking postsecondary places through relational narrative inquiry* (Young et al., 2012), our narratives aim to pursue a similar direction. Acknowledging our cultural, linguistic, and gender diversity, our settler, Métis, and Māori perspectives, as well as the integral presence and guidance of community members from Syilx Okanagan and Lheidli T’enneh First Nations, these shared narratives have informed our thoughts, our words, and our hearts. In the narratives below, we engage in our learning and unlearning about mindfulness and Indigenous knowledge. The narratives are followed by summaries of personal communications with one another, with Elders, and Knowledge Keepers, who generously agreed to share their wisdom with us.

Mindfulness in Education

In keeping with the wisdom found in ancestral Indigenous Knowledge and in contemplative practices, K-12 and higher education institutions are actively implementing curriculum that recognize the importance of nurturing social, emotional, and intellectual well-being. Aware of the high levels of stress and anxiety prevalent in teachers and students (Emerson, 2017; Taylor, 2017), British Columbia’s K-12 curriculum (2016)

has developed orientations emphasizing understanding, doing, and knowing about personal awareness, social awareness, and positive cultural identity. Within this context, Faculties of Education in BC have responded by implementing health literacy initiatives focusing on a holistic approach to well-being (Ragoonaden, 2017). UBC Okanagan's Faculty of Education responded to these curricular orientations about well-being by introducing mindfulness practices into a course on Physical and Health Education. The mindfulness practices were organized around nine sessions based on breathing awareness, visualizations, meditations, and mindful movement practices. As a renewal program supporting the development of self-care techniques, its aim was to support well-being through a greater understanding and control of breath, movement, and the physiology of emotions, like kindness and forgiveness. Experiential in nature, the mindfulness practices aim to support intellectual, physical, and emotional well-being by cultivating habits focusing on paying attention to everyday activities such as eating, gardening, walking, and listening. This holistic approach is recognized as a natural human capacity involving observing, participating, and accepting each of life's moments from a state of balance (Abenavoli et al., 2013; Benn et al., 2012; Langer, 1989; Lantieri, 2008). It is within this context that Karen, as the instructor of the course, and Brenda, as a student in the course, reflected on the impact of mindfulness practices in relation to teaching, learning, well-being, and Indigenous Knowledge.

Indigenous Knowledge

Battiste (2002) and Barnhardt & Kawagley (2005) define Indigenous knowledge (IK) as ways of knowing about meanings, purposes, and values of self, family, community, and the Land. In particular, Battiste (2002) emphasizes that this ancestral knowledge is dynamic, holistic, intergenerational, and linked to experience on traditional land. The relationship to the Land and the harmonious balance of the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual self are particularly important components of IK. Similar to Cajete (2000) and Yellowbird (2013), Little Bear (2000) refers to the constant flux of all existence consisting of energy waves/spirit, all things being animate, all existence being interrelated, creation/exis-

tence having to be renewed, space/place as an important referent, and language, songs, stories, and ceremonies as repositories for the knowledge that arises out of Indigenous Knowledge (p. 8). Due to the importance of the relationship to the land, there is a global recognition that IK has a valuable contribution to make to science, conservation, pedagogy, and sustainable development (United Nations, 2008). Cajete (2015) recognizes that the Native American philosophy of science incorporates at the highest degree all aspects of interactions of humans in and of nature. He states, "That is the knowledge and truth gained from interaction of body, mind, soul, and spirit with all aspects of Nature" (p. 46). Within this paradigm, there is also the recognition of the multiplicity of historical, cultural, and linguistic perspectives prevalent amongst Indigenous Peoples of the World. Similar to the TRC Calls to Action (2015), many have asserted the importance of decolonizing educational curricula by recognizing and including Indigenous histories, content, and perspectives in contemporary pedagogy (Battiste, 2002, 2013; Hoffman, 2013; Kitchenham et al., 2016). The release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) and the TRC Call to Action 62 underscored the strong calls to acknowledge and to include age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Indigenous Peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada.

In the words of Cajete (2005), Little Bear (2000), Yellow Bird (2013), and Donald (2012), it is within the context of recognizing that all existence is interrelated, that space/place are interconnected, and language, songs, stories, and ceremonies are repositories for knowledge, that we share, respectfully and humbly, our stories.

Our Stories

Our stories about mindfulness and Indigenous knowledge come from relational narrative inquiry (Young et al., 2012). These are our personal narratives, our learnings and our unlearnings. Our unlearnings signal our simultaneous growth and the undoing of that growth (Cochran-Smith, 2002, p. 25) emphasizing the potential, the tensions and the disruptions involved in learning and re-learning, storying and re-storying (Ragoonaden et al., 2020). We adhere to the "organic tensions" of our voices as

we weave and braid experiences into a unified landscape of emergent understandings based in respect, reciprocity, relevance, and responsibility (Kirkness & Barnhart, 1991). The words below reflect the diversity in our approaches to learning about mindfulness and IK. Tina and Ross shared their experiences with Elders from Lheidli T'enneh First Nation, and Elder Tūhoe, a Māori knowledge keeper. Brenda shared her experiences as a member of the Métis Nation, as a Sun Dancer, as a reiki practitioner and as an Indigenous spiritual healer. Karen listened, learned, and reflected on the *First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning Model* (Canadian Council of Learning, 2009; see Appendix A).

Tina

I am a Māori scholar teaching at UNBC. I have many academic roles: Associate Professor, Aboriginal Education Coordinator with the School of Education, and an Adjunct Professor in the School of Nursing, First Nations Studies. Currently, I am the Acting Chair of both the School of Education and the Department of First Nations Studies. I am also a Fellow of Te Mata O Te Tau (The Academy for Research and Scholarship at Massey University, New Zealand).

Mindfulness. As Indigenous Peoples, we don't actually sit down to say, "You know, our practice is mindfulness." It's not until actually later on that I had heard about the mindfulness and what it meant in the West. A lot of my practice is mindfulness. I would have to say this is something that I had growing up. I think for me, mindfulness was actually interwoven in my transition to assimilation because I have been taught, all my life, how to be calm, how to not be reactive, and how to remember your ways. For me, mindfulness is in my traditional ways of cultural practices. I have learnt this from my mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, and my great-grandparents. They were a huge part of my life. Talking about colonization and assimilation, I was one of the last documented students from the Crown's 1800s document paper going to "old native school," and then in the early 60s, I was switched so everybody had to transition and become assimilated.

Mindfulness practices. There is a sense that our music, dance, and ceremonies are about mindfulness. So those practices, that's what I re-

member. They came through the ceremonies and through dance. It is about you moving your human anatomy and physiology with the four concepts of the medicine wheel. The dance is a way of allowing you to move freely, to access the lived experience of your ancestors, to access the knowledge and to take what they have laid ahead of us in terms of a pathway and for us to follow that pathway. So, it (mindfulness) is through dance, through songs, through chanting, through weaving. Those are the things that I witnessed and practiced. A part of it (mindfulness) was about collecting traditional plants, bringing it to a place where Elders used to weave and make our garments. It is about collecting certain feathers and bringing them to the Elders where they made the traditional cloaks. That's the mindfulness.

Similarities between mindfulness and Indigenous practices. From an Indigenous perspective, what does that (mindfulness) mean for us? I'll ask myself this question: what does mindfulness mean to me? Mindfulness for me is about how to make my own physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual domains. It is about me being this whole person and it's about me making sure that there is a balance between these dimensions. It is very much like the concepts of the medicine wheel. It's really about the mind, soul, and body, based on the four concepts of mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical. As an Indigenous person, we do not separate disciplines; everything is interconnected. For example, when you look at a spider web, you are looking at the connectedness of how that spider spun that web, that silk. That's very much how Indigenous ways of knowing and being are based. We are not separate entities. Everything is connected to something, but not just Aboriginal and Indigenous people think that way. We have the great philosophers who had similar ways of thinking about how we are all connected and brought together by something somehow.

Impact on well-being. I teach Introduction to Indigenous Education and Indigenous well-being and health. My students learn about Residential Schools and the impact of colonization. Do the mindfulness practices support them by calming them and bringing them to a place of understanding? I believe so, yes, by bringing in mindfulness, non-judgment,

patience, and noticing. Experiencing the mindfulness in different ways, talking about the mindfulness in different ways, presenting the mindfulness different ways: this is all very connected to Indigenous knowledge and also non-Indigenous knowledge, because there is that reciprocal learning. Teaching and learning and learning and teaching are not separate things. These are the things that they (students) engage with. You get them (students) to talk about something that can help diffuse situations that might be already stressful. That's why a circle is very important for all. By creating the circles of healing, like the circle of education, circle of Ceremonies, Circles of Truth and Reconciliation, we learn, we teach, we learn, we teach.

Brenda

I am a member of the member of Metis Nation from Winnipeg, Manitoba. As a student at UBC's Okanagan campus, I bring a learner's view to our narratives. As a Sun Dancer, I embody the tenets of seeking harmony in the four facets of the self. I had experienced the mindfulness practices during a class I took with Karen. I recognized the breathing exercises, the meditation, and the mindful movement as part of my own practices. To provide a bit of background, I had a conversation with Karen one sunny day, sitting outside in the shade. We talked about mindfulness and Indigenous ceremonies. As a non-Indigenous woman, Karen had become aware of the reverence the Syilx Okanagan People had regarding smudging, the sweatlodge, and the innate respect for Elders. Our conversation flowed and ebbed, and this is what I remember.

Mindfulness. I do not remember where it (mindfulness) comes from. For me, it is about staying present in the moment, acknowledging thoughts and feelings and an awareness of body. It correlates to all aspects of my being. This heightened awareness, moment, and vibrations are all in sync. I do believe that it is about healing the past and affecting the future by being mindful in the present.

Mindfulness practices. I am a reiki practitioner and an Indigenous spiritual healer. I stay true to my DNA focusing on the path of my Indigenous ancestry—whatever is brought to me will be brought to me. I trust that the universe will guide me. I know that focus is important and being quiet

is important. I try not to let noise interfere and recognize the importance of meditation. Some practices that I am aware of are the awakening of the ceremonies, the connection to the cleansing of the spirit with the smoke, and I am aware of the diversity of people present at Indigenous ceremonies. While I have very limited teachings in formal mindfulness practices, I do have teachings of connectedness with all there is in existence through ceremonies and with my ancestors. I am still on my path and enhancing my spiritual journey and some practices that I am aware of are the awakening of the ceremony, the smudging with the smoke. I am aware of the diversity of people present at ceremony including the different religious, spiritual tenets that are present. While I have no formal practice, I am still finding my path, and my connectedness.

Similarities between mindfulness and Indigenous practices. They are all co-related, connected by energy in time and space where we are present. I am drawn to areas where the Ancestors are aligned. For me, the biggest word is acceptance—it is like a piece of the puzzle. I find it interesting to sit with people from other practices. Meditation is important, as is the energy vibration. I trust that my guides will bring through only what I need.

Impact on well-being. I honor all directions of the Medicine Wheel teachings and believe that all elements of spiritual practices are associated. I recognize that our spirit leads us consciously and acknowledges that we are doing the work to spiritually evolve. Forgiveness is key to unconditional love. I stay in the heart and I remember to stay connected to the land and my roots. I am aware that this is what life is about; every moment there is a sign—people, plants, rocks, and animals are all connected. Nothing is irrelevant and we should all be spiritually aware and present by being receptive to different vibrations that connect us all. I do not have much time for negativity. I am very aware of who is in my sphere of life's teachings. I intend to keep moving forward with the beauty of the horse teachings that remind me to take care of my spiritual, emotional, and mental well-being. This gives me the freedom to honor all.

Ross

I am a Professor in the Department of First Nation Studies at UNBC. As a settler, whose ancestors are English and German, I have spent approximately forty years learning from Indigenous Knowledge Holders. Originally from Ontario, I have lived for more than two decades in northwestern BC. During that time, I worked with Wet'suwet'en, Gitksan, and Cree communities on a variety of community-based research projects in the areas of education, language and culture, and health and wellness. This includes extensive work in the oral tradition with Elders and other knowledge holders.

In order to develop a deeper understanding of the relationship between mindfulness practices and Indigenous knowledge perspectives and practices, I have summarized my conversations with three Indigenous Knowledge Holders from northern British Columbia (BC). These conversations were conducted separately with two members of the Lheidli T'enneh First Nation who are considered Elders within their community. One interview was conducted with a Māori Knowledge Holder and a Tūhoe tribal member who has resided in northern BC for over forty years and has kept close cultural ties to her *iwi* (tribe) and *whanau* (family) in Aotearoa (NZ). Permission was granted to use their names.

As shared here, the three conversations reflect the fact that each of these three Indigenous Knowledge Holders brought their own unique understanding of both mindfulness practices and Indigenous Knowledge perspectives and practices to the forefront. Within the diverse responses, specific examples of Indigenous practices that can be considered "mindful" were described. The examples shared fell into three broad inter-related thematic areas: Relationship to the Land, Ceremonial Practices, and Knowing One's Self.

Relationship to the Land. One of the Lheidli T'enneh Knowledge Holders, Marcel Gagnon, saw a connection between the practice of mindfulness and his cultural practice of being present, centered, and grounded while being on the land. He stressed that this is especially important when a person is hunting. This was explained in terms of the teachings he had received from his mother, as well as in terms of ensuring one's per-

sonal safety. Marcel also spoke of the relationship between mindfulness and his spiritual practices, such as smudging and the sweat lodge.

Ceremonial Practices. The other Lheidli T'enneh Knowledge Holder, Darlene McIntosh, explained why she intentionally incorporated a grounding exercise with those present when she was welcoming visitors to the Lheidli T'enneh territories. The act of asking people to ground themselves to the land and to be present in that space and moment allows her to do her ceremonial work. She also spoke of how she incorporates mindfulness practices as part of the smudging ceremonies she conducts.

Knowing One's Self. Tūhoe, a Māori Knowledge Holder, explained how mindfulness was part of the cultural practice of identifying one's self relative to specific elements of her tribe's territory. This includes acknowledging the landscape from the top of the mountain to the river mouth where it flows into the ocean. She also spoke of how mindfulness practices are incorporated into Māori Performing Arts; specifically, the individual cultural preparation that one undertakes prior to the start of a performance.

All three Knowledge Holders referred to the importance of an individual knowing oneself, whether that be through ceremonial processes, a connection to traditional lands, or the surrounding environment that one finds themselves in. While it would be correct to say that mindfulness practices can be found, or are part of, Indigenous Ways of Knowing, Being, and Doing, the reverse is not true. Indigenous Ways of Knowing, Being, and Doing are not mindfulness practices. They encompass entire knowledge systems that are culturally based and founded on a deep understanding of the spiritual nature of the universe.

Karen

As a settler immigrant woman hailing from a Mauritian father and an Irish mother, my cultural and spiritual background has been intimately tied to Eastern contemplative practices. Practicing meditation and yoga since a young age, I had experienced the benefits of non-judgement, of patience, of observation, and of coming back to breath to settle strong emotions, wayward thoughts, and discomfort in my physical self. After

introducing mindfulness practices to students enrolled in a first year education course, I recognized the ease in which Brenda and many Indigenous students accepted breathing exercises, meditation, and silent outdoor walks where the focus was on sight, sound, and touch. Conversations with students like Brenda, and with Tina and Ross, revealed the connections between ceremonial smudging and ceremonial cleansing in the sweatlodge and informal mindful practices like breath awareness, visualizations, and meditation. Around this time, I discovered the Holistic Lifelong Learning Model developed by the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL). This holistic model proposed a series of learning frameworks for First Nation, Inuit, and Métis Peoples in Canada (CCL, 2009).

Holistic Lifelong Learning Model

The Canadian Council on Learning (CCL), in collaboration with the Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre (ABLKCC) and First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples, created three Holistic Lifelong Learning Models (HLLM) that present an Indigenous framework for understanding individual and collective well-being. These models demonstrate what holistic, lifelong learning means from First Nations, Inuit, and Métis perspectives and provide frameworks for how Indigenous Peoples in Canada understand their learning for success, and how success is understood as being integrative and supportive of their collective identities, knowledge, languages, and cultures. Bouvier, Battiste and Laughlin (2016) show how the models can potentially be used as theoretical and methodological foundations for schools, scholars, and research in Indigenous health and collective well-being. The learning models are also representative of diverse cultures, histories, and geographies of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples of Canada.

As my learning progressed, I learned that the *First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning Model* (see Appendix A) represented the link between First Nations lifelong learning and community well-being. For First Nations Peoples, the purpose of learning is to honour and protect the earth and ensure the long-term sustainability of life. To illustrate the organic and self-regenerative nature of First Nations learning, the Holistic Lifelong Learning Model uses a stylistic graphic of a living tree. The tree de-

picts the cycles of learning for an individual and identifies the influences that affect individual learning and collective well-being.

As a settler woman, the tree as a metaphor for understanding individual and collective well-being resonated with my own mindfulness practices. In particular, the tree conceptualized by the CCL is similar to the Tree of Contemplative practices found on the website of the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society (<https://www.contemplativemind.org/practices/tree>; see Appendix B). This holistic approach is also highlighted in British Columbia's First Nations Education Steering Committee's *First Peoples' Principles of Learning* (FNESC, 2014; see Appendix C), defining learning as a holistic, reflective, experiential, and relational focusing on connectedness, relationships, and a sense of place.

The similarities between the depiction of the *First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning Model* as a tree, the Tree of Contemplative Practices, and the *First Peoples' Principles of Learning* are at the crux of my journey seeking the decolonization of contemporary education and reconciling settler and Indigenous perspectives in a context fostering mutual recognition, respect, sharing, and responsibility.

Mindfulness and Indigenous Knowledge

As we, Tina, Brenda, Ross, and Karen, circle around our *organic tensions in motions* (Donald, 2012), we recognize that culturally-based Indigenous Knowledges are ways of knowing, being, and doing, founded on deep understandings of the spiritual nature of the universe. As settlers, we, Karen and Ross, unlearned our colonial assumptions about teaching, learning, relations, and connections to the land. We learnt from the Knowledge Keepers of the Syilx Okanagan Nation, Lheidli T'enneh First Nation, and Tūhoe, the Māori Elder, that Indigenous Knowledge emphasizes the wholistic nature of the self revealed through relationships to the land, to sharing circles and to traditions infused with meditation, and visualizations (Four Arrows et al., 2010; Hoffman, 2010). This ancestral knowledge is at once context, content, and process (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). It isare deeply spiritual.

We also recognize that westernized approaches to mindfulness are not steeped in spiritual practices. These contemporary versions of

contemplative practices focus on stress-reduction and the improvement of mental health (Hyland, 2016; Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Recently, emergent criticism around the commodification and secular nature of mindfulness practices has become prevalent in educational discourses (Ergas & Hadar, 2019; Purser & Loy, 2013; Purser, 2019; Wilson, 2014). As a counterpoint to the commodification of mindfulness practices, spirituality is predominately present in Indigenous ways of being and ways of doing. Underscored by Cajete (1994), Schiff and Moore (2006) emphasize the importance of spirituality in Indigenous knowledge, ceremony, and traditions. For example, they address the important aspect of the sweat-lodge ceremony as a traditional healing practice, healing in multiple dimensions of body, mind, emotion, and spirit. As Tina states, "It's about connections.... very much like the concepts of the medicine wheel. It's really about the mind, soul, and body, based on the four concepts of mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical."

Based on our own learnings and unlearnings, we recognize the distinctiveness of contemporary applications of mindfulness, devoid of spiritual connotations (Albrecht et al., 2012; Kabat-Zinn, 2013). We acknowledge the traditional, ancestral Indigenous knowledge steeped in respect, reciprocity, responsibility, and relevance to the land, to the community, to family, to the self, and to the spirit. Once again, in Tina's words, "By creating the circles of healing, like the circle of Education, circle of Ceremonies, Circles of Truth and Reconciliation, we learn, we teach, we learn, we teach."

Recognizing the optimal impact of mindfulness practices in pedagogical contexts (Barbezat & Bush, 2014; Block & Cardaciotto, 2016; Meiklejohn et al., 2012; Roeser et al., 2012; Zajonc, 2013) as well as the depth and breadth of Indigenous knowledge traditions emphasizing human relations and connections to the land as fundamental to spiritual, mental, physical, and emotional well-being (Cohen, 2010), our writing is reflective of the learning and unlearning that has guided our paths. We have brought our multiple voices together to share our narratives about mindfulness practices and Indigenous knowledge in an act of advancing reconciliation and the decolonization of Teacher Education curricula. As teacher educators and students of learning, our experiences may have

the potential to inform the TRC's Call to Action 62, Education as Reconciliation, in the Okanagan Valley and in Prince George.

Explicitly, this means decolonizing teaching practices through reconciliation by taking time to reflect on land acknowledgment by walking alongside, listening, learning, and supporting Elders and Knowledge Keepers as they generously and graciously lead and share traditional, ancestral knowledge relating to the land, to human relations, and to the nested interconnections between all living beings.

We come full circle by ending with Brenda's words describing how she introduced our work on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Musqueam people at CSSE on UBC's Vancouver campus.

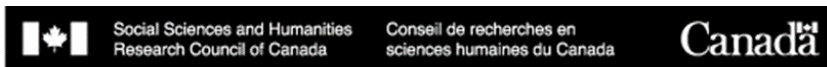
During the presentation at UBC, I started with a Welcoming Song aimed at the Four directions, honoring all of our ancestors and asking them to come in and be present in our writing. I gave a brief explanation at the end of the song and then talked about the medicine wheel healing practices, explaining briefly about the North, West, South, and East. There is so much to teach about each direction: color, medicines, animals and healing modalities associated with each of the four quadrants of a medicine wheel circle. I opened with the East (Yellow), the beginnings of life. In my teachings, we are all born with Truth and Love, walking this direction with the Turtle and the Eagle. The medicine in this direction is braided sweetgrass, the life force of masculine, feminine, and two-spirited. I spoke about the Southern (Red) direction next, as representative of Respect and Humility. As young children, we are all learning and making mistakes and learning how to respect all. By walking with the Buffalo and the Wolf, the medicine in this direction gives us sage guidance. In the West (Black), we have the teachings of Courage and Honesty, which is Bear and Sasquatch. It takes a lot of courage and honesty to walk in our adult years and correct our wrong

doings. We walk with cedar medicine in this direction. The last direction is the North (White) which is closest to our elder years as we prepare to go home to spirit. We walk closest to the ancestors and with the Beaver. This is all about Wisdom attained throughout our lifetime and the knowing that we will return to spirit and be with our ancestors. This direction works with the medicine of tobacco for prayers and honoring all. I concluded with Mitakuye Oyasin/All Are Related. (Brenda, June 2, 2019)

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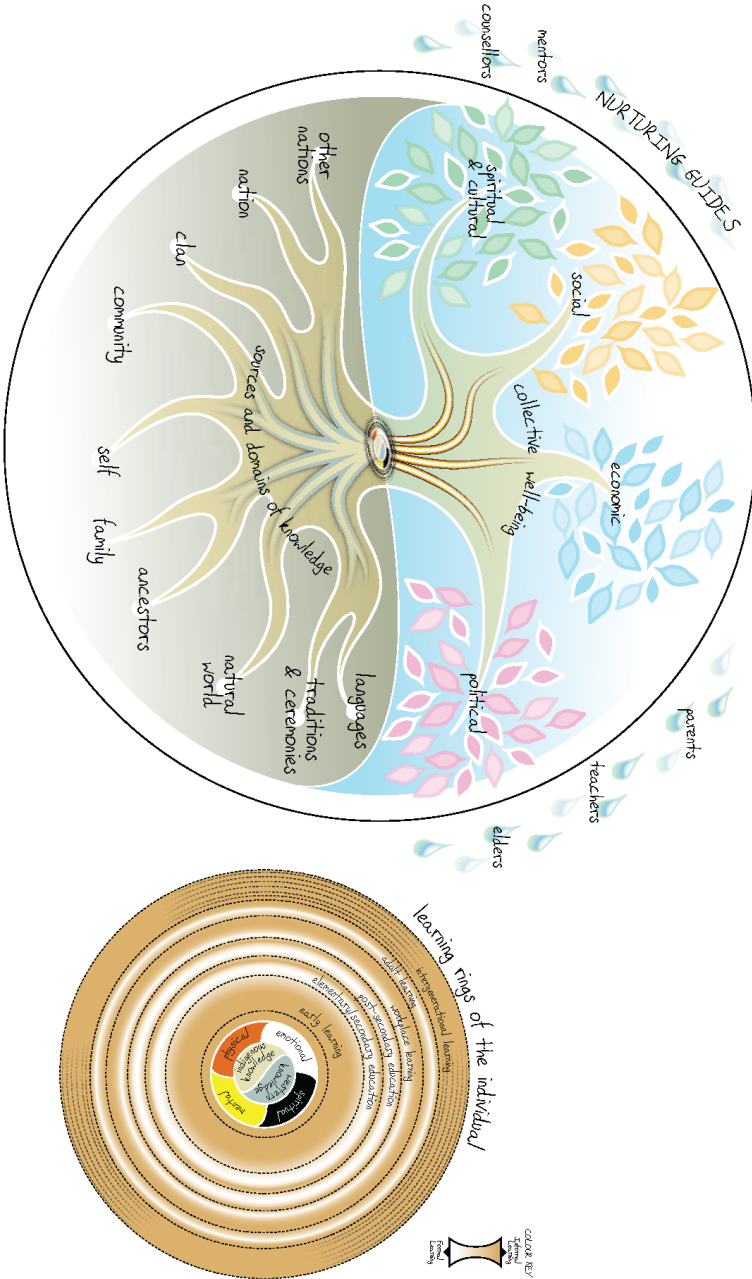
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Appendix A

First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning Model



First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning Model

LIVING DRAFT
Last Updated: June 6, 2007



ABOUT THE FIRST NATIONS HOLISTIC LIFELONG LEARNING MODEL

The *First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning Model* represents the link between First Nations lifelong learning and community well-being, and can be used as a framework for measuring success in lifelong learning.

For First Nations people, the purpose of learning is to honour and protect the earth and ensure the longterm sustainability of life. To illustrate the organic and self-regenerative nature of First Nations learning, the Holistic Lifelong Learning Model uses a stylistic graphic of a living tree. The tree depicts the cycles of learning for an individual and identifies the influences that affect individual learning and collective well-being.

The *First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning Model* is a result of ongoing discussions among First Nations learning professionals, community practitioners, researchers and analysts. For a complete list of individuals and organizations that have contributed to the development of this learning model, visit www.ccl-cca.ca.

DESCRIBING THE MODEL

The First Nations learner dwells in a world of continual re-formation, where interactive cycles, rather than disconnected events, occur. In this world, nothing is simply a cause or an effect, but the expression of the interconnectedness of life. These relationships are circular, rather than linear, holistic, and cumulative rather than compartmentalized. The mode of learning for First Nations people reflects and honours this understanding.

Lifelong learning for First Nations peoples is grounded in experiences that embrace both indigenous and Western knowledge traditions, as depicted in the tree's root system, "Sources and Domains of Knowledge". Just as the tree draws nourishment through its roots, the First Nations person learns from and through the natural world, language, traditions and ceremonies, and the world of people (self, family, ancestors, clan, community, nation and other nations). Any uneven root growth can destabilize the learning system. The root system also depicts the intertwining presence of indigenous and Western knowledge, which forms the tree trunk's core, where learning develops.

A cross-sectional view of the trunk reveals the "Learning Rings of the Individual". At the rings core are the four dimensions of personal development—spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental—through which learning is experienced holistically. The tree's rings portray how learning is a lifelong process that begins at birth and progresses through childhood, youth and adulthood.

Learning opportunities are available in all stages of First Nations life. They can occur in both informal and formal settings such as in the home, on the land, or in the school. The stages of learning begin with the early childhood phase and progress through elementary, secondary and post-secondary education, to adult skills training and employment. Intergenerational knowledge is transmitted to the individual from the sources within the roots.

The First Nations learner experiences the various relationships within indigenous and Western knowledge traditions through their emotional, mental, spiritual and physical dimensions. The tree's extended branches, which represent the individual's harmony and well-being depict the development of these experiences. The individual's well-being supports the cultural, social, political and economic "Collective Well-Being", represented by the four clusters of leaves.

Just as leaves provide nourishment to the roots and support the tree's foundation, the community's collective well-being rejuvenates the individual's learning cycle. Learning guides—mentors, counsellors, parents, teachers, and Elders—provide additional support and opportunities for individuals to learn throughout their lifespan.

Appendix B The Tree of Contemplative Practices



Appendix C

First Peoples Principles of Learning

**FIRST
PEOPLES**

PRINCIPLES OF LEARNING

Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors.

Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).

Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions.

Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities.

Learning recognizes the role of indigenous knowledge.

Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story.

Learning involves patience and time.

Learning requires exploration of one's identity.

Learning involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/or in certain situations.



For First Peoples
classroom resources
visit: www.fnesc.ca

