

**SCHOOL FAILED COYOTE, SO FOX MADE A NEW  
SCHOOL: INDIGENOUS OKANAGAN KNOWLEDGE  
TRANSFORMS EDUCATIONAL PEDAGOGY**

by

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## ABSTRACT

This project examines how Indigenous Okanagan knowledge embedded in traditional stories, life histories and people's practices, responsibilities and relationships are relevant and applicable to current and future Okanagan people's educational and cultural aspirations. Okanagan language proficiency, cultural and territorial knowledge and practice, provincial curriculum and world knowledge are all important elements in creating Okanagan identity. The focus of this thesis is to identify, understand and theorise the transforming potential of Okanagan pedagogy through the development of an Okanagan cultural and language immersion school where language and cultural knowledge recovery are key elements, and express a new and current understanding, through a *Sqilxw*-Okanagan, children centred, extended family pedagogical approach and curriculum structure for current application in schooling projects and communities. Indigenous and world knowledge that improves, complements, and is compatible with evolving Okanagan knowledge and practice is included to generate an interconnected web; a convergence that may be useful in Okanagan, Indigenous and world educational contexts.

## PREFACE

My research is informed by *Sqilxw*-Okanagan epistemology which suggests knowledge is a continuously evolving web of relationships. By gathering bits of old and current knowledge, engaging in dialogue, action, and reflection, a new understanding emerges. My research, to create a new understanding, is guided by academic practice through Certificate of Approval No. B06-0801 issued by the University of British Columbia's Behavioural Research Ethics Board, and by *Sqilxw* ethical accountability that I honour individuals, families and communities, who have contributed knowledge and experience to my understanding, by applying and sharing that knowledge in ways that they approve of. To affirm through practice the notion that *Sqilxw* knowledge, values and ways are also valid academic knowledge, I combine conventional academic referencing with traditional acknowledgements that are part of the continuing story of evolving knowledge as oral tradition merges with academic discourse.

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## FOREWORD

The *Sqilxw* - Okanagan are the people of the stories. Our knowledge, survival, and cultural practices have been maintained through story. The narrative style and structure of this thesis is meant to express and embody *Sqilxw* traditional story ways of knowledge transmission and speak to multiple audiences, in the academic realm and in *Sqilxw* and Indigenous community contexts, and the many interconnected sites that extend from the academy and Indigenous ways of knowing. Themes and strands emerge throughout the sections of this thesis in feedback loops, or as strands woven back into the larger composition, that reconnect stories to other stories and contain stories within stories. Several strands are intentionally repeated in several contexts to convey, as in Okanagan storytelling, their importance and need for dialogue and reflection.

## NOTE

Chapter 5, Section 5.1 “We Are the Ones to Fix That” *Enowkinwixw* and *P’ax* is a condensed version of the Final Report of *We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For*, an En’owkin Centre project funded by Gathering Strength: Canada’s Aboriginal Action Plan. I designed the workshops, facilitated every aspect of the project and wrote the final report. The Okanagan Nation, through the En’owkin Centre, is the copyright holder. The Final Report was circulated throughout the Okanagan Nation to all Okanagan Bands and Education Departments.

## DEDICATION

This thesis, because it has a *Sqilxw* genealogy, a kinship relationship with generations of peoples, families and places who have converged and contributed negatively and positively to my evolving understanding as an Okanagan Indigenous scholar, is dedicated to the *Tmixw*, the ancestors, and the gramas and grampas who look out for us. And it is dedicated to the people to be, the children and future children who will inherit the real world consequences of this generations' understanding, relationships and practices.

## GLOSSARY

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b><i>Sqilxw</i></b>  | The Okanagan term for the Indigenous people also commonly called the Okanagan whose territory is located in the southern interior of BC and north central Washington, literally translates as the dream in a spiral. <i>Syilx</i> is also used and refers to the peoples who speak <i>Nsyilxcen</i> , the Okanagan language.  |
| <b><i>Captikwl/CepCaptikwl</i></b>                            | The Okanagan traditional story system which expresses cumulative knowledge, the living record of what it means to be <i>Sqilxw</i> /Okanagan.   |
| <b><i>Kwulencuten</i></b>                                     | A metaphorical concept which describes the oneness who recreates oneself continuously and refers to all of creation—is often translated as Creator or God.  |
| <b><i>Indian, First Nation<br/>Indigenous, Aboriginal</i></b> | All four terms refer to a vast diversity of peoples. From a colonizing perspective, the terms are homogenizing and dehumanizing because they do not recognize Okanagan, Secwepemc, Mohawk, Maori, Blackfoot and so on. My textual use in this thesis, however, will mimic the oral ways that the terms have been and are applied and used interchangeably in community contexts as English approximations for Okanagan and Indigenous terms. In that sense they are co-opted and owned. |
| <b><i>Okanagan</i></b>  | Anglicized version of <i>Suqnaqinx</i> and refers to the Indigenous people of the Okanagan territory, it translates as “takes to the head or mind.”   |
| <b><i>Nkmaplqs i<br/>Snmamayatn kl<br/>Sqilxwtet</i></b>      | North Okanagan/Head of the Lake learning place in the way of/toward our Indigenous ways, the name of the Okanagan cultural immersion school featured in this thesis. Because it is also a meaningful  |

metaphor, it will be applied often in this thesis in its full title for conceptual resonance rather than just the NSS abbreviation.

|                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <b><i>P'ax</i></b>               | A metaphoric term for group knowledge, it refers to generating sparks from flint to start a fire.  |
| <b><i>Sama</i></b>               | A general term used to refer to Western or European settler peoples and ways.  |
| <b><i>Sqilxwlcawt</i></b>        | Okanagan concept that means our Indian or Indigenous way, quite simply the evolving knowledge and practices that have sustained the people culturally and ecologically for thousands of years. |
| <b><i>Tmixw</i></b>              | Spirits of the land/ecology refers to all the beings and things in the ecology with spirit.  |
| <b><i>Qwilmist</i></b>           | Pull together your heart, mind, strength, and determination for leadership.  |
| <b><i>Limlimt</i></b>            | A formal expression of thanks and appreciation.  |
| <b><i>Social Capital</i></b>     | The interconnected webs of social experience, relationships, influence and responsibility.   |
| <b><i>Cultural Capital</i></b>   | The knowledge which informs our lives, practices and relationships: language, stories, practices, customs, songs, and so on.   |
| <b><i>Kaupapa Maori</i></b>      | Maori ideology – a philosophical doctrine, incorporating the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values of Maori society.   |
| <b><i>Te Kohanga Reo</i></b>     | Maori Language preschool (total language immersion).   |
| <b><i>Kura Kaupapa Maori</i></b> | Elementary school operating under Maori custom and using Maori language as the medium of instructionI (total language immersion).  |
| <b><i>Whare Kura</i></b>         | Secondary school operating under Maori custom and using Maori language as the medium of  |

instruction – traditionally the place where esoteric lore was taught (total language immersion).

***Whare Wananga***

University, house of higher learning – traditionally the place where tohunga (expert) taught tribal knowledge of history, genealogy, and religious practices. Today, language/learning gatherings are held in polytechnics and universities (bi-lingualism).



## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION: *SQILXW* VISION EMERGING

This section introduces Indigenous Okanagan knowledge through the metaphor of the spider's web and strands of knowledge through stories and concepts to symbolize the dynamic interrelationships and balancing of tensions that characterized traditional Okanagan societal practice. From an organic positioning from within the evolving web of learning, the *Sqilxwlcawt* model, the thesis purpose and research questions are expressed. Included are an introduction to the Okanagan cultural immersion school and an outline of Thesis Chapters. The latter part of this chapter introduces the *Sqilxwlcawt extended family* theorizing which form supporting and connecting strands throughout this thesis. The last section introduces the notion of gifted translators, Indigenous scholars/leaders who gather, select, translate and interpret useful tools from Indigenous knowledge and Western discourse for inclusion in the Indigenous transformative toolkit. They create intellectual space and substance for organic Indigenous research practices, relationships, and a body of literature to express and document new knowledge informed by cultural ways, values and languages from specific--rather than Pan-Indian—Indigenous peoples. *Sqilxwlcawt* theory is a *Sqilxw* - Okanagan contribution to an expanded web of diverse Indigenous knowledge globally.

“*Suqnaqinx*, or Okanagan, translates as, ‘The ones who stand on a mountain and are seen and heard from far away.’ The Okanagan nation, the people of the stories, the people with the power to dream, integrated *snklcaskaxa*, horse, into the lives of the people. Horse, like *kikwapa*, dog, was brought to the Okanagan by *snk’l’ip* (Coyote). The relationship to the land through Coyote’s teachings is central to the Okanagan culture, language, and the stories and mythology or *Cip-Captikwl*. Respect for the land and all the beings put here by the creator was expressed through the language and *Captikwl*, and practiced through the culture in ceremonies and everyday life activities. This produced a nation of people who lived in a comfortable balance with the environment they depended on. The concept of sustainability was a value which shaped the whole lifestyle to ensure that the natural gifts and resources of the present generation would be there for the children and future generations. This is the *Sqilxwcut* or “Indian way.” The *Sqilxwcut* did not change with use of the horse. Ceremonies and medicines were developed to honour and doctor the horse. The Okanagan people adopted, cared for, and respected the horse and *snklcaskaxa* became part of Okanagan culture. (Cohen, 1998, IV)

The Okanagan are the “people of the stories” and through storytelling and relationship building—by renewing the extended family learning and teaching relationships, the *Sqilxwlcawt*, continues, and visions are realized.

An Okanagan phrase **i? Sqilxwlcawt** uses a term to describe this principle. The phrase means ‘our Native way.’ The term refers to the things we do as specific individuals within our culture as a deliberate part of our existence. It is the deliberate part which is expressed as the creative process and the essence of being human and for which we have complete and utter responsibility. (Armstrong, 1991, p. 14)

The approach taken, by the researcher of this thesis to theorise Indigenous Okanagan pedagogy in order to inform current Okanagan schooling projects, parallels the way Okanagan people treated the horse and dog. In the *Captikwl*, horse and dog were people destroying monsters who were transformed by Coyote’s powers and medicines so they became useful, beneficial and

integral to ongoing *Sqilxwlcawt*<sup>1</sup>. Schooling can be and was used by colonial governments as a “people destroying monster” (Armstrong and Pierre, 1998, p. 34). Schooling, particularly with reference to the Indian Residential Schools, has been likened to *Skalula*, “the monster who steals and devours children” (Sterling, 1997, p. 183) Schooling, therefore, cannot be treated uncritically and for schooling to be effective, beneficial, and compatible for Okanagan knowledge and cultural aspirations, it must be transformed by knowledge and “tools” from Coyote, Fox, the Okanagan Food Chiefs, and others symbolic of knowledge relationships into an ongoing, dynamic expression of the *Captikwl*. The Okanagan understanding is that knowledge comes from the world, the ecology, the land, plants and the animals. “Instead of Aristotle, Plato and Newton, we have *Spitlem*, bitterroot, *Skmxist*, Bear and *Senklip*, Coyote.” (Cohen, 2001, p. 4) While it may seem obvious or straightforward that Okanagan knowledge should inform Okanagan children’s participation in educational processes and institutions such as schools, that is not the reality in Okanagan communities. “Despite all the oppressive measures imposed upon the Okanagan people—assimilation policy, waves of disease epidemics, theft of our children, government and church sanctioned cultural genocide—the *Sqilxw* survived. . . The Okanagan people are here today because our ancestors were hardworking, strong, creative, talented and determined.” (Cohen, 1998, p. 6) That Okanagan and Indigenous peoples have survived is a clear indication of the strength and

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<sup>1</sup> I initially used the term *Sqilxwcut* which informally translates as “the Indian way.” After consulting with fluent Elder Pauline Archachan, it was explained that *Sqilxwcut* is more about acting or talking *Sqilxw* and that *Sqilxwlcawt* would be a more appropriate term because it more accurately means “our *Sqilxw* way of life,” as Armstrong describes it. I will use *Sqilxwlcawt* from now on.

resilience of Indigenous practices, knowledge and resistance. It is also clear however that over five hundred years of cultural genocide (150 years since the first permanent *Sama* settlement in Okanagan territory) has generated negative, contradictory, and intense attitudes and reactions toward Okanagan (and Indigenous) knowledge and ways. In many ways we have become our own colonizer, and that is the context from which this thesis project emerges, and underpins the necessity for Okanagan transforming theory, research and praxis to reconnect to strands of relevant and applicable concepts and practices and embody those principles so Okanagan research is a continuous expression of Okanagan evolving knowledge, worldview, and positive change. The Okanagan Food Chiefs, from Okanagan oral tradition, asked one another, “What will you do for the people to be?” *P’ax* is an Okanagan metaphorical term used to describe group knowledge and enlightenment. *P’ax* literally means “to spark so as to cause to light.” (Armstrong, 1991, p. 66) It is the spark that ignites the fire or light for the group and refers to scraping flint. This thesis is the author’s humble contribution to “spark the fire” for Okanagan and Indigenous transforming praxis with Okanagan families in a collaborative self-determining cultural immersion school project where we ask ourselves “What will you do for the people to be?”.

*Suqnaqinx*, or Okanagan, also suggests the ones who can see and hear far away, into the future. The word for our people or ourselves is “*Sqilxw*, which in a literal translation means the ‘dream in a spiral.’ We recognize our individual lives as the continuance of human dreams,” (Armstrong, 1991, p. 111) coming to reality in a spiralling way. Currently, Okanagan language, and subsequently,

Okanagan worldview, knowledge, culture and people are “critically endangered”, and are facing extinction. Many are determined to not let that happen. Our ancestors left us with knowledge, practices, tools, understanding of natural laws, thousands of years of accumulated wisdom to live sustainably connected within our territorial ecology. It is up to all of us to reconnect to those strands of knowledge and create new systems that balance creativity and survival, new understandings and shared responsibilities, that express and embody tolerance, pluralism, and relational sustainability.

The structure of this thesis merges the journey with destination in its narrative style and it aligns with traditional story ways of knowledge transmission. The Okanagan are the people of the stories. Our knowledge, survival, and cultural practices have been maintained through story. Themes and strands emerge throughout the sections of this thesis in feedback loops, or as strands woven back into the larger composition, that reconnect stories to other stories and contain stories within stories. Several strands are intentionally repeated in several contexts to convey, as in Okanagan storytelling, their importance and need for dialogue and reflection. When I looked around to find theses and literature that would help me put into words and chapters my research experiences and aspirations, the following Indigenous scholars’ works were particularly useful: I have learned from Dr. Jo-ann Archibald’s thesis (1997) and her work with elders to interpret traditional stories and apply them to teaching practices, Dr. Shirley Sterling’s use of stories and storytelling as modes of cultural knowledge transmission (1997), Dr. Roland Chrisjohn’s critical insights

on Indian/First Nation research and his use of metaphors for clarity have assisted my efforts to avoid the “Splendid Blonde Beast” (2006, p. 59), or systemic colonizing assimilation/genocide. I have been inspired by and taken Indigenous intellectual notes from the works of George Manuel (1974) and John Mohawk (2000) and elements of their style and positioning are also adapted in my writing. Dr. Graham Hingangaroa Smith’s Indigenous organic transforming praxis and Kaupapa Maori theory (1997) form continuous supporting threads to my Okanagan critical theorizing. Concerning Okanagan knowledge and practice, Dr. Jeannette Armstrong’s written works (1985), and leadership substantially inform my research and practice. This thesis is a continuing expression of Okanagan and Indigenous thought, knowledge and experience, and expanding knowledge relationships.

### **1.1 *Sqilxwlcawt* in Practice (Thesis Purpose and Research Questions)**

The aim of this thesis is to theorize, practice and report on Okanagan transformative theory and praxis through the establishment of a successful Okanagan language and cultural knowledge revitalization school. “Successful” in this context means fluent speakers are emerging, cultural aspirations are being achieved, students are experiencing improved academic success after leaving the school and entering public schools, Okanagan self-determination is organically resonating in community, inter-tribal, provincial and world contexts, confidence in the accumulated knowledge of our ancestors is re-emerging/restored. Given the current aspiration broadly felt amongst Okanagan people in

regard to the continuance and revitalization of aspects of our language, knowledge and culture, my fundamental and complex research question is stated: Why, and how can Okanagan and Indigenous knowledge, language, and culture be maintained and revitalized through a specialized educational and schooling approach? My thesis has two purposes in relation to the development of an Okanagan cultural immersion school with language and cultural knowledge recovery as key elements: first, it theorizes dynamic, transformative and evolving Okanagan concepts and frameworks, that have sustained the Okanagan people for thousands of years; and second, express a new and current understanding, through an Okanagan, children centred, extended family pedagogical approach and curriculum structure for current application in schooling projects and communities.

This thesis is written from the perspective of an Okanagan educator and community member who is very much an “organic intellectual who actively participates in the struggle against hegemony” (Gramsci cited in Apple, 1990, p. 166). I am intellectually positioned as one of the foxes from Okanagan *Captikwl* stories who carefully and critically gather information, experiences of others, attitudes and artefacts, old and current knowledge and breathe it into new knowledge and understanding to be ritualized into practice. “It means that critical work needs to be done in an ‘organic’ way. It needs to be connected to and participate in those progressive social movements and groups that continue to challenge the multiple relations of exploitation and domination that exist. The role of the ‘unattached intelligentsia’ seems a bit odd here.”(Apple, 2000, p. 7) This

thesis is non-typical, non-objective or “unattached,” and is a creative expression of an Okanagan artist, who happens to be an Indigenous academic, with extended family and community responsibilities, and those responsibilities are connected to the strands of knowledge extending from Okanagan ancestors and the *tmixw* who continue to look out for us. My research and the cultural immersion school project is not “decolonization,” because it is only reactionary resistance to colonization in the sense that colonization was imposed by external forces. Colonization happened, and will continue to “happen” to Okanagan and other Indigenous peoples until we are resolutely proactive and take responsibility as *Sqilxw*, as Okanagan, on our own terms. “We must put an end to the idea of allowing things to continue and not taking responsibility. This does not mean that we need to accept adversarial methods. We write the script continuously.” (Cardinal, 1991, p.20) The intent is to express my understanding of Okanagan knowledge on its own terms (within the limitations of a thesis), conceptually with Okanagan metaphors and terms, creatively and relationally through Okanagan *Captikwl* and life experience stories.

Two key areas of research are expressed by this thesis: theorizing Okanagan traditional knowledge for current application and reporting on the developments of the combination of theory, research and action through and connected to the Okanagan cultural language immersion school project. Central themes that guide the two areas of research are Coyote and Fox<sup>2</sup> gathering the bits of knowledge and collaboratively breathing new life and understanding into

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<sup>2</sup> The reference is to the *Captikwl* story, *Coyote and Eagle*, and the role of Fox in bringing Coyote back to life. This story is included in Chapter 3.



old and current knowledge and practice patterns; the second theme concerns schooling and creating relationships for learning and teaching to occur by putting our children in the centre of Okanagan extended family structured pedagogy.

The story of *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayath kl Sqilxwtet* development is very much like Fox bringing Coyote back to life, but in a community context that expanded to include others in the role of Fox. The *gathering* of bits of Coyote corresponds to researching past and current schooling, connecting to strands of language and cultural learning experiences and methods. Fox *breathing* into the pile of bits—the research gathered—corresponds to talking about the knowledge and methods with parents, elders and staff, then trying it out. Fox stepping over the pile of bits and then Coyote *coming back to life* metaphorically describes the ritualizing, transforming praxis, of the learning and teaching relationships that are ongoing action and reflection, a cumulative praxis. Coyote coming back to life is also very symbolic of *Sqilxw* mind-power and creative potential re-emerging for and with our children. The role of the small group of parents was very much like Turtle and Muskrat<sup>3</sup> in that there was doubt within the group but the vision was strong and potential of the vision was empowering based on what could be achieved for our children. Confidence in the vision, and within the group, expanded when the kids began to demonstrate what learning was possible. Incrementally, with continued determination, the potential to expand *Sqilxwlcawt* by practising *Sqilxwlcawt* increases the likelihood that Okanagan people, language and culture will continue sustainably.

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<sup>3</sup> The reference is to the *Captikwl* story *How Turtle Set the Animals Free*. This story is included in Chapter 3.

## 1.2 Chapter Descriptions

### Chapter 1. Introduction: *Sqilxw* Vision Emerging

This Chapter introduces Indigenous Okanagan knowledge through the metaphor of the spider's web and strands of knowledge through stories and concepts to symbolize the dynamic interrelationships and balancing of tensions that characterized traditional Okanagan societal practice. From an organic positioning from within the evolving web of learning, the *Sqilxwlcawt* theoretical model, the thesis purpose and research questions are expressed. Included is an introduction to the Okanagan cultural immersion school, *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet*. The latter part of this chapter introduces the *Sqilxwlcawt extended family* theorizing which form supporting and connecting strands throughout this thesis, and concludes with a section introducing the notion of "Gifted Translators," the Indigenous scholars who have created space for Indigenous theory, practices, and epistemology in the academic realm.

### Chapter 2. *Swit<sup>4</sup> askwist?*: Who Is Your Name?

This Chapter positions the author as an Okanagan organic intellectual situated within complex streams, strands, and undercurrents of knowledge and practice flowing from traditional Okanagan societal practice through childhood and school learning experiences through the wake of cultural invasion and assimilation. It is this experiential formation of who the author is and the related

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<sup>4</sup> *Swit askwist?* translates as "Who is your name?" Your name is a "who" rather than a "what" and represents your genealogical and tribal identity(s).

dynamics of resistance to colonization, strands of transformative praxis, and conscientization that converged as necessary elements to the author's role in this thesis as a transforming educator.

### **Chapter 3. Okanagan Knowledge and Cultural Practice**

This Chapter 'gathers the bits' of Okanagan and Indigenous concepts and frameworks of knowledge from *Captikwl* and life experience stories, practices, and relationships past and current, and theorizes the accumulated knowledge for current and future application and practice. This chapter is also an Okanagan literature and orature review.

### **Chapter 4. Coyote Learns From Other Indigenous Peoples**

This Chapter extends the literature and orature review and addresses the question, what can the Okanagan learn from other Indigenous peoples' experiences, knowledge and transforming praxis? Cooperative learning relationships with Maori and *Secwepemc* peoples and their transforming projects are particularly noted. Indigenous Peoples can engage in dialogue, learn from each other and grow stronger as part of a vast diversity of Indigenous peoples and knowledge systems. Through respectful engagement and sharing, they may generate understanding and appreciation for the diversity of peoples and cultures: new ideas form, paradigm shifts occur, networks expand. Webs of sustainable relationships are created.

## **Chapter 5. *Sqilxw* Resistance (With Strands of Conscientization and Transforming Praxis) to Colonization**

This chapter describes patterns of colonization in Okanagan and First Nation communities, and *Sqilxw* expressions of cultural and intellectual resistance, and colonizing hegemonies, tensions and undercurrents at play as intergenerational patterns of “self-colonization.” These are the shifting fields in the ‘war of position’ between being *Sqilxw*-Okanagan and the forces of assimilation/cultural genocide. Resistance is placed foremost because that is what Okanagan peoples were primarily engaged in. Conscientization and transforming praxis were also occurring as dynamic strands of knowledge and activity in smaller community patterns. Weaving evolving Okanagan knowledge, language and practice with conscientization, resistance, and other Indigenous peoples’ experience and transforming praxis is an expression of transforming praxis. In this chapter, I will continuously “loop” back to negative patterns of colonization with transforming “tools” to mediate the contradictory emancipatory and self-destructive potential of *Sqilxw* Okanagan communities.

## **Chapter 6. Fox Makes a New School: Okanagan Transforming Pedagogy**

This Chapter reports on the application of *Sqilxw* principles of leadership and responsibility and *Sqilxwlcawt* pedagogy in the development of *Nkmaplqs I Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet* as an intervention strategy in the contexts of colonizing hegemonies and practices that serve to maintain or reproduce colonial relationships of domination and factionalism. It modestly answers the question, “How will the people be free?” with culturally informed relationship building. The

main theme of this Chapter is transformation by putting children back into the centre of extended family learning relationships through culturally informed teaching and learning practices.

## **Chapter 7. Recreating Ourselves Continuously: What have we done for the People to Be?**

This Chapter concludes the story—so far-- of ongoing *Sqilxwlcawt* and *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet* with a “Bill’s notes” condensed guide of experiential bits of wisdom that informed the development of *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet*, which may be useful for other First Nations and Indigenous peoples with aspirations for cultural knowledge and language recovery. I make some recommendations for Aboriginal teacher training programs to enable First Nations teachers to be transforming educators in terms of Indigenous pedagogies, languages, and cultural aspirations for knowledge. Finally, a reflective commentary about the overall challenges, successes and personal, family, and community experiences is provided.

### **1.3 *Kl Sqilxwtet*: Toward Our *Sqilxw* Ways By Being *Sqilxw***

This section introduces *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet* (NSS) and provides a brief narrative chronology of how NSS developed and includes a question and answer section. Later on, Chapter 6 expands on NSS development through the practice of Okanagan pedagogy—extended family learning and teaching relationships--and *Sqilxw* principles of leadership and responsibility.

On September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2006, on the Westside of Okanagan Lake, the Okanagan Indian Band's vision became a reality when they opened the doors of their Cultural Immersion School.

"This is a great day and I feel very honoured to be part of this historic celebration" stated Chief Fabian Alexis, "We have the most valuable people in front of us, our children, and our future teachers".

The Okanagan Indian Band Chief and Council were mandated by the membership to proceed with a K-7 Program for our children, with the first phase incorporating grades 1-4. First year enrolment is at 14 students, and numbers are projected to dramatically increase in subsequent years. Plans are already in place to include an expansion on the existing Sn'c'c'amala?tn` School, which currently accommodates the Daycare and Preschool programs.

Bill Cohen, OKIB Councilor commented, "The vision of the immersion school is not only to animate our Sqilxw language, culture and rights, but also to meet and exceed the provincial standards and learning outcomes" further he went on to acknowledge the people who were extremely driven in endorsing the vision regarding the development and implementation of the cultural immersion school.

"This project, for our children's benefit, relies on the determination, cooperation and support of Okanagan elders, parents, educators and community members. This will be the first wave of Okanagan speaking, culturally knowledgeable, confident, academically capable kids" stated Cohen. "The Cultural Immersion School provides an option for parents and children that does not exist anywhere else, place and project based learning, and the opportunity to excel in Okanagan language and knowledge as well as the provincial curriculum."

Today's historic event was witnessed by many OKIB leaders, parents, staff, elders, teachers, and interested members. The Okanagan Honour song was performed by Band Councilor Emery Robins; as well prayers and welcoming comments were made by our elders and leadership. (OKIB, 2006, press release)

*Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet* is the name of the Okanagan Indian Band cultural immersion school that is discussed in this thesis. The name was given to the school by elders Pauline Archachan and Madeline Gregoire, lead elders who have been involved with school development from the outset. *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet* translates as "The North Okanagan/Head of Okanagan Lake place for learning in the way/direction of our Indigenous

Okanagan/dream and spiral ways. Naming the project in our own language and the active vision implicit in its meaning is an expression of Indigenous organic transforming praxis: we are moving toward our *Sqilxw*/Okanagan ways within our territory and families by being *Sqilxw*/Okanagan, talking *Sqilxw*/Okanagan, dreaming *Sqilxw*/Okanagan, and "walking" *Sqilxw*/Okanagan.

A few years ago we had nothing, just an idea, and now in 2010 we have a cultural immersion school completing its fourth year of existence, twenty-three kids, caring, capable and committed staff, a developing language nest, a pool of elders, a very active and committed parents' group. . . and lots to do yet. The school vision that guides school development was informed by and facilitated through the *enowkinwixw* process in workshops involving parents and extended families. Those workshops are connected to earlier culturally informed workshops. In 2000, an En'owkin Centre project, *We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For*, through *enowkinwixw* workshops, critically examined the academic underachievement and high dropout rates of Okanagan children and youth in schools and established very clearly that Okanagan children and youth were generally not feeling loved or appreciated by the public school system and they were feeling invisible in terms of Okanagan content in the curriculum. Those were the main factors contributing to academic underachievement and a disproportionately high dropout rate (Cohen, 2001). Youth participating in a "We Are the Ones..." workshop at Okanagan Indian Band (OKIB) expressed the need and vision to have "Our Own Okanagan School,"

After, the 2000 workshops, a small working committee of parents was formed and it was determined that the aspiration for an Okanagan cultural immersion school was real and that OKIB community dynamics were such that any project to move forward would require the endorsement and support of OKIB Chief and Council. I made several proposal presentations to the OKIB Chief and Council to seek support for the school project. It became clear that the project was at a standstill. The majority of the Council of the time simply did not see the value or potential of an Okanagan school with our language and knowledge at the centre of learning and teaching relationships. First Nations political leaders, with some exceptions, were and are in the practice of reciting platitudes about the importance of language, culture and elders, but doing nothing of substance about it. So, I had to become a politician. I ran in the 2005 election. My platform was simple, "A cultural immersion school is my priority, so our children have the option to learn their own language and cultural knowledge as well as provincial curriculum and world knowledge. If elected I will work to make our school a reality" (excerpt from election platform). I was elected and then had a mandate to make the school happen through engagement with parents, families, elders, educators, and political leaders. A Band Council Resolution was passed delegating me to undertake the necessary work to make the school a reality. For the school to be successful and ongoing, it would have to be a collaborative project. A series of *enowkinwixw* informed meetings was held with interested parents. Parents and extended families' involvement has been a continuous, resilient, and relational dynamic both supporting and moving along school development and



ongoing growth. I worked with administration to find funding and get the paperwork done and find training and teaching resources for our community school. We had high aspirations for our children and through the determination of parents and extended families, our school became a reality.

The OKIB School benefitted from the experiences and programs of other successful Indigenous language immersion school projects in BC, New Zealand, and the US, particularly Chief Atahm School<sup>5</sup>, and Maori Schools. Support and resource networks were established regionally. The Paul Creek Language Association and Chief Atahm School provided training, curriculum resources, and ongoing support and encouragement. That support has been very useful, necessary, and much appreciated. The En'owkin Centre<sup>6</sup> has worked with the school to offer adult language classes so parents and community members can learn *Nsyilxcen* and receive Adult Dogwood (high school graduation) or University credits. The school project takes place in one Okanagan community, the Okanagan Indian Band, but it is very much influenced by and connected to other Okanagan and Indigenous communities, municipalities, BC and Canada, and especially other Indigenous transformative schooling projects.

The time spent with caring elders engaging in language and cultural knowledge recovery with the children through immersion in our language is proving to be very worthwhile. The kids from *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl*

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<sup>5</sup> Chief Atahm School (CAS) is a *Secwepemc* language immersion school located near Chase BC. CAS contributed to the development of NSS, and CAS is noted in Chapter 4.

<sup>6</sup> The En'owkin Centre is an Okanagan cultural, language and arts post-secondary institution located in Penticton BC.

*Sqilxwtet* have become well known ambassadors for the Okanagan Band and Nation by proudly understanding, speaking and singing our language.

#### **1.4 Questions and Answers About *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet***

Because *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet* is a new school and is an Indigenous school, in the contexts of colonization, internalized deficit, hegemonies, and transforming theory and praxis, there are many questions posed from many different viewpoints from Indigenous parents and families, and from academics and institutions. A question and answer format is a direct and informative means to show the types of questions that are repeatedly asked and to respond positively as to what NSS is about.

**Question: Is the school the same as public schools?** Answer: No, this school provides an Okanagan alternative with a language and cultural program not found in provincial or other schools. *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet* is the Okanagan's first cultural and language immersion school, and is in its fourth year of operation in 2009-2010. This school takes for granted that Okanagan language and knowledge are important, valid and necessary for our children's futures. This school is for parents who feel that *Sqilxw*/Okanagan knowledge is vital to their children's education. For parents who do not want Okanagan language and knowledge to be central and foundational to their children's schooling experience, the public and other schools are still there. This school is a

real example of self-determination by Okanagan families who chose to do something about their children's rights to their Okanagan language and Okanagan parents' rights to decide what and whose knowledge their children have access to.

**Question: Will my child fall behind academically at *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet*?** Answer: Children's success in school in terms of grades and skill development correlates directly to parent/family support and interest in their learning, whatever school they are in. NSS provides an extended family structured team approach to teaching. Our school in 2009-2010 has undergone a comprehensive external assessment by the First Nations Schools Association (FNSA) and has been certified to meet standards for BC Ministry of Education learning outcomes. FNSA evaluation team had very positive comments about our programs:

Teachers have developed considerable teaching units, materials, and resources from which to deliver effective educational programs and experiences . . . A key feature of the school is the **quality and number of staff** working at the two sites<sup>7</sup>. The low ratio of student to teacher is ensuring academic success for all involved. The school has maintained a consistent core of staff which has provided a stable, well organized, and visionary educational service that the OKIB is very proud of.

Growing "pains" have included temporarily locating students in two distinct sites, slowly acquiring the necessary materials, staff, policies, and organizational structures. However, again the dedication of the teachers is commendable. Making "a lot out of a little" is a skill that the teaching team has worked tirelessly to achieve and provide to First Nations learners.

The mission statement [NSS Vision] is embraced fully. The external assessors were deeply moved by the Okanagan language skills displayed by students, the

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<sup>7</sup> *Sn'c'c'amala?tn* is the OKIB daycare, preschool and Kindergarten, and is administratively the OKIB school. NSS is the Grade 1-7 elementary school program under the umbrella of *Sn'c'c'amala?tn*. They are currently in two sites, about 4 km apart.

positive social relationships between students, the staff, the commitment to take real learning risks, and the support provided to the school by the OKIB leadership and parents. (Ashdown & Mitzner, 2010, p. 39)

*At Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet* we have confidence in the accumulated knowledge and wisdom of our ancestors and our children are encouraged to learn and speak Okanagan and be proud and respectful of who they are. Cognitive, emotional and intellectual development is not separated; “Academics,” thinking skills, creative potential, and BC Ministry of Education prescribed learning outcomes (PLOs) are nurtured through the Okanagan immersion and English programs. Students get constant mental and physical exercise involving multiple senses through active language learning. The programs in English emphasize Language Arts, Math and hands-on Science learning. The kids who have left our school and have moved to public school have done well; in fact most have done exceptionally well and are on honour rolls and Principals’ lists. The evidence so far suggests that kids will not fall behind *Sama* schools academically, and the kids who remain in the school **will also know their language** and cultural knowledge. Indigenous kids who know their own language tend to have higher academic achievement in high school and post-secondary than Indigenous kids who know only English (Pease-Pretty On Top, 2009, p. 12): that is a goal we are on our way to achieving for the long term.

**Question: Why is the school in a little portable?** Answer: *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet* began with no money, no building, just an idea. It operates on limited program funding, proposal writing, and parent fundraising. Our language and cultural knowledge has grown with our kids in that little

portable and we are working to have four classrooms and a gymnasium/cultural centre added to *Sn'c'c'amala?tn* preschool-kindergarten. Currently the school is at maximum enrolment. Next year, more classroom space will be available for increased student numbers. Although our facility is small, we continue to work to develop and improve learning and teaching relationships to achieve the school vision for the children's benefit.

**Question: How long will it take to learn the language?** Answer:

Possibly a life-time. Many Indigenous immersion schools, for example Chief Atahm School, have full immersion programs from infancy to grade three. With seven years of immersion for three hours per day (and potentially twelve years when the language nest is fully operational) we are confident that children from our school will retain their language, do well in public high school and have access to a broad range of courses for career paths as well as access to sports and extracurricular programs. It is also important that language use expand in family and community contexts to recover, maintain, and evolve our language as a people so individuals can retain their language through active daily usage with others.

**Question: What are some benefits for kids at the immersion school?**

An opportunity to learn Okanagan language is the key benefit and that knowledge will be a foundation for strong Okanagan identity, confidence, awareness of responsibilities and rights. Place-based education is featured so the children become ecologically literate about the land that supports our survival, for example, the school garden, salmon restocking, eco-field trips with

elders and scientists. Our kids tend to be very confident in public. The staff to child ratio is high so children receive much support and encouragement. Parents and extended families are very involved in their children's education at the school and parents also contribute a substantial amount of cultural, academic, technical, and creative expertise to the kids. The kids receive a combination of language acquisition, Elders' knowledge and influence, cognitive and emotional development, and prescribed learning outcomes (PLOs).

**Question: What are some limitations of the school?** Answer: We do not have the budget and resources of larger schools. We currently have limited classroom space, and do not yet have a new building and gymnasium. We do not yet have the capacity to go beyond grade seven.

**What is a typical day like at the school?** Answer: The mornings, from 9 am to 12 noon are full immersion in Okanagan language, no English. The learning is active, participatory, and includes a daily fitness program. The afternoons from 1:50 pm to 3 pm are in English. Okanagan knowledge and practice is privileged and Okanagan language is included as much as possible in the afternoons by teachers and support staff.

We do not have all the answers. This is a project that continues to develop and improve. We learn from mistakes, avoid bad habits and do the best we can for the children, resulting in a praxis informed by kinship responsibility. So far, the kids have demonstrated that our efforts have been worthwhile. Fluent Okanagan elders and speakers who come to our school are amazed at the children's

language proficiencies. Herb Bonneau, for example, sat in for several morning sessions and said, “You know, I didn’t think the kids were going to be that good! I’m going to have to talk to other fluent speakers more to keep our language up” (personal communication, 2009).

We have also had elders, teachers, administrators, students, and leaders visit our school from communities and universities in the Okanagan and across Canada. Our school has hosted many visitors including the En’owkin- University of British Columbia Okanagan (UBCO) Language Teachers, a group of student teachers from Australia, UBCO Faculty of Education, and student teachers have volunteered. UBCO Faculty of Education Elementary Teacher Education Program has received requests from teacher education students who would like to do their practicum at our school. One education student completed his practicum with NSS and is currently teaching in Vernon. Our reputation is growing and many First Nations and institutions are looking to our school for leadership. It is remarkable that the United Nations designated 2008 the Year of Language Diversity and provincially, nationally and globally, language recovery is becoming a key issue. With all the interest in our little school we know we are doing many things well and there is still a lot to do. NSS has learned from other Indigenous schooling projects, and it is vital that NSS contributes to and expands the diverse network of Indigenous schooling projects in the Okanagan, regionally and globally.

## 1.5 Shared Struggle Globally

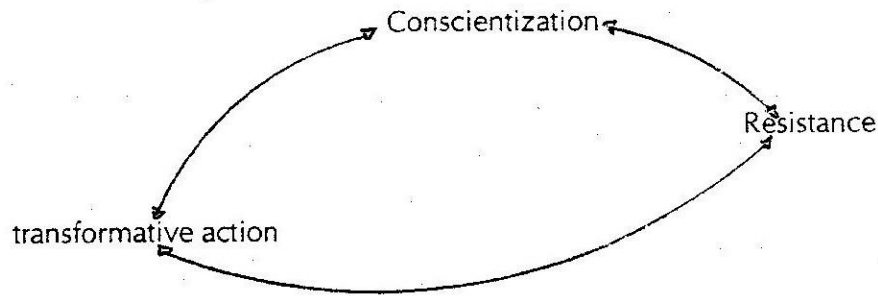
In the early 1970s, Shuswap (Secwepemc) visionary George Manuel articulated an Indigenous understanding of history and a vision, *The Fourth World*, where Indigenous values and Western science and technological paradigms merge into sustainable global relationships.

The Fourth World emerges as each people develops customs and practices that wed it to the land as the forest is to the soil, and as people stop expecting that there is some unnamed thing that grows equally well from sea to sea. As each of our underdeveloped nations begins to mature, we may learn to share this common bed without persisting in a relationship of violence and abduction. Such mutuality can come only as each respects the wholeness of the other, and also acknowledges his own roots. (1974, p. 7)

My research project is an Okanagan connection to the larger global Indigenous peoples' revitalization movement that has the potential to significantly change the world, and as John Mohawk reminds us in *Utopian Legacies*, we must be alert to not continue past cycles of resistance and oppression (2000) either internally or with other people and peoples. A realistic and pragmatic vision and strategy are necessary because the success of self-determining projects depends on the determination of the people involved. Because other Indigenous peoples' schooling projects have manifested positive change for their families and communities, we have the opportunity to learn from them. We must be alert and avoid creating new forms of colonial domination and avoid factionalizing notions of "us and them" within our own communities and world communities because these tend to perpetuate tensions and conflicts and nurture intolerance. In that sense, First Nations are microcosms of the issues and challenges for all peoples at the global level.



Maori scholar and transformative educational leader, Graham Hingangaroa Smith brings much to the global Indigenous movement with Maori knowledge and experience, and the relational, inclusive and cyclical expression of organic Indigenous Transformative Praxis (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1 Indigenous Transformative Praxis**

A further point here is that individuals and groups enter the cycle from any position and do not necessarily (in reflecting on Maori experience with Kaupapa Maori interventions) have to start at the point of ‘conscientization’. In other words, individuals have been caught up in transformative praxis (e.g. taking their children to Kohanga Reo), and this has led to conscientization and participation in resistance. (Smith, 1998, p. 16)

Conventional Transformative Praxis occurs by 1) Conscientization –becoming aware of history, hegemony, colonization, “what really happened” etc, 2) Resistance – decolonization, protesting, banking knowledge, going to court etc, and then 3) Transformative Praxis – taking action to “transform” the undesirable conditions of oppression, colonization etc. In the NSS project, I could have become absorbed in conscientization – researching and studying Indigenous and minority language revitalization projects, studying more critical theorists, linguists, ethnographers, anthropologists, read more and more articles and deconstructed

this and that, and so on, but Okanagan language and knowledge would have continued on the fast track to extinction. At some point Indigenous scholars/leaders have to stop looking around and get to work in the communities with community people who also possess substantial knowledge. Okanagan knowledge informed the creation of *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet* from idea to its current phase. Okanagan knowledge, values and ways are also valid academic knowledge. The task is to gather it up, try it out and see if it works, if it has current and future relevance and application. Along the way we can share what we learned by doing, reflecting, and continuing to learn and share through action and expanding relationships. That is the challenge of what has become transforming praxis. Smith both takes on the task and demonstrates it through action that if self-determination is the destination, we must be self-determining to get there (which he has stated at several public lectures). Smith is nurturing and manifesting real change through the vision of a “critical mass of conscientised indigenous scholars to provide the leadership to significantly transform the conditions of Indigenous communities in the wake and continuous grip of colonisation.” (2008, p. 16) This thesis and the language and knowledge gathered and expressed is a synthesis of Okanagan, Indigenous and Western knowledge and experience, a lot of it is learned the hard way, and it is my response to Smith’s challenge when he spoke in the Okanagan at the World’s Indigenous Peoples’ Conference and echoed the Food Chiefs, “If the answers are within us, what are we doing about it?” (2004) Smith also had other connected challenges in multiple sites, such as making space in the University

for Indigenous knowledge, and I will address those as well in the following chapters.

## **1.6 Culturally Informed Research Question: What Will You Do For the People To Be?**

The fundamental culturally informed research question for this thesis is the same one that the Okanagan Food Chiefs are asked in the *Captikwl* story *How Food Was Given*: “What will you do for the people to be?” I had to ask myself, “Do I know enough to interpret Okanagan knowledge forms, and then theorize my understanding into a transforming praxis?” After all, I am not a fluent speaker or elder, so it could be questioned as to whether I had enough smarts to do this (and of course it was). What I do know is that we all need to do what we can. To paraphrase Freire, “Everyone knows something, no one knows everything” (1970). I have read every *Captikwl* story I could find. I heard, and talked about *Captikwl* stories, from and with many Okanagan elders, and a good number of elders with plenty of cultural smarts took the time to explain things to me, answer questions, and not lose hope or their patience with me. Many Okanagan elders and knowledge keepers were instrumental, through their encouragement and support, to my formal post-secondary education. My granddad, as soon as I finished high school would continually suggest I “should go to school.” Gus Gottfriedsen, my Uncle Walter Archachan, Frank and Mary Gottfriedsen, the Allison family, the Gabriel family, and others who I will note throughout this thesis encouraged and kept my spirits up while I endured a “Western academic supremacist indoctrination process—to get a piece of paper, and hoped I would

learn a few useful things in that process. However, I learned that Indigenous Peoples can engage in dialogue in the universities and create their own intellectual, theoretical, and epistemological spaces. All of us carry our belief systems into the classrooms, and through respectful engagement and sharing, generate understanding and appreciation for the diversity of peoples and cultures: new ideas form, paradigm shifts occur, networks expand. Webs are created” (Cohen, 2001, p.1).

Currently, although Indigenous peoples have made substantial gains in terms of presence and symbol, Indigenous aspirations for knowledge continue to be a struggle for space and legitimacy in the university, and contradictory tensions exist for the Indigenous researcher in his or her own or other Indigenous communities .

I have always felt uneasy admitting to First Nations people that I am in a Ph. D. Program because they may associate me with the effects of academic disrespect discussed earlier. However, I have an additional concern. First Nations people are encouraged by Elders and local community to “get more education.” But becoming educated in mainstream institutions can create a chasm between the university educated one and others who were not educated this way.”(Archibald, 1997, p.67)

Dr Jo-ann Archibald in her commentary about the unease between First Nations people and knowledge and University knowledge and research notes the advice West Coast elder, Ellen White gives to youth:

To young people my grandparents always said, “You’ll do all right if your hands are both full to overflowing.” One hand could be filled with the knowledge of your ancestors. You could study the ancestors, but without a deep feeling of communication with them it would be surface learning and surface talking. Once you have gone into yourself and have learnt very deeply, appreciate it, and relate to it very well, everything will come very easily. They always said that if you

have the tools of your ancestors and you have the tools of the White man, his speech, his knowledge, his ways, his courts, his government, you'll be able to deal with a lot of things at his level. You'll not be afraid to say anything you want. A lot of people keep back—they say, 'Oh, I might hurt them—I might say something.' When your hands are both full with the knowledge of both sides, you'll grow up to be a great speaker, great organizer, great doer, and a helper of your people. (cited in David Neel, 1992, p.108)

Collectively the words and actions of my elders and relatives resonate with Ellen White's advice. I am connected through kinship to virtually every Okanagan elder past and present, and those connections extend through my children, so I have a responsibility to do and share what I can. The advances Indigenous peoples have made in the academy, to "help the people," must express complementarity and synthesis with the people. We can theorise all we want, publish books, and all that, but unless theory and research, the intellectual and conceptual tools, are put to work organically for transformation, university research will remain a cooptation and acculturation process. "Indigenous and Western researchers have followed separate but potentially very compatible paths in their searches for knowledge; both gather, examine, analyze, synthesize and interpret ideas, works, and phenomena from within cultural contexts. One difference I have noted is a Western tendency to look for understanding in how it works, whereas an Indigenous tendency is to look for understanding in how we are related and connected. But the two epistemological worlds are quickly becoming the same world" (Cohen, 2001, p. 8). It is the same world, but how can academic research theories, methods and institutions converge with Indigenous peoples' knowledge and ways given that much of the colonization and cultural invasion and subsequent resistance by Indigenous peoples has occurred in the university? It

was clear that no one institution, individual or group (Indigenous or not) could make language and cultural knowledge recovery and our own school happen. It would take the cooperative and coordinated efforts of elders, educators, administrators, extended families, and political support. My role was to facilitate the animation of Okanagan knowledge and ways through respectful learning and teaching relationships as a co-learner because I am certainly not the expert. The approach and methods at the simplest level have been to try to conduct myself informed by and in accord with Okanagan principles and frameworks of leadership and responsibility—‘to know my *Captikwl*,’ and that has been very helpful in terms of theoretical and practical “tools” to apply, because this little school project became very complex in a hurry and I found myself in the midst of tensions between colonising hegemonies and transformative praxis in multiple sites of struggle: schooling, language and culture, relationships with elders, band politics, credentials and qualifications . . .

## **1.7 Spider’s Web: Okanagan Organic Theory and Praxis**

This thesis is also meant to contribute to the collection of Okanagan literature, and the expanding webs involving the expression of Indigenous thought and experience globally. I acknowledge Dr. Jeannette Armstrong for her leadership in terms of what has been written so far. Armstrong founded the *En’owkin International School of Writing*, a place for aspiring Indigenous writers. A large part of Okanagan written theory to date has been her work and her understandings substantially inform my work. She will be noted often through this thesis, including a section on Okanagan organic leaders. *The Native Creative*

*Process*, a collaborative work by Armstrong and architect, Douglas Cardinal is particularly useful because of the combination of Okanagan-Indigenous principles expressed as essential elements to creating structures and/or relationships, that like the spider's web, dynamically balance creativity and survival.

To the Native, balance is a way of describing how change, which is the natural outcome of any creative process, can be brought about by humans in a deliberate, mutually beneficial pattern as an enrichment process rather than one which is competitive and therefore occurs as a destructive force . . . a reminder to be aware of and to be protective of the sensitivity and the relationship between all beings and things, including us. The spider's web is a physical construct which many native cultures draw on symbolically to imbed this principle in their storytelling as an expression of the creative process concerned with the connectedness of all things. (Armstrong & Cardinal, 1991, p.18)

I have had a long fascination with webs, particularly after I read *Stones and Switches*, a novel by the late *Miqmaw* author, Lorne Simon. I went to the *En'owkin International School of Writing* with Lorne in 1992. Over the years, I have often quoted and applied the story, "Webs," in my teaching roles and in my writing. "Webs" is a story, within stories, from the larger narrative.

There is a popular horror story told amongst us of a certain spider who once tried a most unusual experiment. He decided to construct three webs in a row. He planned to build the outside ones first and the inside one last. This way he figured the outside ones would shelter the inside one. The webs to the front and the back of the inside web would stop all the flies coming in from both directions. The central web would remain undisturbed and he could contemplate on this web for as long as he pleased. This he did. And when he had completed the project, he set himself on the corner of the inside web and observed. He studied the fascinating weave at his leisure. He sat there for hours and hours and great mysteries were gradually revealed to him. The wonders, however, that the web disclosed eventually trapped him just as surely as webs entangle flies.

He became totally consumed by the outpouring of knowing and he forgot himself. He forgot that he was a spider. He forgot that he had eight legs and a breast full of

filament. All the knowing of himself vaporized. Just as he thought he was to crack the riddle of the universe, a swallow came by and plucked him from his reveries.

I can never forget that story. And sometimes I can't help but think that webs are unnatural. If knowing can only come by fits and starts, then webs are illusions. This art form generates a false sense of completion and harmony. It deceptively suggests to us that it contains the all. In truth, knowing is not so neat and compartmental. Knowing is more like dew. It is everywhere, but it only gathers into little drops that plop off boughs one by one. Yet webs are not altogether deceptive. After all, they elevate the act of survival. Somehow webs prevent life from ever degenerating into ugliness. (Simon, 1995, p.303)

*Stones and Switches* sparked my imagination in the *P'ax* sense and got me thinking about stories within stories, stories as interconnected feedback loops, how Indigenous knowledge stories are told and retold over generations and have become complex systems of evolving knowledge. The novel provides many insights into an Indigenous narrative form, in this case *Miqmaw*, informed by traditional storytelling practices.

The *Webs* story has been unforgettable. It has influenced much of what I have learned, taught or written, and I acknowledge Lorne for his talent and culturally informed prose. Subsequently I wrote "The Spider's Web: Creativity and Survival in Dynamic Balance," (2001) an essay that was written in a narrative style to mimic the interconnected webs of Okanagan *Captikwl* stories in its organization and content. It represents my initial modest contribution to Indigenous organic transforming theory, specifically Okanagan theory and praxis, as a means to transform unsatisfactory learning, teaching and knowledge relationships into something better for Okanagan children and learners. Essentially, it was my report on the emergence of Okanagan radical pedagogy.



The fundamental question for this weaver-educator is how Okanagan language, and subsequently Okanagan world view, culture, and people will survive. (Cohen, 2001)

It is now nine years since I wrote that little essay, and my fundamental question and my fascination with webs and the traditional Okanagan *Captikwl* story system, has not changed. In this thesis, however, I share my expanded and more mature understanding of these concepts as an organic intellectual and educational practitioner who has acquired more meaningful experience in multiple sites of struggle. This thesis is connected to the realization of an Okanagan Cultural Immersion Elementary School, *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet* (NSS). The school project developed with the fundamental goals of providing *Sqilxw* children an option and means to attain excellence in Okanagan language and cultural knowledge, and excellence in provincial curriculum and world knowledge.

Through the expansion, clarification and praxis of dynamic and transforming Okanagan and Indigenous concepts and frameworks introduced in the *Spiders' Web* article, particularly the *Sqilxwlcawt* web of learning model, this thesis is my response to Smith's "Call to Theorize Transformation," (2006, p. 5). I introduce fundamental Okanagan concepts and frameworks, *Captikwl* stories, and my connected narratives. I then continuously re-connect those narratives to the content and experiential application of Okanagan knowledge in sections and chapters of this thesis. Okanagan ways and theorizing therefore inform the research, plans and relationships throughout.

There is a need to meaningfully focus on the issue of transformation—to understand more profoundly the nuances of developing, initiating, and attaining transformation. One of the key initiatives by Maori is a strategic reinvestment in theoretical understandings and insights to assist their social, economic and cultural transformation. While there has always been an emphasis on practical ideas and strategies, they have often been vulnerable to being surface and fleeting initiatives. . . . This movement to indigenous theorizing is not a rejection of ‘western theorizing’ or of non-aboriginal knowledge forms it is viewed as the addition of an indigenous set of intellectual ‘tools’ into the total ‘tool-box’ of theories generally available in the academy. (Smith, 2008, p.10-11)

This thesis is my attempt to present and merge the journey with the destination: the process of theorizing Okanagan transforming pedagogy with the recovery of Okanagan ways of knowing, and fluency in our language for our children. This research is both a reconnection to strands of Okanagan knowledge disrupted by colonization, and a continuation of Okanagan knowledge that has informed our cultural survival through the era of colonization and resistance. The continuing knowledge is inclusive of Western and/or scientific knowledge that complements the evolving socially and ecologically sustainable Okanagan cultural relationships, and will be shared within and beyond Okanagan knowledge networks (aay).

The “spider web” of relations ensures that the welfare of the group is the most important thing in Aboriginal societies. The value of wholeness tells the members that, if all do their parts, then social order will be the result. It is as though everybody is a “cop” and nobody is a “cop.” If the whole is maintained, then beauty, harmony and balance result. (Little Bear, 2000, p. 84)

Within the Okanagan people, there is much to learn from each other, and that learning is very much connected to larger Indigenous and global relationships. Everybody is a learner and everybody is a teacher is perhaps prerequisite to “everybody is a “cop” and nobody is a “cop.”

## 1.8 *Sqilxwlcawt*: Okanagan Transforming Theory

The vision I share is a weave or synthesis of story, history, poetry, epistemology, and creativity: a web of learning and knowing. “I present my ideas as one of the many foxes in the Okanagan, gathering up the bits of skin, bone, and hair of coyote. When enough is gathered we can breathe on the assembled pile and Senklip, coyote, will awaken, yawn, and say, “Oh, I must have closed my eyes for a few minutes” and carry on as if he’d had only a brief nap.” (Cohen, 2002, p. 2) The brief nap has lasted 100 years, the time span from the earlier eras of Okanagan cultural vitality and dominant cultural modes of living; when the Okanagan lived our lives within Okanagan territory informed by Okanagan ways and responsibilities, to eras of disease epidemics that decimated our populations, repressive and racist legislation and policies, to the current era of struggle for our identity, human rights, evolving territorial knowledge, practices, and sustainability. The understandings of the world that I share in this thesis are influenced by many years of visits and conversations with elders and or fluent speakers—people with Okanagan educations—about the concepts and to matters connected to the concepts. I do not consider myself an expert on Okanagan knowledge. I am Okanagan and connected to strands of knowledge and practice that have continued from thousands of years of sustainable Okanagan governance and stewardship.

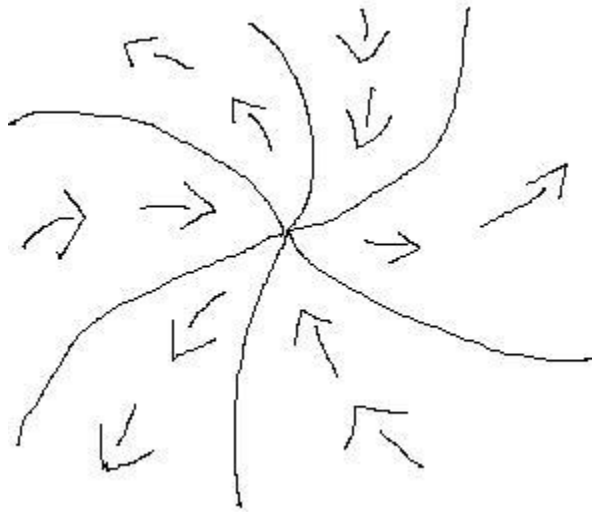
*Sqilxw* is the Okanagan word for ourselves and translates as “the dream in a spiral. We recognize our individual lives as the continuance of human dreams.

We know our lives to be the tools of the vast human dream mind which is continuing on into the future.” (Armstrong, 1991, p. 111) My interpretation of the spiral was influenced by a conversation in 1984 with Okanagan elder Mary Archachan. She told me, “You have to be very careful about how you act, what you do, and what your thoughts are towards other people. You can help or hurt other people with your physical actions. People know that, but your thoughts and feelings are also powerful and you can help or hurt people that way as well.” I often recall her voice and her insights resonated in later life experiences and situations as my responsibilities to those in my sphere of influence and responsibility became clearer, particularly when it came time to stop talking about our own Okanagan cultural immersion school and make it happen collaboratively, a *Sqilxw* version of Participatory Action Research.

Participatory Action Research can be understood to be a self-reflective spiral composed of multiple sequences of reflecting, planning, acting, and observing. . . . *This process is, in effect, the method.* As a part of a given project/study, the researcher is very much in the middle of the lives of the people involved. She or he must be prepared to care deeply and personally, be confused and frustrated, and be quiet when necessary (Maguire, 1993). The researcher must have both an open and critical attitude. Building from that attitude, the PAR project may quickly take on a life of its own or take years to develop under profoundly challenging conditions. . . . a cumulative knowledge generating process that ultimately became participatory and action oriented. (Kidd and Kral, 2005, p. 189)

Each of us has been shaped and influenced by people, experiences, events and environments in our lives and we in turn influence and affect everyone and everything in our social, cultural and ecological worlds. This understanding is expressed in the following *Sqilxw* diagram (Figure 2). What we responsibly envision, we can achieve by gathering old and current information, talking about

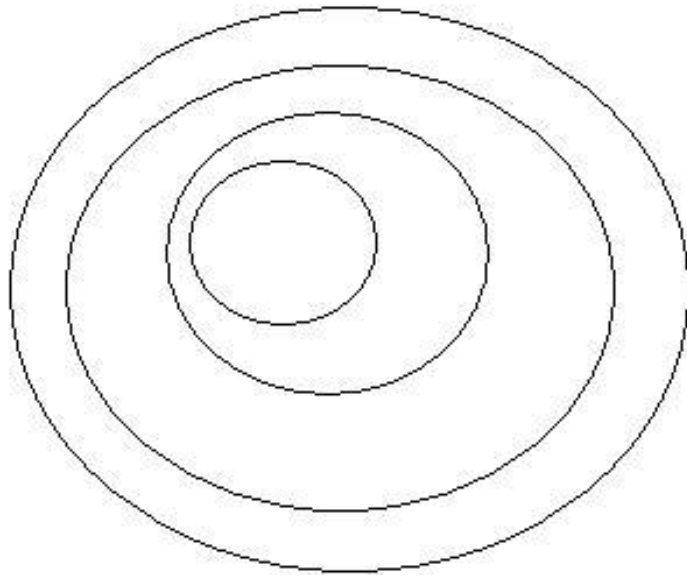
it with elders, families and youth, and generating new understanding to be actively tried out and tested. If the new understanding works for us, and the people to be, the coming generations, then it can be ritualized into practice.



**Figure 2 *Sqilxw* Diagram**

*Kwulencuten*, a term often used in translation as “God” or “Creator”, was explained to me by the late Chief Barnett Allison. He said, “*Kwulencuten* doesn’t really mean God, it means everything, all of creation! You, me, the land, trees, stars, that truck and shed, everything! That is always moving and changing. The old people, when I was a boy, would always get up before dawn and greet all of creation, kind of like a prayer but more of a greeting or welcome. Then they would say *kuks sxelpina ku xwelxwelt!* It means everything we need is here and it is good to come alive with the new day. Those were really tough times back then but our people made it” (Personal communication, 1990). The tough times Barnett speaks of included disease epidemics that filled graveyards, repressive legislation and enforcement—the historical barrage of assimilation policies and

attempted cultural genocide. Not only is everything we need here, the knowledge and practice of 'everything we need is here' has, through the continued realization of our visions, responsibilities and aspirations for our children, been here for thousands of years. *Kwulencuten* is a conceptual metaphor expressed as the one-ness who re-creates oneself continuously. When I envisioned *Kwulencuten*, I pictured a vast, continuously changing and evolving universe. Within that universe is the nation, the Okanagan people. Within the nation are communities, and within the communities are extended families, the fundamental social structural dynamic (social "unit" is the commonly used term but it does not fit very well) of the Okanagan people. At the centre of the nation, communities and extended families are the children. This is suggested by the Okanagan Food Chiefs whose leadership responsibilities are framed by the question, "What will you do for the people to be?"



**Figure 3 *Kwulencuten* Diagram**

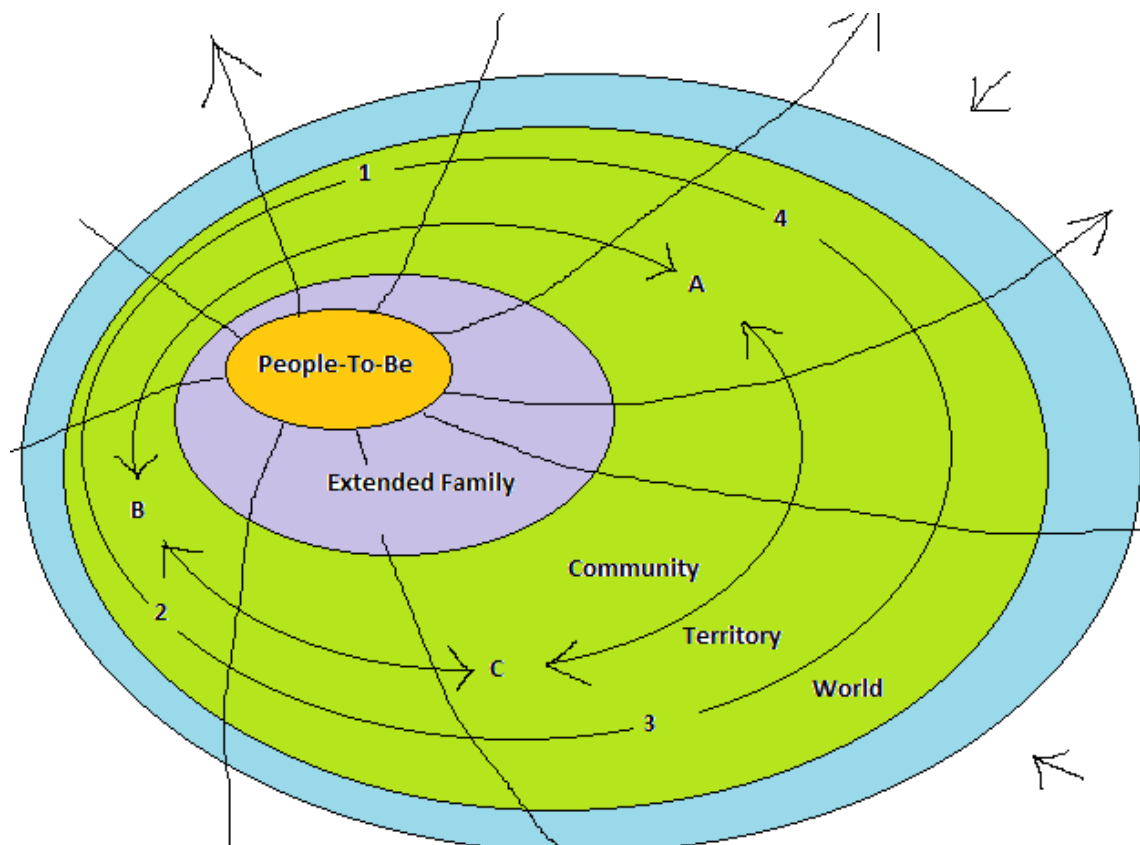
Because colonization has been a global practice of conquest and oppression, many Indigenous peoples and individuals have been disconnected or disrupted from the continuous flow of their respective systems of knowledge and cultural identities that tie them to their territories. “So long as there is a single thread that links us to the ways of our grandfathers, our lives are strong. However thin and delicate that thread may be, it will support the weight of a stronger cord that will tie us securely to the land” (Manuel, 1974, p.47). The evolutionary dynamic of *Kwulencuten* (Figure 3) synthesizes with the *Sqilxw* spiral, a symbol of organic interrelationships, and becomes the spinning of webs, similar in a societal/cultural sense to “creative process . . . a result of the interplay among all the previous elements yet it is the process itself, as well as the product. . . It is organic in that it emerges sequentially from each previous influence and existential in that it proceeds from and to each moment in time.”

(Kenny, 1989, p.108) The spider's web reflects creativity, awareness, structure, and symbolizes the interplay between creativity and survival, which in essence is the Okanagan way of living, the *Sqilxwlcawt*. (Cohen, 2001, p.5) Each spider web is also different, and different species of spiders create different webs suited to their territorial ecology. So it is with the diversity of Okanagan and Indigenous traditional knowledge systems which are ecologically informed relationship patterns that tied, and tie, each people securely to their respective territorial ecologies and were/are expressed through cultural practices, more simply put, the way Indigenous peoples lived their everyday lives. Many of those threads and connections have been severed or diminished. Our survival however, can potentially be informed by thousands of years of accumulated wisdom from our ancestors and *Tmixw*, and it is certain that we are those strands, and it is in our children's interests to reconnect and strengthen those strands, something spiders do continuously. "Survival, when it is strictly only survival, is an ugly thing. Life is to know splendour and beauty. Living is an art form. I am immersed in art. I am forever spinning art from out of my flesh. My purpose in spinning webs is no longer merely to catch flies to eat. There is much more to it now." (Simon, 1999, p.210)

With the legitimacy of Okanagan knowledge taken for granted, I began to doodle and sketch and the *Sqilxwlcawt* model emerged as a tangible two-dimensional model on paper. Informed by learning, "with the people" as Freire would put it, more *Captikwl* stories, concepts and metaphors, more Okanagan language and Indigenous critical theory: I combined the *Sqilxw* diagram with the



*Kwulencuten* diagram: and the result was a spider's web that became the *Sqilxwlcawt* model (Figure 4), a conceptual representation of traditional Okanagan society that could be applied as a radical pedagogical framework. The *Sqilxwlcawt* model illustrates how knowledge, influence from the world, and collective responsibility resonate inward and outward through generational practice, and how forms of knowledge are positioned and organically produced and reproduced through the extended family sphere.



**Figure 4 *Sqilxwlcawt* Model**

The concentric circles can be considered dissipative structures; the spiralling lines from the web's centre also express the interconnections and dissipative

features. Within each circle is a self-organizing system nested within the larger eco-cultural systems. The Okanagan Food Chiefs 1) Berry 2) Bitterroot 3) Bear and 4) Salmon from *Captikwl* stories metaphorically place children, rather than the individual, at the centre as the collective responsibility of extended family, community and nation. The collective responsibility is balanced by interdependent and cooperative relationships between 1) youth, 2) mothers 3) elders, and 4) fathers. Tensions between groups and individuals are mediated by collective responsibility to the People to Be, the children. It is grounded in Okanagan epistemology, and complemented by “The Circle of Courage,” a conceptual model of Native American philosophy of child development with, “belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity [1-4 respectively] as the central values—the unifying theme—of positive cultures for education” (Brendtro & Brokenleg, 1990, pp.35-36). The model of Indigenous transformative praxis<sup>8</sup> offered by Graham Smith also fits easily into the diagram A) Resistance B) Transformative Action and C) Conscientization which can occur in any sequence, or all at once. This Okanagan language-based conceptual model embodies sustainability and exposes short-term economic gains at the core of current educational practices. Consider *Sqilxwlcawt* a pedagogy, with the community, including the schools, as the parents, and the education system becomes an act of love.

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<sup>8</sup>Transformative praxis conventionally follows a linear sequence: conscientization, resistance, and then transformative action. In Indigenous societies, involvement in transformative praxis can occur in any sequence, concurrently or all at once.

Teaching and learning occurred through the extended family. Children learned what they needed to know to take on their roles and responsibilities through the extended family. Their teachers were the people who loved them and cared for them the most, their parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles. The learner-teacher relationships were long term. Areas and specializations of knowledge were often the domain of families. Political leadership, for example, would be the responsibility of an extended family and the hereditary political chiefs would come from that family. The Okanagan hereditary chief system was very different from the Western patriarchal notions of authoritarian power and the oldest male child is the next in line to the throne. The role of chief was not a role of absolute or coercive power. When a chief was getting old and looked to pass on the leadership role to a younger person, “Generally, the next chief would come from the chief’s family. It could be one of his kids, a nephew or an adopted kid” (Chief Barnett Allison, 1990, personal communication). A chief would have a few candidates and would choose someone whose individual potential, personality and aptitude most suited the responsibilities. “The Chief represented the guarantee that the *syilx* will carry on. The Chief represented good decisions of the people while protecting the land and natural laws. It is a responsibility to balance human needs with the natural laws.” (Okanagan Tribal Council, 1994, p. 9) Late elder Johnny Archachan provided another example with arranged marriages. He said, “That’s *kinuschen*, the older people in one family would arrange that for one of their young ones. They would talk to other families about who would be a good match.” (personal communication, 1989) Chief Barnett

Allison expanded with, “The older ones in a family, they’re the ones who knew their kids the best, their personalities, interests, and they would talk to other families to find someone that would really get along with their son or daughter. When they found a good match they would start gift exchanges, and that would continue until the children were old enough to live together and then there would be bigger exchanges of horses, equipment, maybe land” (Personal communication, 1990). Barney told me that the young woman always had the option to say no if she did not like her potential husband, but usually the older ones made very compatible matches. Kinship and economic relationships were established, and there were few separations or divorces. Both Johnny and Barney said that divorces were rare but if a woman wanted to divorce a man she would, “pack his things up and put them outside the house and that was the divorce.” The father and both extended families would continue to be responsible for the children. The point of these examples is to show that teaching, learning and social relationships occurred through extended family structures, were long term, and relied on the teachers collectively knowing and loving the learners responsibly from infancy and throughout their lives. The learners were in a role where their personal gifts, strengths and abilities were appreciated and nurtured by especially caring teachers, their relatives. The extended family networks looked out for and prepared the children for later roles and responsibilities in their lives, an expression of relational responsibilities.

## **1.9 The Spiders' Web Expanded: More Strands Connected**

The two dimensional conceptual model eventually turned into an interactive “web.” I was in a Master of Education organizational theory course (1999) and we had to do a presentation. I was thinking about families working together and pictured a hide tanning process. Many people participate in the process from when a deer is hunted and harvested to when the hide is tanned. The hair is scraped off the hide then it is soaked, wrung out and stretched before it is put on a frame. To stretch it, everyone around, including adults, kids, and grandparents, hold the hide around the edges and pull and give until it takes shape and is stretched and flattened to prepare it for the tanning frame. The image of the group stretching and giving part of the tanning process sparked the idea of a spider web for my presentation. With the process of the participants’ holding, pulling and giving together in mind, I constructed a spider’s web, which became a physical apparatus that makes tangible and experiential the dynamics of community organization. The apparatus is simply an elastic web with five concentric sections to represent children or the people to be, extended family, community, nation, and world. There is a baby rattle at the centre of the web to represent the People to Be, our collective children and future generations.

This tangible “web” makes concrete an understanding that collectively we hold our children and their futures in our hands and through us our children/future generations are connected to a social, cultural and territorial ecology and past, present, and future sustainability. The web is an effective symbol and apparatus that embodies the dynamic balance between creativity and survival, and that we

hold the means and the responsibility for our children in our hands collectively. We influence, and are influenced by the actions of others, and the economic and social structures and relationships we create, transform, or go along with ultimately are about our survival. Our children will inherit all of that whether we take responsibility for it or not. The web also manifests the potential of dynamic tension between parts of society that are often in conflict, the youth and elders for example. Through the participation of holding the web strands, this tension is experienced, acknowledged and understood as a natural and vital dynamic rather than as merely oppositional factions. The complementary aspect of the web is that different individuals, and by extension, different groups or societies in a people, nation or world, share connections and responsibilities to the means for survival, and make it clear that leadership, cooperation and dialogue are essential to accomplish meaningful change for our children's benefit. I have used this web to facilitate many Okanagan and Indigenous courses, workshops, and community meetings to make tangible and experiential the dynamics of community organization. Through the process of holding the web, the participants understand that in order for our children to survive and experience less conflict, racism and intolerance, there must be appropriate tension, compromise, and complementarity, amongst the quadrants. We are the ones to do that. In traditional Okanagan society a dynamic balance was maintained through the networks of relationships, responsibilities and collectively nurtured values, connections to place, family and community, ideas and visions, and actions.

The web has also been useful to conceptualize the effects of the residential schools. Indigenous children were removed from the centre, of extended family and clan structures embedded in their territorial ecosystems, by colonial agents. The children were removed from the central place in their extended families and communities where they were literally surrounded by people who loved them, taught them, and looked out for them. They were placed in residential schools where they were forced to learn a new language and had to survive in a totalitarian institution meant to eradicate their Indigenous thoughts, languages, cultural aspirations, responsibilities, and identities. Research and programs have often focussed on residential school survivors, and most of it has been misdirected and co-opted by Department of Indian Affairs and the Federal government who intentionally or not, put the focus on “survivors” through “healing” and “therapy” programs.

In doing its part, the Therapeutic State sets up its version of the Land Claims Commission. “Come in one at a time and show us your scar; if you can prove how you got it, we’ll cover it up with makeup for you. Remember, **you** don’t tell **us** what it is you want, **we’ll** tell **you** what you’re going to get. . . And that part of the Beast that is caring and therapeutic casts a glance around, and **quite properly** sees the pain and suffering it has brought about. But it does not see **that** it has brought it about, nor in a world where all the mirrors have been covered up can the beast turn its gaze upon itself. It does not see and does not care to understand its own pathology. (Chrisjohn, 1997, p.104-107)

The survivors did not create residential schools or forcibly remove generations of themselves from their families’ love, knowledge and influence. The survivors did not commit genocide. The intellectual positioning of the residential schools and the location of the problem (the Indian student) has not changed much currently in public schools. Residential schools’ positioning was that Western knowledge

(and religion) is supreme and Indigenous knowledge systems and cultures are bad and need to be destroyed. Now, Aboriginal kids are considered to be at a disadvantage because of their cultural ways which need to be eliminated so Indians can be “successful” and “close the gap” with the mainstream public. This very similar assimilation process is made less painful by the “process of ‘mentioning.’ Here, limited and isolated elements of the history and culture of less powerful groups are included in the texts,” (Apple, 2000, p. 53) for example, Aboriginal contributions to Canadian society. There has not been much research until lately about the impacts to Indigenous communities and families through the residential school era. For generations many Indigenous extended families did not have their own children to love, nurture, care for and teach, all of which would have occurred as a natural process in the contexts of their own languages and territories. *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet* is a project where Okanagan extended families are repositioning their children in the centre of the *Sqilxwlcawt* and not waiting for anyone else to do it for them. The Kura Kaupapa Maori Schools and the Secwepemc at Chief Atahm School, as well as Mohawk, Hawaiian, Piegan and others, have demonstrated the positive effects of proactively asserting control of the knowledge that their children have access to. Our kids deserve that much too!

I have facilitated sessions using the web throughout the Okanagan and BC communities, several times in Aotearoa (New Zealand), within Indian Band halls, elementary school classrooms to Ph D seminars and the web has physically connected children, students, adults, leaders, academics and elders,



Indigenous and non-Indigenous, from many different backgrounds. The web, a creative construct with many real and symbolic connections to knowledge, survival, sustainability, and the ecology, has been a guiding metaphor in my conceptual understanding of Okanagan knowledge, critical theory, and more importantly, organic Indigenous transforming theory, praxis, and reflective praxis. Many former students tell me that the web workshop was a significant and memorable shift in their learning and perspective, and some are conducting their own classrooms and workshops with webs they have put together. The point is not to brag about creating something but rather the opposite: the learning experiences and people in my background converged to make it possible for me to have this idea. *Tupel'* or spider created the web and that genius emerged from creation. It is up to us to notice the knowledge that we are a part of and learn from it. That is the *Sqilxwlcawt*, or Indigenous way.

I share these web experiences to show how knowledge and understanding comes from many diverse experiences and sources, from Okanagan, Indigenous, non-Indigenous, community, academic and non-academic sources. In the Okanagan context, and in this thesis, Okanagan stories, concepts, and frameworks of knowledge and praxis do not have an “original” author or source other than the collective memory of the Okanagan people.

To our people, knowledge does not belong to us; we are simply carriers of it. We use the word *P'ax*, which literally translated says, “to spark so as to cause to light’ as in striking a match, to mean to become mind-aware as a human. Knowledge is understood to be only a starting point for the human. (Armstrong, 1991, p.66)

There are of course storytellers, many storytellers, (and authors in the contemporary sense) and in this thesis, I reference and acknowledge them as much as possible. The web was a starting point for me in that sense as I started applying it to facilitate learning in courses and seminars based on Okanagan and Indigenous knowledge and perspectives; I was not the expert, but a co-learner with Freire resonating again that “Everyone knows something. No one knows everything” (1993). This was obvious when, for example, highly regarded Okanagan Elders, Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and a few professors enrolled in courses or attended workshops, and were learning new perspectives and contributing knowledge to the group. That many individually, and certainly collectively, came with more knowledge and wisdom than I did not matter as the collective potential of collaborative thought and experience emerged as more relevant, because much more knowledge, experience and insight were cooperatively activated. Okanagan *Captikwl* knowledge, through my learning process of reconnecting to strands of surviving knowledge, was proving itself in courses and projects. Coyote and Fox re-emerged to symbolize continuously evolving Okanagan knowledge: experiential, relational and ecological wisdom.

This thesis and its research, the expression of new knowledge and understanding, is not mine alone because it is connected to and informed by generations of peoples and the ecology. In a world of diverse peoples and knowledge systems, it is a snapshot of my understanding and I am aware that knowledge continues to evolve and be used for good and bad. The *Captikwl* system (Coyote and Fox, *How Food Was Given, Coyote Challenges God, for*

*example*), *Kwulencuten*, all of creation, everything, the one who creates oneself continuously; *Sqilxw*, the dream in a spiral, the vision unfolding, coming to be in a spiral or circular way; Personification; *P'ax* the spark; Indigenous theory and praxis—all of these concepts and stories became interconnected webs within webs.

Since I was a child, Elders and community members took time to invite me into their lives to share some of their knowledge and experience and provide encouragement. People in my extended family and community recognized that I had a few things going for me, in spite of some of the destructive behaviours I was stubbornly engaging in, so they became mentors. No special relationship is claimed i.e. “hereditary chief or knowledge keeper.” Similar mentoring occurred for many others. I now understand those experiences as part of a continuing Okanagan pedagogical practice that sustained Okanagan societies and relationships to Okanagan territory as part of a larger social and cultural world and ecology and the extensive and complex networks of relationships. My contextual positioning relates to issues of knowledge and the need to transform current education systems, particularly schooling methods and curricular frameworks. Growing up I had no idea about rights, responsibilities, colonization, the Indian Act and so on. In several ways, for example, hunting, fishing, and extended family relationships, I was practicing Okanagan and *Ntlakapmx* rights and responsibilities. My resistance definitely preceded my conscientization. All of that is important to the organic transformative praxis I am engaged in as an adult.

Our traditional knowledge is expressed in our *Captikwl* stories, our language, and our rights are expressed by living *Sqilxw*/Okanagan culturally informed lives. This does not mean “going back” in time or rejecting technology or ideas from other cultures. The spiders’ web conceptual metaphor suggests that, like the spider we too must never forget who we are, and continuously repair and renew old “webs of relations” and build new ones, that tie us together through extended family relationships to other peoples and the natural world of which we are a part.

Lived worlds themselves must be open to reflection and transformation. The culture and its traditions compose part of the context—so do the languages of the present and the noxious clouds, hoarded books, and socioeconomic phenomena of the world. I hope we can ponder the opening of wider and wider spaces of dialogue, in which diverse students and teachers, empowered to speak in their own voices, reflect together as they try to bring into being an in-between. Not only may they weave what Hannah Arendt called a “web of relations” (1958, p. 184) among themselves as embodied consciousnesses. They may through their coming together constitute a newly human world, one worthy enough and responsive enough to be both durable and open to continual renewal. (Greene, 1995, p. 59)

Our *Captikwl* stories make it clear that our world, knowledge and society are continuously evolving. *Senklip* (Coyote) is symbolic of mind power, creativity and vision, and sometimes that gets us in trouble. A recurring theme in *Captikwl* stories is when *Senklip* gets destroyed through foolishness, greed, ambition, or ignorance and *Xwylxw* (Fox) always gathers up the bits (hair, bone, etc,) breathes into the assembly, steps over it four times, and *Senklip* comes back to life. We sometimes act like the destructive part of *Senklip*, but we are also *Xwylxw*

## **1.10 Gifted Translators and the Wishing Rock: Creating Space for Indigenous Aspirations for Knowledge**

This section introduces the notion of gifted translators, Indigenous scholars/leaders who gather, select and interpret useful tools from Indigenous knowledge and Western discourse for inclusion in the Indigenous transformative toolkit, and more importantly, gather and breathe into life Indigenous theory and praxis from Indigenous knowledge systems and translate that understanding for Indigenous scholars to expand and reference. Through Indigenous praxis in the university, they create intellectual space and substance for organic Indigenous research practices, relationships, and a body of literature to express and document the new knowledge informed by cultural ways, values and languages from specific--rather than Pan-Indian—Indigenous peoples. *Sqilxwlcawt* theory is a *Sqilxw* - Okanagan contribution to an expanded web of diverse Indigenous knowledge globally.

Lonely Metaphors

Are Story-less Figures

What's it worth to play charades

And look for the wishing rock? At an Indian assembly

A relative is talkin' Indian and feelin' good

About bein' mad at those who don't understand

He had to change, had to speak English

So all would know and remember

Sometimes we forget how babies talk.

Mat swit i xnumpt?

Who got hurt?

Wanna hear about Ceremonies and Spirits?

All my relations? "Noble-Vanishing-Epic."

Nice words? Original? Mine?

Nah, I learned them from books.

We've so many people with wonder

In their voices—and yet there are so few

Gifted Translators

And that's why I look

for the wishing rock

and play charades. . .

(Cohen, 1995, revised version 2010)

Okanagan, and Indigenous research and cultural expression and practice, hampered and problematized by colonisation, require an expanded network of scholars and knowledge keepers to re-generate organic systems of theory and transforming praxis. Poets do not usually explicate their own work, but what the heck. The wishing rock is a metaphorical place, the homeland, the territory, where Okanagan dreams and aspirations are realized. Despite the fact that we are still living and practicing our ways on and within our homeland: the wishing rock is a utopian vision, only because for large numbers of our people the wishing rock represents a symbolic vision, a future reality. That future is nevertheless tied to the past and present, and the wishing rock is a real place, the *tmxwulaxw* that takes care of us: the realization of the vision is interconnected and interdependent with the re-emergence of collective praxis informed by and expressing the *Sqilxwlcawt* with knowledge from the territorial ecology. Gifted translators provide meaning and substance from our own respective cultural contexts. To Okanagan learners (me included) who know only English but are looking for the wishing rock, gifted translators such as Herman, Edward, Jeannette Armstrong, Harry Robinson and many others help us to understand our own cultural capital (language, knowledge, traditions, etc) and assist us in the struggle to live culturally informed lives. To sort out and make sense of the tensions, contradictions, and hegemonies at play in the continued wake of colonization and continuously emerging new forms of colonisation, gifted

translators are useful and necessary. They provide the strands of meaning that tie us securely to the *tmxwulaxw*, the territorial ecology, and who we are.

Now that the residential schools have essentially been terminated, has the Canadian government “finished?” Not at all. The residential school was only one of the many tactics deployed to assimilate First Nations, and most of the other tactics remain in place, continuing to do their job today without interruption. . . History, Wells once wrote, is increasingly a race between education and catastrophe. What Wells saw as separate features were joined in unholy matrimony for First Nations (and other Aboriginal minorities worldwide); education was catastrophe in residential schools. Not only the experiences of the past but the way in which those experiences are being recast in the present, are part of the continuing genocidal assault directed at First Nations. . . And First Nations peoples, locked in this genocidal Dance of Death, crushed in the embrace of their (thinking **or** thoughtless) oppressors, are supposed to believe social scientists are only there to help. But how can we know **this** dancer from the dance? (Chrisjohn, 1997, p.247)

Paulo Freire’s critical literacy provides intellectual tools to understand cultural invasion and the potential of using those tools to transform oppressive conditions. Roland Chrisjohn’s informed insights about residential school research and the connected roles of legal professions, psychology, and therapy as new and continuing tools (with old world origins) of assimilation/genocide, and the often uncritical acceptance by Indigenous communities, and when you are lost in the search for the wishing rock, it is helpful to know where not to go. “One thing research can do is help everyone see the big picture, regardless of where each was (or is) located within it. . . This is particularly important for First Nations’ peoples, since we are continually being fed only the localized, individualized picture as ‘Truth’.” (Chrisjohn, 1997, p. 175) Gifted translators provide the critical literacy to understand and articulate the emotional reactions and intuitive sensibilities dynamically at play in Indigenous communities. “New” Indigenous theories combined with critical literacy are powerful catalysts and



means for transforming praxis. In that sense I acknowledge Freire, and Okanagan, Indigenous and Western scholars and knowledge keepers who have experienced, studied and observed the trends and dynamics at play in Indigenous families, communities, and nations. They have taken on the responsibility to critically select useful tools from Western knowledge, disciplines, and interpret them with clarity so our people can understand and generate a convergence of knowledge, and respectfully bring worlds, in the sense of “two worlds,” “third world” or other notions of separate realities together into a healthy diversity of worldviews, as expressed in “The Fourth World.”

Thus it is that the Fourth World of George Manuel offers a vision of human existence beyond that of expediency and the balancing of powers and speaks to the identity crisis that has gripped every land and its peoples. No contemporary political and economic structure *has to be*” (Deloria Jr cited in Manuel, 1974, xii).

These are the gifted translators and they come as a mixed and diverse assortment of educational and cultural leaders from Okanagan, Indigenous and Western knowledge systems. They get us “thinking right” or in Graham Smith’s words, “The revolution happens right here (points to head).” (Presentation, 2004) “Proper to right thinking is willingness to risk, to welcome the new, which cannot be rejected simply because it is new no more than the old can be rejected because chronologically it is no longer new. The old is capable of remaining new when it remains faithful through time to the experience of original and founding intuitions and inspirations.” (Freire, 1997, p. 41) A “new” old direction is counter clockwise, the way of the world. Late elder Isabelle Edward shared the following, “Our people are going in the wrong direction. At meetings, at pow-wow dances they are following the clock. That is not our way. The winter-dances go counter

clockwise, the way everything used to go. Our people will continue to struggle as long as our direction is contrary to way of the world” (As told to me by Herman Edward, Isabelle’s son, 2003). Gifted translators help us to ‘snap out of it’ when “hegemony acts to saturate our very consciousness, so that the educational, economic, and social world we see and interact with, and the commonsense interpretations we put on it, becomes the world, *tout court*, the only world” (Apple, 1990, p.5). Coyote demonstrates the consequences of becoming self absorbed with appetite and forgetting he is part of a larger world. He was eating chokecherries. He became completely absorbed in what he was doing. Eating and picking, picking and eating, going round and round, lower and lower, the berries disappeared from the tops of the bushes and Coyote kept going lower, round and round. Raven flew by and noticed Coyote. Raven laughed and called out, “Hey! Look at Coyote. He’s eating his own shit!” Coyote looked up, realized what he was doing, and sheepishly replied, “No I’m not... I... was just smelling it” (Armstrong cited in Cohen, 2001, p. 9) Gifted translators, like Fox--and like Raven when necessary--in *Captikwl* stories, gather the bits of knowledge and experiences, so new understanding can emerge.

Despite centuries of repression of Indigenous knowledge and practice, Indigenous knowledge, languages, and territorial relationships and responsibilities have survived. The Okanagan and many Indigenous peoples are at a critical era because we are connected to strands of knowledge that have sustained our peoples for thousands of years yet we stand within an unstable transition zone. Cultural recovery and revitalization are possible. Because of

colonisation, however, and its debilitating effects, we are also facing potential extinction of our peoples and knowledge systems, which include a vast diversity of languages and territorial relationships. We have work to do, and it is not going to be easy, but it will be worthwhile.

The coming millennium is not for sissies, but our generation should do what it can to provide options for whatever conditions arise. We have the capacity to provide those options if we can be realistic and if we have the will. The problem is, we who undertake this task won't make much money doing this, and until the fat lady sings, most of the people in the culture(s) around us are unlikely to be supportive. (Mohawk, 2006)

The challenge for Okanagan and Indigenous scholars, and knowledge keepers, to become transformative leaders is to make sense of and determine what Okanagan and Indigenous knowledge from the past has relevance and application today to inform renewed sustainable relationships and transform current unsatisfactory conditions. This knowledge must not only apply to current conditions and crises, but also transform and support the wellbeing and potential of our children and our collective territory, the earth. It sounds very grand, that Indigenous knowledge has the potential to inform sustainable and tolerant global relationships and practices, but thousands of years of sustainable Indigenous cultures provide substantial empirical evidence that our ancestors were looking out for coming generations, and we can all learn from that accumulated wisdom.

The Indian peoples have a tradition and culture to offer the world. We have tried to take on other peoples' ways and found that they just did not work for us. Today, more and more European people in North America are finding that their own culture cannot meet all their own needs while they live on this land. It is not only young people who are trying to retribalize European society by building communes and developing other forms of extended family. They are trying to recreate a situation where everyone is related to everyone else, a situation in

which everyone says, for better or worse, these are my people.” (Manuel, 1974, p. 265)

Indigenous scholars/leaders have emerged for several generations and have distinguished themselves through their writing and community work as gifted translators. In the Okanagan, most of the scholars, including me, are the first in their families and communities to obtain university degrees. We have always had intellectuals but lately more are acquiring university degrees when at one time it was unheard of. It is becoming more common these days for second and even third generation Okanagan scholars to complete university education. The challenge for these “educated” people is to not become co-opted by dominant discourse and practice and to “make space in the academy” for Okanagan and Indigenous knowledge and research paradigms with meaningful and emancipatory application in communities.

From the perspective of an Okanagan organic intellectual, kinship relationships of knowledge transmission include many elders who have passed on, and some I did not know personally but knew through stories from others. Elders and knowledge keepers, Okanagan and Indigenous people with smarts and experiential wisdom form a network of knowledge sources who have been guides and mentors do not fit conventional norms of knowledge sources (authors, books, etc). How to position and converge separate streams of knowledge, practices and world view has been a key intellectual role of Indigenous scholars----The pragmatic approach taken by noted Indigenous scholars when they were graduate students, was to mediate the tensions and

incongruent paradigms between Indigenous knowledge and conventional academic research as respectfully as possible and make more space for Indigenous knowledge and praxis (e.g. Sterling, Wilson, Archibald, Smith, Armstrong) through the approach to do the necessary work for change and ‘report’ on the developments afterward, rather than try and fit complex cultural relationships and protocols involving peoples, places and practices into a conventional non-organic academic research paradigm. Western methods and academic and ethical standards can then be selectively applied where they are useful, or smaller projects that fit conventional research can be completed as complementary sidebars to the central work of community engagement and Indigenous transforming praxis. The approach taken in my research is to focus on the organic theorizing and application, and report on the developments afterward, which is not far off from typical graduate research, as pointed out by my supervisor, Jo-ann Archibald,

The distinction between what you have done and what is done usually in academic research is the emphasis on application (in your case the school). Theorizing and reporting on developments or what one learns through the research process is common practice in academic research, especially for grad students. Actually for your Ed. D. program there is an expectation that application be part of the research process (Personal editorial comment, 2010).

The further distinction I make is in the selection and use of *Sqilxw*-Okanagan research “tools” which are not readily available in the university “toolkit” and like the relationships created by those “tools” can only be found through creative, organic engagement with *Sqilxw* people, knowledge and territorial ecology.

In the Okanagan and BC interior plateau contexts and through kinship networks, the first waves of Indigenous scholars/leaders, Jeannette Armstrong, Shirley Sterling and Robert Sterling for example, could be considered “groundbreakers.” Indigenous peoples, however, are not engaged in breaking ground. We are engaged in struggle for survival and to move beyond survival on this ground, this *tmxwulaxw*, which gave us the knowledge to survive, upon and within which our ancestors practiced that knowledge for us. The first wave of scholars reconnected our organic intellectual webs to the earth, to our territories.

This thesis draws particularly on the works of Okanagan gifted translators: Harry Robinson, Herman Edward, Sarah Petersen, Jeannette Armstrong, Tommy Gregoire, Rob Edward, and many others; Indigenous Gifted Translators, Michel, Billy, Manuel, Mohawk, Smith and Smith, Archibald, Sterling (Robert and Shirley), Chrisjohn, Cajete; and World Gifted Translators, Freire, Apple, and Greene.

Earlier in Indigenous lands, when Indigenous peoples met with colonizing ideologies (and armies of course) brought by peoples most notably from Europe: a complementary relationship of respect and shared knowledge to inform new understandings to maintain cultural and ecological global diversity—simply did not happen. Ideologies of conquest and oppression are necessarily based on conflict, assimilation, homogenization, and they reproduce intolerance. These recurring cycles of taking other peoples’ lands and resources by whatever means and then “justifying” it as “God’s will, progress, civilization” or whatever had been established long before Indigenous peoples were subjected to colonization. A

more pluralistic and tolerant world will require transforming intellectual leadership to change current patterns and conditions. We know what does not generate change.

Some of history's darkest moments have occurred during times when people have been confronted with ideas they found enormously attractive. . . The result—whether the annihilation or near annihilation of the other or of themselves—have too often been tragic. . . The antidote to these kinds of movements is to defuse intolerance. . . But pluralism, at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century, is unpopular in most of the world's societies because it goes against the perceived interests of religious establishments, ethnic and racial groups, and power elites. People who embrace combinations of nationalism, religious intolerance, and racial distinction tend to be alienated from all other peoples. To the degree a people or nation can be taught to respect the principles of pluralism and tolerance, the prospects of militias committing slaughters and armies participating in wholesale ethnic cleansing are dimmed. To the degree that pluralistic thinking is not respected or practiced such events await opportunity. To this, history is our witness. (Mohawk, 2000, p. 267)

Indigenous scholars/leaders who are Gifted Translators have and are creating the intellectual and spiritual space in universities with strong ties to communities and territories. They are bringing Indigenous creativity and imagination into Indigenous research to move beyond the symbolic presence of images and architecture. Hunting leaders travel to resource areas to make sure it is worthwhile for others to come (if the deer are there in abundance they prepare the camp). Gifted Translators create Indigenous intellectual spaces for Indigenous scholars to feel connected to their communities and lands. This nurtures a critical mass of conscientised Indigenous and Western or World scholars. Gifted Translators build webs of theory and research to reference and expand Indigenous ways of knowing, filter and mediate Western domination in research areas and disciplines and the tendency to co-opt or appropriate Indigenous knowledge. In this thesis for example, Smith has studied, interpreted

and translated for Indigenous understanding and application the works of Gramsci (1950), Freire (1970) and Apple (1990). I do not need to re-walk the same path because Smith has gathered many of the bits that I need. I do not need, thankfully, to retrace Chrisjohn's learning path through clinical psychology and statistics to understand the work he has put together (1997) (even though he uses big words). I do not need to re-travel Manuel's journey of struggle and resistance (1974) or Mohawk's research path through Western history and ideology (2000) because they gathered those bits and passed understanding to us to grow. Kathy Michel and her sister Janice Billy have researched language acquisition methods and translated through language workshops and seminars (2004) the works of Krashen and Terrell (1983), Asher (2003) and others, so I do not have to duplicate their research. It is not necessary to re-trace Armstrong's research journey because she too has gathered knowledge and is sharing it for our benefit. The flow and circulation of Indigenous knowledge is becoming a dynamic multi-generational relationship of strands connecting territorial ecologies and peoples, and inspiring and motivating new and expanded strands of Indigenous research and knowledge.

*Limlimt* to the Indigenous and non-Indigenous "gifted translators" who remind us to be Okanagan, to be *Secwepemc*, to be Mohawk,

to be Maori is taken for granted; there is little need to justify one's identity, as is the case in most other 'mainstream' educational settings. . . Where Indigenous people are in educational crises, Indigenous educators and teachers must be trained to be 'change agents,' to develop transformation of the undesirable circumstances. They must develop a 'radical pedagogy' (a teaching approach for change). Such pedagogy must also be informed by their own cultural preferences and respond to their own critical circumstance. (Smith, 2002, p.11)



## CHAPTER 2. ***SWIT ASKWIST? WHO IS YOUR NAME?***

This section positions the author as an Okanagan organic intellectual situated within complex streams, strands, and undercurrents of knowledge and practice flowing from traditional Okanagan societal practice through childhood and school learning experiences through the wake of cultural invasion and assimilation. This experiential formation of who the author is, and the related processes of resistance to colonization and conscientization that converged as necessary elements to the author's role in this thesis as a transformative educator.

On this page i assert myself with words like bones sinking deep into the earth. Into earth memory... this voice is mine and yet through me my ancestors speak and sing and are given voice... their thoughts flow through me. There is strength in this voice that is theirs and mine....  
(Akiwenzie-Damm, 1996, p. 1)

It is still a common practice when introduced to Okanagan elders, fluent in the language, to be asked, "*Swit askwist?*" meaning, "Who is your name?" Your name is a "who" rather than a "what" and represents your genealogical and tribal identity(s). Then a discussion of who your parents and grandparents are would follow. The elder would place you through your family connections and determine who you are related to or associated with, and generally, there were extensive family connections and you would hear anecdotal stories about your parents, grandparents, and relatives. This section, in accord with Okanagan cultural practice, is to state, "Who is my name" so Okanagan, Indigenous, and Western

peoples will know who I am, who my family is, and where my homeland is. There are many kinship, social, economic and cultural networks involving people and events who have shaped and influenced my identity and perspectives. It is important to share and honour those people and events, to recognize and renew connections that already exist and to establish new networks of kinship and understanding. It is also important that people in my Okanagan and Indigenous kinship networks know that I have not forgotten them or who I am, and for others to know who I am not i.e. a non-Indigenous scholar objectively studying, interpreting, and co-opting Indigenous knowledge.

I was named after my grampa, Billy Cohen, and great granddad, Alec Marchand. The name Cohen comes from my great great grandfather, a *Sama* surveyor for the TransCanada Railway. He met and married my great great grandmother, a *Sto:lo* woman from Hope. They were married and had two children, a girl and a boy. My great great granddad, after a few years, deserted my great great grandmother and took a *Sama* wife elsewhere. He was not well liked or remembered by my grampa and the family. The boy was the first William Cohen in my family, my great grandfather, and he married Mary-Ann, the daughter of Chief Edward from Penticton, and since that time the Cohen name carried on through the Okanagan. My grampa always said, "You stay away from the women at Penticton, Your great granddad was the chief there and he had ten wives. Everyone there is your cousin."

My great granddad, Alec's parents were Maryann Lezard from *Nkmaplqs* and Louie Paul from the South Okanagan with ancestral links to Omak and Kettle

Falls. Through my parents and grandparents, I am related to Okanagan, *Ntlakapmx*, *Sto:lo*, Spokane, Mohawk, Jewish, French and English peoples and extended families throughout British Columbia and beyond.

I have a Jewish name from a *Sama* ancestor from whom there was no continuity of anything Jewish other than the name. Some of my family, including my mom, are very devout Catholics. They go to church all the time, and it's not unusual for Priests or the Bishop to eat supper at my parents' house. I went to bible study and catechism as a child, but was never baptized. My dad, granddad and uncle always said, "You can pray anywhere. You don't have to go to church to pray, our church is everywhere." My granddad was very resolute on the notion of confession. He said, "Don't ever do that! You're the one who has to be responsible. You never give that away to someone else!" It is quite a complex web of *Sama* religious beliefs, Indigenous beliefs, and nurtured freedom to make educated decisions.

## **2.1 My Story: Who, What and Where Inform My Praxis**

I have included a "My Story", describing particularly memorable experiences (for me anyway) that relate to this thesis in terms of evolving Okanagan transforming praxis and my evolving understanding as an organic intellectual connected to generations of Okanagan, Indigenous and Western epistemologies. It is certainly not a role model story, it is one of very positive strands of nurturing and responsibility extended from Okanagan traditional kinship and pedagogy. Those strands are inter-connected with very destructive

patterns of behaviour that emerged from the tensions and contradictions associated with identity, survival and resistance to assimilation, for example, when I count on my fingers the number of close friends and cousins that have died violently, I quickly run out of fingers, and toes.

I have been carving grave markers throughout Okanagan territory and the interior since I was fifteen when I was asked by my uncle to carve my grandmother's grave marker and this practice has evolved as a skill and a responsibility and through it I have learned a lot of history and Okanagan, *Ntlakapmx*, and *Secwepemc* customs from families throughout the interior of BC. In traditional Okanagan society, people were buried in rock slides or talus slopes, and limbs from pitch tops would be used to mark the site and the deceased person's special belongings would be hung from the limbs. Now that churches have influenced Okanagan and interior plateau Indigenous communities, the traditional practice has evolved to pitch tops, rather than the limbs, being used for grave markers in cemeteries. Pitch tops are bull pine trees that have died at the top so they become filled with pitch, are very weather resistant, and they can be seen in community cemeteries, many in the one hundred year old range. Carving grave markers has made me aware of how tragic it is for families when young people die early, and that many of our elders lived amazing lives and contributed so much to our communities. I learned it is important to contribute skills, knowledge and resources when your community needs you, especially when there is a crisis.

## **2.2 The Early Years**

For the first years of my life, I lived in my great-grandfather Alec Marchand's big log house beside Siwash/Naswito Creek on the Okanagan Indian Reserve. Besides my immediate family, my great granddad, maternal grandfather and grandmother, maternal aunt and uncle, all lived together. There was cold running water in the kitchen, no electricity or indoor bathrooms, and we had heat from a wood burning stove. Since those early years, a significant part of cognitive, perceptive, and linguistic development, and through to my adult years, I have always been close to elders and fluent speakers. At least one was always either living with us or in close proximity for daily interactions. Because I have been surrounded by people, especially in infancy, who were fluent speakers and for whom English was a second language, perhaps I have acquired an Okanagan cognitive framework, even though I am not a fluent speaker of our language. I am convinced that Okanagan epistemology and patterns of our ancestors' thoughts and experiences resonate through our thought and speech patterns despite the current dominance of English. The genealogical connections, where we are situated in our homeland, the continuing and evolving hunting, resource gathering, farming and ranching practices would suggest that the strands connecting us to our ancestors' knowledge are extensive and complex.

My grandfather was a continuous influence in my life as I was growing up. He was born on New Year's Day, 1900 and passed away in 1989. I can't recall him ever raising his voice at me and I have a deep respect for his integrity and

dignity. I have read and heard of other academics and educators, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous with wise grandparents or elders who adopt them; sometimes (too often) the wise elders are shamans or sorcerers. Mindful of clichés, stereotypes and romanticized fantasies, and with Linda Smith's "granny stories"(1999, p.4) insights in mind, I will qualify my relationship with my wise, tough old grampa who was extremely stubborn, would hold grudges against people, and was very opinionated. We were very close because I was his first grandson, was named after him, lived with him as an infant, and over many summers growing up. He often came and visited for weeks or months wherever I lived, either with my parents or aunt and uncle, or other relatives. He always set an example, nurtured and encouraged rather than lectured or whipped me, but I know from my uncle and others that when he was raising his own children he was very severe with discipline. I believe that he reflected on his experiences as a child, his experiences with Okanagan kinship relationships and his own roles of parenting and I was the beneficiary of a relationship more in line with his own childhood. He had several maxims that he would tell me, "Always keep your word, be a gentleman (always treat women well and never hit a woman), never back down, and never say die." He was well known for being a man of his word and handshake, and for mentoring many young men, who are now elders or have passed on, in hunting, horsemanship, logging, and wrestling. He was a very well known cougar hunter, and old-timers still tell me stories of cougar hunting with him. Many of his hunting camps and trails are now documented as evidence for court cases involving Aboriginal rights and title. He was a very good wrestler

into his seventies. I have many memories of his visits with elders who are no longer with us, Ben Louis, Harry Parker, Murray Alexis and many others. Ben once told me, "Well you carry the name, but you've got a long way to go to be the man your grampa was." Carrying his name reminds me that I have much to do to earn the kind of respect he had.

I have a vivid memory of going with my grampa to the creek in the wintertime. I was around six years old and he was sixty-nine or seventy. He had a towel and a dipper pot with him and he undressed and walked over the ice and snow into a deep pool of water up to his waist and had a leisurely bath. He bathed in the creek almost daily, year round. Every year when the first snowfall arrived, he would roll up his pant legs and go for a long, barefoot, roundabout walk. I have tried the ice water and snow a few times since, and my old grampa certainly had more mental and physical self-discipline to adjust to extreme cold than I do.

My grampa and particularly my great granddad, Alec (known to everyone in the family as 'Papa', knew a lot about 'Indian Medicine.' What plants are good to 'knock a cold' and so on. Papa was also very well known as a storyteller, and when he was younger was an elite level bronc rider. In our family albums are many photos of Papa as a young man competing at major rodeos or pictured with trophy saddles and prizes.

We moved when I was four to live with my dad, who is *Ntlakapmx* and Okanagan, to the Nicola Valley, a place with interesting social relations because

there are five Indian reserves in the area and the valley population is about twenty-five percent Indian. Four reserves are *Ntlakapmx* or Thompson, and one is Okanagan. All of the reserves are interrelated through marriages. In fact, all of the reserves in southern BC and northern Washington State have extensive family connections.

I went with my dad to many households in many communities in the valley to visit, drop off meat or firewood. My dad was and still is (in his eighties) an active hunter and I grew up learning to hunt, fish, and pick various berries, mushrooms and food items from the bush. My mom with the rest of us helping always canned a lot of saskatoon berries, huckleberries and soap berries every year. Canning was done outside using large metal tubs that could hold large amounts of jars. There were also trips south every year to the Similkameen to buy boxes of cherries, apples, peaches, pears, strawberries etc; these would also be canned. My grampa gave me a twenty-two rifle when I was ten, and after that I would always go along on hunting trips. He would ask about every trip and tell me how to watch for landmarks and keep my bearings. My dad and uncle would tell me where to go in the bush. They would say, for example, "You follow this ridge until you get to a meadow on top and we'll meet you there" or "Work your way back and forth through here until you get to the road below that bluff up there." I would do that and would always hear a shot up ahead, and I would hurry toward the sound to find my dad or uncle gutting a buck. Later on I realized that I was the flusher and that was the novice learning role. We always took the smaller bucks rather than the big ones. When I shot my first buck at age twelve



my dad drove me to elders' homes on several reserves to give all the meat away to them. It was really empowering because they were so happy that I got my first buck and really praised me up for my abilities and thanked me for thinking of them. My dad and I regularly took deer meat, hides and brains to Patsy Harry, an elder who tanned a lot of hides. Every year she would give me a pair of buckskin gloves. I also helped my dad cut firewood, with fencing contracts and such. One of his favourite and often stated sayings whenever faced with a tough task or situation was, "If it's too tough for everybody else, it's just right for us."

It was common at our house, whichever house I was living in, for Papa, my grampa, or uncles and aunts to come and visit and stay for extended times. "Uncles and aunts" can refer to any older relatives. They all helped out with things around the house, chopping wood, cooking, cleaning etc. My uncle George Charters had a drinking problem, and spent some of his later life on the streets of Merritt. From time to time uncle George would come and stay with us for a few weeks. He was always sober, respectful and helpful when he was in our house. He had a very loud and deep voice and would draw out and emphasize words. When I was between ten and thirteen years old and he was around sixty he would ask me, "Where's your pocket knife uncle? You're the oooooonly one who knows how to keep his knife sharp enough for me to trim my nails!" He made me feel really good about my knife sharpening abilities, although later I realized that he was really just giving me confidence so I would practice. He taught me how to split fire wood, "and neeeever get your axe stuck!" He also taught me how to roll smokes with loose tobacco and rolling papers, and would

give them to me to roll his smokes when he visited, something I never mentioned to my folks..

I was mostly raised by my parents, Mary (Cohen) and Dempsey Charters, and my aunt and uncle, Birdie and Walter Archachan. My siblings are Darrel, Dale, Gerald, Cindy, Edna, Shirley, Valerie, Earl, Deloris, Steve, and first cousins who are siblings in the Okanagan extended family understanding, Beaver, Chona and Phoebe. I was also very much raised by the *Sqilxw* communities in Vernon, Merritt, Upper Nicola, and Similkameen. Growing up, I stayed with relatives in several Okanagan communities, William and Jean Wilson, Dorothy Ward, and Josie and Raymond Terbasket. I was adopted by the Chillihitzia, Manuel, Lindley and Archachan families. I experienced firsthand the strength and hospitality of *Sqilxw* extended families throughout my youth. That strength is what carried us through the hard times and that's why we are still here.

## **2.3 Elementary Education**

My elementary school years involved transitions from three different schools, grades one to three in Merritt and four to seven in Lower Nicola. In grade six, I was having a spit fight at recess with a friend, not the most mature thing to do but anyway . . . We were running, dodging, launching spit bombs, and a girl ran between us and she caught one on the leg. I quickly said, "Sorry about that!" and resumed dodging and shooting. When the recess bell rang and we went back to class, the Vice Principal came in to see me, gave me very stern looks, and marched me to the office. I sat outside the Principal's office, until he

came out and he too gave me stern disapproving looks, neither told me what I did. The Principal sent me to the school counsellor, who was also my gym and Social Studies teacher. I sat on a chair in front of his desk and he asked me, "What race are you William?" At the time, I had long hair, and although my skin is relatively fair; I obviously was an Indian kid. The only time up to then I had heard the term "race" connected to people was in Social Studies, where I recalled a text saying something about race, Vikings, and Norwegian people. So I replied, "Norwegian." The counsellor looked at me, thought for a moment and asked, "Has anyone ever put you down because of your race?" I said, "No." and wondered what he was talking about. He looked at me again, thought for a moment and then waved me out of his office as he said, "Go back to class." I was confused by the whole thing, and didn't understand anything about it until a few years later. The girl whose leg I accidentally spit on was a Jehovah's Witness. They assumed I spit on her because of that. My spit fight opponent, who was also my cousin, and I continued our friendship until he died tragically in a car accident just out of high school, something that continues to happen too often.

Since then I learned that I am not Norwegian, and a few things about "race" relations. I was suspended a few times for fighting and drinking at school. Other than that my elementary school years were fairly routine. I never got into trouble at home for fighting. My granddad and mom, especially, encouraged me to not be a bully and to not back down from anyone. Several times the Principal or Vice-Principal drove me home, suspended, for fist fighting in school. They

expected me to be in trouble, but my mom would ask, "Did he start it? Is the other boy smaller? Was it a fair fight?" As long as I wasn't a bully and didn't let anyone push me around, fighting was okay.

Oddly enough, I was a bookworm during my elementary and high school years. I rarely did any homework or read much assigned stuff. At home, however, my mom had loads of books and encyclopaedias around. By grade seven I had read many of what are considered "classics," all the Mark Twain books, Don Quixote, Count of Monte Cristo, Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde . . . many biographies, Thomas Edison, Alexander Graham Bell, Elvis as well as any Louis L'Amour western, Mad Magazine or cartoon that was around. I was also constantly making things from a "do it yourself" book set that my dad had, unicycles, go carts, kites etc. My grampa's eyesight was failing through that era, and I often read Globe and Mail articles aloud to him. He could make out the headlines to choose which articles. Because he suggested it, I also read the bible (Old Testament and New Testament). He did not tell to believe it, just that I should know what it said. He also wrote angry political-historical letters to the editor in the local newspaper. He would write them by hand and give them to my mom to take in. When I saw the first one in the paper it was full of spelling and grammar mistakes. I asked my mom why she didn't fix them up, and she said, "That's the way he wrote them." I was a bit embarrassed because we have the same name and people would think I or my granddad were stupid. My Grade 11 English teacher condescendingly asked me if I wrote it. I said, "No, my granddad did. Why?" She chose not to engage. My earlier embarrassment vanished when I felt

my granddad's smarts being challenged. I realized that substance and relationships matter much more than form.

I learned to fear and not trust the police when I was growing up. Many times I recall travelling in a vehicle, or being inside a home on a reserve, and the RCMP were spotted. The adults would say, "Hide you kids! The policeman will take you away!" We would scramble to hide and get out of sight. After a few times, we realized that it was not likely that the RCMP were going to "take us away." Later, I understood why the police were seen as the "bogey man" when I found out about Indian residential schools and child apprehensions. It was a residual response from an earlier era, most intense from the late 1800s to the 1960s, of the Police accompanying priests and social workers to enforce the "taking away" of children from their parents and extended families.

I learned to not talk about hunting, fishing or "Indian" activities at school. Every year several large freezers would be filled with deer, moose, salmon and trout, as well as the berries and fruits mentioned earlier and vegetables from our garden. It seemed we were always out in the bush. Once, after a successful hunting trip, I bragged to my grade seven friends at school about the nice bucks we got. Later my friend's father, a non-Native, showed up at our house wanting deer meat. The implication was that if my dad did not give him a bunch of meat, he would report us. At the time we were non-status Indians but nevertheless were doing what our ancestors had done for thousands of years. That was my introduction to the complex jumble of colonial legislation and identity politics.

Thanks to the determination and struggle of Indian women, we all later became “status Indians” after 1985.

## **2.4 High School**

In high school and young adulthood, I went through a very reckless phase as a young man, partying, chasing women, fighting, crashing cars and so on. I was expelled a few times from high school for drinking. In grade nine, a few weeks into the school year, Mr Reporter, a math teacher, sent me into the general math class with the rest of the Indians. I was okay with it, my friends were there and it was easy, but when my mom heard about it she was furious and stormed into the school, yelled at the Principal and Vice-Principal, and after that my teachers kept me in the academic program. Every year in high school I would get As and Bs first term, Cs and Ds second term, Es and Fs the third term, and to pass the year I would ace the provincial exams. A few times I and a friend were expelled for a month. Our sisters would bring us homework from school. We did our schoolwork together every morning in less than half an hour, and then we would go play in the hills the rest of the day. Our grades went up each time, so of course we questioned the value of classroom teaching when we had to go back to the drudgery of public school.

I have one strong memory of an inspiring teacher, Mrs Young, my Grade 12 English teacher. When teachers would give assignments to do, I would put my twist on it to get a response from them. I and an Okanagan friend Ted Tom, for example, for a senior art project painted an awful mural on the wall in the

entrance hallway at Merritt Secondary, a fat biker with swastikas, Nazi helmet, Grad '81 etc to symbolize what we thought of school. That ridiculous mural, surprisingly, stayed up until fairly recently. Mrs Young assigned an essay on careers, so I wrote one about teachers. I said people with no imagination were recruited for teaching to ensure that students were bored to death, that dead people were often hired as teachers because no one could tell the difference anyway, and on and on with that theme. Mrs Young called me up to her desk. She looked a bit emotional, and I was expecting her to throw my paper in the trash and send me to the Principal. Her face had turned red, but she looked up at me with a huge grin and said, "This is brilliant! Your use of irony and parody is amazing! Would you read this to the class?" I was shocked. It was the first time I'd heard anything good about my writing. I was even nominated for Valedictorian after that. I am grateful to Mrs Young for giving me confidence.

I was also involved in boxing, wrestling, and martial arts. I was pretty good at boxing and the fitness and discipline it required kept me from getting too involved with various drugs. Alcohol, marijuana, acid, and cocaine, were all certainly available and many of my friends struggled with them. Some died. Some went to jail. Luckily, I made it through that period. I graduated from high school in 1981. My grampa was very proud of me and a picture of the two of us in suits still hangs on the wall in my home. He would continually suggest that I should go to school/college. Eventually I would take his advice.

In 1982, Isaac Lindley, an elder from Upper Nicola, who called me *sinji*, little brother, said to me, "Bill Cohen, you're a smart young fella. How do those

politicians in Ottawa make all these laws about us?" At the time, the constitution was being "brought home" from Britain by the Trudeau government and recognition of Aboriginal rights in the new constitution was a major issue for Indian politicians. I knew little or nothing about Indian issues, history, the Indian Act and so on, and I replied, "Well, Canada has a bicameral parliament, and a law has to be debated in the House of Commons and then pass a couple of readings in the senate, then it becomes law." Isaac did not know what the hell I was talking about, and neither did I. At the time, even though I was living on reserve with my relatives, I was not even legally an "Indian" as described in the Indian Act, My "school education" and Isaac's knowledge were not compatible or complementary at the time, but the experience certainly helped my conscientization later on.

## **2.5 An Indian Student Survival Guide**

Fresh out of high school I worked on illustrations for an Indian Student Survival Guide that the late Robert Sterling and Sharon Lindley, who was a student at the time, were putting together. Robert was well known for being one of the few "educated Indians" around. It was the first time that I actually hung around with an Indian who had a university degree. I remember very clearly Robert's warm energy and enthusiasm. He would get so excited and animated about ideas Sharon or I had; it seemed that he would glow and dance around the room with his beaming smile and encouraging words and questions. At the time, going to university had not even crossed my mind because I really did not know what a university was. I pictured it was some big fancy place where middle-aged



people walked around in suits and acted important—which as it turns out was not far off. After that project, Robert and his son Cory died tragically in a boating accident. I went with my uncle to search along the river for signs of them. A few years later I came across some of Robert's essays and poems and his vision of an education to "know your language, your land, know how to build a house, hunt, plant a garden, read and write . . ." has resonated in my work. Robert's earlier vision for Indian education matched what Okanagan parents wanted for their children in the 2006 Okanagan school project: an education that provided excellence in Indigenous language, knowledge and skills and provincial curriculum and world knowledge. I acknowledge Robert for his vision, work and warm spirit.

From the early to late eighties, I worked as a commercial artist painting signs, murals etc, and I also got commissioned to paint or carve a few pieces. I mixed artist jobs with bush and cowboy work in the BC interior where I usually worked with older Indian cowboys and loggers. I worked in the bush running a chainsaw, skidding trees, piling lumber. I also worked on ranches and spent some time in Haida Gwaii as a deck-hand/fishing guide.

At nineteen years old, I was introduced to Millie Gottfriedsen because she was looking for an artist. Among other notable achievements including the Order of Canada, National Mother and Citizen of the Year, she was one of the first Indigenous fashion designers in the province. Millie would have ideas for dresses, jackets and such. She would describe them to me and I would draw them for her. If it looked good, she would make it. I then got to know Gus

Gottfriedsen, Millie's husband, and spent a lot of time at the Double G Ranch on the Kamloops Indian reserve, feeding stock, fencing, being a test pilot for bucking horses, and listening to Gus's stories. He was an amazing story teller with an incredibly sharp wit and sense of humour, and I got to know many of my relatives that Gus knew when he was a child and young man through his stories. Several are noted in this thesis. I especially appreciate getting to know my great granddad Alec through Gus. He could mimic voices, expressions, and mannerisms exceptionally well. This was an important time in my life. I did not realize it fully at the time but I learned a lot about leadership, history, Indian politics, and community responsibility from Gus and Millie. Millie was active in the BC Native Women's Society. Gus was very active in the development of the North American Indian Brotherhood and the political movements through the 1940s to the 1970s. Gus' thoughts on leaderships will be highlighted later on in this thesis. Millie always teased Gus in later years whenever I visited. She would smile and say, "Gus, your son is back."

## **2.6 Back to School**

I returned to school in my mid-twenties. My daughter Tallin was born during this time, and I started to realise how important it is that I be responsible for my children and nieces and nephews. I took upgrading and university transfer courses at Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT), one of the first First Nations controlled post-secondary institutions in BC. After NVIT, I went to En'owkin International School of Writing for a year. While I was attending En'owkin I organized a community literacy project with the Lower Similkameen

Indian Band for a couple of years and got to know Sarah Peterson, an elder who has been a kind, thoughtful and pragmatic leader in Okanagan language recovery and programs. Sarah and I worked together to offer literacy sessions (in English), and Okanagan language lessons. Sarah was one of the first Okanagan language educators to apply Total Physical Response (TPR) methods which focus on acquiring another language through actions (Asher, 2003). Her voice and turning, stopping, walking, jumping, “*axelmncut, tlep, xwist, letpmncut ....*,” in yards outside of homes where sessions were conducted remain a vivid memory. During the time I stayed in the Similkameen, I got to know Barney and Margaret and the Allison family (also known as Grand Chief Barnett Allison), the Qualtier family, Charlie Horse and the whole community. For years I rented Isabelle Edward’s old house in Chopaka. Isabelle adopted me and gave me the *Sqilxw* name *Mahuya*. The adoption happened this way. Herman Edward, Isabelle’s son, said to me one day, “My mom was talking to me in Indian and she asked me how my younger brother was doing. I wondered who she was talking about and said ‘I don’t have a brother.’ She said, ‘Your brother *Mahuya*, he lives next door. You look out for your younger brother.’ My mom decided to adopt you and that’s her name for you.” Although several of those elders are gone, I continue to learn from them. Herman and I became good friends and he is uncle Herman to my kids. Herman told me more *Captikwl* stories, showed me more plant medicines, and talked to me about being *Sqilxw* more than anyone else, as well as tutored me in the language. He is noted throughout the interior as a musician, canoe carver, and fluent knowledge keeper. There are many Okanagan, *Ntlakapmx*,

*Secwepemc* and Indigenous peoples, past and living, young and old who have influenced me with their kindness, generosity, and patience. I can't list all of them but I am grateful to all.

I enrolled at NVIT in 1989. My career goal was to become an artist. That summer, prior to school starting, my granddad passed away at the age of 89 and I woke up in the hospital with my mom and aunt praying over me. I was in about my twelfth serious car wreck, and for the first time I broke a few bones. It took a few months to recover . . . and I began to think a little bit about the crazy things I did. Through that time, my grampa continually suggested I should go to school, and my uncle Walter Archachan and Gus Gottfriedsen would echo his encouragement. It was more than just words. When I finally did get into post-secondary and was studying in Lethbridge. I would get letters, cards, boxes of canned food and clothes (a new pair of wranglers) from the Gottfriedsen and Allison families, a small freezer from my uncle Walter, all of whom never went past high school, but put a lot of effort into helping me and others make it through university.

It was at NVIT where I first experienced being taught by an Indigenous Instructor, Blackfoot/Kainai educator, Marie Small Face-Marule. Marie taught a course about colonization of Indigenous peoples. She was very knowledgeable and very patient. I was still going through an emotionally driven phase and I would get very angry hearing about all the awful things that had been done to the Indians and the Indigenous peoples of the world. I would think, "Nope, my ancestors wouldn't have taken that shit." In that frame of mind I would turn my

back to Marie and face my chair to the back wall, arms crossed, oblivious to the other students, seething and thinking to myself, "I signed up for school and I am gonna see it through; even if I have to listen to this (deleted) crap, but I'm not just gonna (deleted) take it like everyone else." Marie would calmly continue the course and the other students would glance at me, at the back of the room, fuming, staring at the wall, and leave me alone as well. She introduced me to the works of George Manuel, Paulo Freire, John Tootoosis, and Indigenous history and resistance. She organized a field trip to the En'owkin Centre, where I met Jeannette Armstrong. Jeannette and the En'owkin community would later play a significant role in my future conscientization and praxis as an Okanagan student, academic, artist, and educator. At NVIT, I discovered I was a pretty good student and began to enjoy "the academic stuff." I got part-time jobs tutoring other students, did some teacher assistant work with Marie, and volunteered as a literacy tutor. Because I was still in my reckless phase I sometimes went to the pub and did my homework. I often sat in class hung over, sometimes with black eyes and scuffed up from bar fights, but determined to see it through and taking some irrational pleasure from being a drunk and a top student. I often recall my behaviours during those times; although I now turn a bit red thinking about it, it has been useful in my role as a teacher and facilitator. I am very thankful to Marie for being a patient mentor and sharing insights about the leadership roles of Indigenous women in the survival, resistance and evolution of Indigenous peoples. A few years later, when I was a student at the University of Lethbridge Marie had returned to her people at the Blood Reserve and was in a senior

position at Red Crow College. She would buy me dinner once in a while and continue her encouraging, mentoring role. She inspired much of my thinking about multilingual fluency as a historical norm for Indigenous peoples and the world and that Indigenous children, at the very least, should know their own language as well as the dominant colonial language. The reconnections to Blackfoot people, knowledge, and projects would continue during my studies in Lethbridge, later with my children Mary-Rose, Emma and Willy, who are also Blackfoot and with my interest in the Piegan Institute for the *Nkmaplqs* school project.

I completed a Bachelor of Arts and Science at U of Lethbridge where my second daughter Kwanita was born. Several professors influenced my conscientization there, including Leroy Little Bear and Betty Bastien, but two in particular. I took a number of art courses, theory, history and painting, with Alfred Young Man. He gave me some advice to “take on my journey”. On one of my essays, after he wrote some kind words about my creativity and work, his advice was, “The system is a real mind-fucker! Don’t let it eat you up.” (1995) I gave him a painting, and it’s probably still hanging on his living room wall. After experiencing “the system”, the conventional post-secondary schooling process, his advice certainly informed resistance and transformative projects I engaged in later as a teacher. The other professor was Russell Barsh. In one of the first courses I took with him, about Indigenous rights and international law, Russell was explaining how the law is imposed on Indigenous peoples. Here was Russell, this big-time international Indigenous and Human Rights lawyer, eyes

bugged out shooting an imaginary machine gun, “taak taah, taah, taah, taaah . . .” mimicking voices, totally absorbed in acting out the story. Students’ eyes were wide open as well, glancing at each other in amused shock. No one had experienced that kind of drama from a professor. I thought to myself, “Wow, just like an old Indian storyteller.” I acknowledge Alfred and Russell for their insights about the creativity stifling process that conventional schooling often is and the potential of and place that Indigenous knowledge, creativity and storytelling can play in post-secondary teaching and learning, and the necessity of and the value of friends and allies to Indigenous transformative praxis because human rights and ecological sustainability are at the core of Indigenous issues and conflicts. I went to university with the misconception that I was going to study the *Sama* knowledge and stories so I could learn how the White Man thinks. Many in Indigenous communities view “White Man’s Schooling” (university) and knowledge to be weapons, so we should “learn their ways and use their weapons back against them.” I learned however, that we have much to learn from each other and that a healthy and sustaining cultural diversity may be a prerequisite to a globally sustaining ecological diversity.

I got to know another Okanagan who was going to University of Lethbridge, Floyd Oppenheimer. The Native Advisor, Martin Heavy Head, a Kainai Blackfoot, regularly took us out hunting. After that we ate elk, deer and moose for the rest of our time there. Martin filled in what was missing in university studies: stories, songs and land knowledge with the people of the land.

Floyd's daughter is graduating this year from *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet*.

The next stage in my educational journey occurred when I worked at the En'owkin Centre for eight years and Mary-Rose, Emma and Willy came into the world. I learned much from the En'owkin community, and applied *Sqilxw* knowledge to programs and courses. I also completed a Masters in Education, met my wife Natalie, signed up for a Doctorate and taught at OUC which is now UBCO. I have been to *Aotearoa*/New Zealand several times, and from the Maori it is clear that powerful social change can happen when Indigenous peoples start being who they are and paddling their own canoes rather than just talking about self-determination. Closer to home, Chief Atahm School has earned an international reputation for the success of their education/language recovery project. During my time at En'owkin and Kelowna (OUC and UBCO), the idea began to percolate of having our own Okanagan school. When the youth voiced their vision for a school at the Okanagan Indian Band in an *enowkinwixw* workshop I was facilitating, that was the call for me to go home and get a school going. I knew it was going to happen, but did not yet know how or with whom. Natalie and our kids Mary-Rose, Emma, and Willy moved back to Nkmaplqs in 2004. It was not easy for Natalie to be a step-mom and become engaged in transforming praxis with all of the community tensions and contradictions of Indigenous struggle, but she came through and contributed time, expertise, and love to "our" kids, helped make our school happen, and is currently very involved with developing our language nest. Our youngest children, Dempsey and Devon



will be following their older siblings into our own school, *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet*. In 2005, Mary-Rose attended public school in Vernon in grade three and she kept at me as well with “When is the Okanagan school gonna start dad? When we have our own school and people come to visit, they’re gonna say, “This Okanagan school rocks!” Our school opened the following year.

## **2.7 Discussion/Reflection on “My Story”**

In my experience, there has always been a sense that something was missing. Many times, in childhood and as an adult, I listened to my older extended family members “talking Indian” to others. Their faces would light up as they talked, told stories and laughed at jokes. I didn’t know what they were saying. The fluent speakers always talked to each other but not to the kids in our Indian languages (I realized as an adult that in childhood I was hearing Okanagan/*Nsyilxcen* as well as *Ntlakapmxcin* (Thompson). I always intuitively felt that I should know what they were saying so I could laugh and tell stories and jokes too. The interactions between fluent speakers seemed to be a joyful sanctuary, a place where *Sqilxw* could be *Sqilxw* with other *Sqilxw*. When I was fifteen, I used to ask my grampa, “How do you say, what are you doing? Where are you going? Why did you do that?” And on and on. I had sheets of paper with my notes on them written in my version of Okanagan phonetics. I found that I was starting to understand what fluent speakers were saying! On one occasion, when some elders were talking Okanagan in my presence, I could understand what they were talking about so I

spoke up with my limited vocabulary. My aunt laughed and laughed when she heard me trying to speak Okanagan, and then she said, “You have to hold your tongue higher up in your mouth.” She did not mean to hurt my feelings but that experience put my language learning on a ten year hold. Since then, I have taken a lot of language courses, I understand sometimes, but I’m far from fluent. I have realised that I don’t need to be a fluent speaker or elder to make our cultural survival and renewal happen. It is the responsibility of all of us to do what we can.

From personal experience and also through dialogue with Okanagan youth, parents and grandparents, it is clear that cultural confusion and lack of or distorted identity is directly connected to the pathologies that are pervasive in Okanagan communities: the suicides, drug and alcohol abuse, family violence and so on. Okanagan youth, particularly the young men, for generations have grown up in a macho, violent sub-culture in constant conflict with the larger society and with little access to the aspirations of the larger society and with little or distorted cultural knowledge and identity. Young men and women grow up disconnected from their *Sqilxw* culture/society and disconnected from Canadian culture/society. They don’t know who they are or where they fit in and form their identities as partiers, tough guys, outlaws, drug dealers, etc in this violent sub-culture. That is what contributed to the recent triple homicide on the Penticton Indian Reserve. Many also opt out through suicide or addictions. In my view, whether it is suicide, violence, car accidents, addiction, assimilation or whatever, we are losing our children because they don’t know who they are, and what their

rights and responsibilities are. On the other hand, the tendency for youth who know who they are and are connected to and valued in their communities and cultures is to carry their identities with them anywhere and not get caught up in the negative behaviours and pathologies. I learned a lot of things the hard way. Anything I was embarrassed about, or ashamed of, tended to happen when I was partying. I have given up that life because I did not want my kids around it. I determined to change things so that our children don't have to experience the confusion, identity crises, violence and dysfunction that are still happening in our families and communities. Many personal experiences, observations of continuing *Sqilxw* relationships to the *tmxwulaxw* (hunting and fishing for example), intuitions about something missing linguistically and conceptually, school experiences that in retrospect were more about resistance to assimilation than positive learning, interactions with elders, educators, and leaders—all of this converged into an understanding that work had to be done. Rather than go along with the debilitating and disempowering march of assimilation and historical erasure, and eventually have to address the question from my children's and grandchildren's generations, "What did you do about it?" I chose to work on a few cultural things with others in education and schooling contexts.

### CHAPTER 3. OKANAGAN KNOWLEDGE, LEADERSHIP AND CULTURAL PRACTICE

This section describes the roles of Coyote and Fox as metaphors for a *Sqilxw* – Okanagan research paradigm. It is Fox who ‘gathers the bits’ of Okanagan and Indigenous concepts and frameworks of knowledge from stories, *Captikwl* and life experience, practices, and relationships past and current, and ‘breathes’ into life new knowledge and understanding. I position myself in the role of Fox to theorize the accumulated knowledge for current and future research methodological and educational application and practice. This chapter is also an Okanagan literature and orature review. Okanagan knowledge is recorded through stories, especially of relationships between peoples and the territorial ecology. *Captikwl* stories express patterns of human tendencies, good and bad, that connect to place and ways of long-term societal sustainability, the evolving knowledge that sustained the *Sqilxw* for thousands of years through dynamic and balancing relationships to mediate hegemonies, conflict, and nurture tolerance and diversity. *Captikwl* story frameworks, symbols and conceptual metaphors from *Sqilxw* language are theorized and expressed as a methodological framework which guided the research in this thesis. This section concludes by noting four organic Okanagan leaders, Indigenous visionaries and knowledge holders who maintained *Sqilxw*-Okanagan responsibilities, practices, knowledge, and relationships, who have kept alive strands of knowledge especially in areas of the right to be Okanagan, storytelling, extended family, Okanagan theory and

practice, and language recovery. Okanagan knowledge, research methodologies, principles of leadership, and pedagogy become a cumulative praxis expressed trans-generationally through dialectical relationships between Sqilxw – Okanagan, Indigenous and world peoples and communities.

Since you asked I'll try to explain. The *Sqilxw*, the Okanagan, who we are . . . We're the people of the stories. Everything we know and everything we do and are gonna be is through our stories. . . (Herman Edward, 1997, personal communication)

I position myself as an organic Okanagan artist/educator/theorist with experiential relationships throughout my life to many elders and older relatives from my extended family networks. Some are still living but most have passed on. Several were exceptional storytellers. Through stories and kinship I am connected to virtually every family, Chief or elder in the Okanagan territory, and the southern interior of BC and northern central Washington. These connections are not mine alone, in fact they are shared by every Indigenous person in the territories mentioned: the Okanagan ways of maintaining knowledge and relationships have diminished in terms of everyday practice, but the strands of knowledge and the kinship relationships are still very real. Those relationships, through the re-connecting of strands, are expressions of continuously evolving Okanagan epistemology, ontology and pedagogy.

My positioning is certainly different from that of a non-Indigenous researcher. Wendy Wickwire, for example, established a relationship of friendship and trust with noted Okanagan storyteller, Harry Robinson, and compiled and edited several books of his stories (1989-2005). Her intellectual

and epistemological background and connections to Harry Robinson and his stories are in history, anthropology and ethnography—mainly the works and research methods of non-Indigenous scholars between 1888 and 1933, Charles Hill-Tout, Franz Boas and James Teit, among others. I also have similar academic connections. More importantly concerning my Indigenous research as an Okanagan scholar, my connections to Harry Robinson are through Okanagan knowledge relationships framed by kinship. I did not know him personally. I heard many stories about Harry through my grampa who was the same age, Chief Barnett Allison, Chief Slim Allison, John Terbasket, Andrew McGinnis, Jeannette Armstrong and others. The point is made not to criticize, but to clarify difference in positioning intellectually, genealogically, ontologically and epistemologically. “Everyone had ignored how “Indians” had come “to be here in the first place” . . . the Indians belonged to the land, not vice versa, and that no justification was needed for their presence.” (Wickwire, 2005, p.9) My ancestors, my relatives, children and future “People to Be” are *Sqilxw*/Okanagan—the “Indians” mentioned. Wickwire’s work has been very useful and is appreciated by many Okanagan and mainstream readers. More of these types of friendships and respectful research and relationships are needed to replace the emphasis on negative colonizing experiences and relationships. Harry Robinson guided and mentored many Okanagan community leaders with his knowledge and storytelling. He was considered very well “educated” in Okanagan terms. My role as an Okanagan educator is to reconnect the strands of knowledge and story and to animate the teaching and learning relationships that nurtured storytellers

as a collective way of knowing. “Knowing is more like dew. It is everywhere, but it only gathers into little drops that plop off boughs one by one. Yet webs are not altogether deceptive. After all, they elevate the act of survival. Somehow webs prevent life from ever degenerating into ugliness.” (Simon, 1995, p.303)

In the North Okanagan, there are seven Okanagan Indian Bands with a total population of approximately 5000 people. Of that 5000, there are estimated to be about 100 fluent speakers of our language left. Of the fluent speakers, there are only a few who

Ethan, one of the Okanagan people's brightest young leaders died tragically in a car accident on June 8, 2010. He was midway through his PhD on Indigenous economics. His mantra was “For the People!” He certainly lived what he believed and brought many people together by mediating tensions and building relationships between families, First Nations, Indigenous peoples, and mainstream communities. A *Sqilxw Yelmixwem*, he influenced elders, adults, youth and children with dignity, humour, respect and insight.

know the *Captikwl* stories. In the rest of the population, some people know a little bit of language and traditional knowledge. Most know little or no Okanagan language. Many people in each community continue to hunt, fish, gather foods, medicines and resources and maintain the practices--sustainable relationships over thousands of years. It is very noticeable, however, that far less people practice traditional Okanagan territorial relationships than twenty years ago, but this is changing.

The Okanagan Nation Unity Trek is an example of the renewal of *Sqilxw* responsibilities. The late Louise Gabriel (my aunt), an influential elder from Penticton, had a vision of Okanagan people travelling our territory in our

traditional canoes. Her vision sparked a renewal of carving dugout canoes from cottonwood trees. Soon annual canoe treks were organized in different parts of Okanagan territory including North Central Washington. Late Okanagan carver Gordon Marchand mentored numerous apprentice canoe carvers and now every Okanagan community holds beautiful hand carved canoes and paddles. Late Okanagan scholar, Ethan Baptiste, had taken on a leadership role in the planning, organization, and continuity of the Unity Trek. The Canoe Trek became the Okanagan Nation Unity Trek and expanded to include annual hunting and gathering camps where food from the land is distributed to elders, single parent families and whoever needs it. The camps are also *Captikwl* story telling sites, and youth are trained to hunt and know the land. Many young men and women have taken their first bucks with the guidance of more experienced hunters.

Because published research about Okanagan knowledge is limited and most has been written by non-Indigenous academics, the standard literature review does not really fit my research. To become a knowledgeable person about Okanagan epistemology and pedagogy, I have to extend beyond literature. So I will pragmatically create an Okanagan literature and orature review. The fundamental sources of knowledge come from the Okanagan traditional story system, *CepCaptikwl*, “It is a history of the meaning of being *syilx*, rather than a history of dates. The meanings in the *CepCaptikwl* are formed through story. They are the truths of the natural laws made active through story,” (Okanagan Tribal Council, 1994, p.1), a dynamic record of what it means to be Okanagan; and from conceptual terms from the Okanagan language. There are text versions



of *Captikwl* stories and concepts produced by Okanagan people. They include children's books, biographies, ethnographies, and historical documents. These I am quite familiar with, and have used them in courses I taught with Okanagan content and knowledge. Ecoliteracy is the ability to "read" the land and ecology. The Centre for Ecoliteracy in Berkeley California, through work with Jeannette Armstrong, has structured its educational model, organisation and funding policy on traditional Okanagan societal processes to create a sustainable, cooperative project-based and hands-on teaching and learning framework that incorporates current research about how the brain works, cognition, perception, creativity and imagination, a positive example of a synthesis of Western and Indigenous knowledge. The Ecoliteracy paradigm and examples of schooling projects are described in *Ecoliteracy: Mapping the Terrain* (2000). Western researchers have benefited from Okanagan knowledge, "We are learning from the Okanagan people how to shape a process of society around sustainability in our own ecosystem." (p.4) It is ironic that, because of cultural invasion and internalized patterns of inferiority, people in California were more open to Okanagan knowledge and ways than many Okanagan people in our own communities. But, such is the struggle.

Stories and knowledge are stored in landforms and practices. Coyote Rock is a landmark near Penticton. It is a large teetering or balancing rock on top a pillar caused by erosion. It is approximately twenty metres high, and is a striking and distinct landmark. According to the *Captikwl*, Coyote Rock emerged when the world was changing to its current form. Long ago, Coyote's daughter

was afraid of the coming changes. Coyote comforted his daughter and told her that she would be safe from the coming changes if she did as he suggested. He lay on his back and told his daughter she should sit on him (on his penis) and she would be safe. She trusted him and did as directed. As soon as her body touched his penis, however, they both immediately turned to stone. During a visit to the site, the late Willy Armstrong, a highly regarded Okanagan Elder, told this story to me when I was a student at the En'owkin Centre in 1992. I have been there several times since and the combination of story, physical symbol and mnemonic device, and the content of course, make the story quite unforgettable. Archibald's description of her relationships with traditional stories expands the connections: "Something the characters experienced in the story grabbed me emotionally. My imagination was challenged to visualize the story plot and characters and to think about the possible meanings of the story. It was as if the story became embedded in my being, in my consciousness, and in my Spirit." (1997, p.104) It is also one example of how *Captikwl* knowledge stories are recorded and perpetuated. Coyote Rock is the physical "text" of that story and it is located in a place where travelling and food gathering activities occur so that the text combines with sustenance practices and serves to nurture collectively shared values. This story has much to say about the consequences to children, family, and community when those responsible for the children abuse their power and authority by seeking gratification for their own appetites and desires, rather than treating the children, especially the female, responsibly with love, care and respect. There are many stories of Coyote being destroyed and then Fox comes

along, gathers the bits, and brings Coyote back to life. This story is the only one where Coyote does not return. His daughter also turned to stone, symbolic of death to the fundamental system of Okanagan society, the extended family. The *cepcaptikwl* stories (the ecology talking to us) make it very clear the extended family kinship relationships amongst people and the world are essential to well-being and survival. So part of becoming a “well read” person is organically activating this cultural library with others.

An Okanagan song project, *The Gift of Song* (Alexis, 2004), is an example of re-emerging *Sqilxw* imagination and cultural expression. Okanagan singers from each Okanagan community north of the forty-ninth parallel, composed children’s songs in our language, and these were recorded on compact disk. Like several other Okanagan language learners, I know the phonetic orthography for Okanagan even though I am not a fluent speaker, an outcome that supports the principle that a language must be learned orally before literacy is an effective mode of communication and learning. My role was to work with the singers to transcribe the songs, translate the Okanagan into English, and then create an illustrated learning activities booklet for the songs. This work required a lot of visiting, travelling and talking, essential parts of Okanagan learning and generating knowledge as a community practice.

Okanagan knowledge, of course, does not exist in a vacuum. The need to integrate and synthesise knowledge and practices from the world is clear. The world is an amazing and vast ecosystem with powerful and useful ideas and practices from a diversity of peoples and places that can better and improve the

lives of everyone, if we can avoid the conquest and exploitation reproducing ideas and hegemonies. Evolution, Complexity, Diversity, Perception, Ecology and Policy Studies correspond clearly to Okanagan traditional social organisation and practice, and all are expressed in *Captikwl* stories. My *Sqilxw* research goal is an Okanagan educational model so our children can be immersed in creativity, dialogue, community building, sustainability, language acquisition and self-determination. I am aware that my research process must embody its goal if it is to be realized, in addition to reading and studying—to practice and experience ways of doing and knowing is essential.

Knowledgeable, fluent, elders in different eras of Okanagan cultural survival shared or chose *Captikwl* stories that Okanagan children and communities should know, and that the larger public could have access to. Mourning Dove's *Coyote Stories* (1933) was the first collection of *Captikwl* stories published in English. Harry Robinson was highly regarded by Okanagan people for his extensive knowledge of Okanagan laws, ways, and *Captikwl*. His published works, *Write it on Your Heart*, *Nature Power*, and *Living by Stories*, were told in English, and compiled, and edited by Wendy Wickwire. Mourning Dove and Harry Robinson both expressed concern that the knowledge could be lost if it was not recorded. English was then the only option available. Things were to change.

In 1981, the Okanagan Elders Council was approached and asked if some traditional legends could be used . . . When the elders gave permission for three legends to be used, they were translated into English. The English versions were then taken back to the Elders' Council for examination and edited until they were approved for educational use by Okanagan children. . . After lengthy discussions,

Theytus was granted permission on the grounds that no individual would claim ownership of the legends or benefit from the sales. The Elders council also named the series, "Kou-Skelowh," meaning "We are the people." The series is authorless and copyrighted to the Okanagan Tribal Council. (p. 5)

*Kou-Skelowh/We Are the People*, published by Theytus Books, represents a major effort to restore access for Okanagan children to *Captikwl* stories and a significant shift in that for the first time, in the 2004 version, the three *Captikwl* stories were published in Okanagan language. Many Okanagan Elders have contributed to the recording of *Captikwl* stories. Sarah Petersen, through the Paul creek Language Association, and Andrew McGinnis, through Rainbow Productions, have combined *Captikwl* stories with language acquisition curricula which is being utilized in *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet*.

### **3.1 Coyote and Fox: An Okanagan Research Paradigm**

A recurrent theme in *Captikwl* stories is Coyote getting killed through his own doing or by others. Coyote's greed, appetite, self-absorption, ignorance, and so on cause Coyote's demise in many stories. *Coyote and Eagle* is a well known example and takes place near Keremeos BC: I have heard this story told and talked about by various Okanagan people including Herman Edward, Poncho Pierre, and Chris Eneas, and I have used this story in Art and Indigenous Studies courses, and for adaptations for puppet plays. I have spent hours thinking about this story and discussing it with elders and students. This story is the fundamental guiding framework for my research and work. This is my interpretation, a synthesis of others' versions.

Coyote was watching Eagle one day. He saw Eagle soaring on up drafts near a high cliff at Ashnola. Eagle would swoop down, scream, and ride the drafts back up, really enjoying himself. Coyote watched and watched. Then he said to himself, "Those are my ways." In this frame of mind, he climbed all the way up the cliff... all the while watching Eagle, and thinking to himself, "Those are my ways." It was hard work but he was determined to get to the top. Finally, after climbing all day, he got to the top of the cliff. He walked to the edge and jumped off, intending to catch an updraft and soar. With his skinny arms and legs, however, he just plummeted down. He tried frantically to flap his arms and twirl his tail, but nothing helped him fly. He continued to plummet down the sheer cliff face. He became so afraid that he screamed and pooped all the way to the bottom, where he was splattered to pieces. A large white streak remains on that cliff to remind us of Coyote's journey. Sometime later, Coyote's brother, Fox, came along. Fox had heard that Coyote's foolishness had caused his death again. Fox carefully gathered up all the bits and pieces of Coyote that he could find, a few hairs, a tooth, a piece of bone and so on. When Fox was satisfied that he had all the bits it was possible to find, he breathed into the assemblage, and then stepped over it four times. The pile then transformed itself into Coyote. Coyote sat up, rubbed his eyes, and chastised Fox for waking him up. Coyote said to Fox, "I must have dozed off for a few minutes, and then you're waking me up!" Fox just shook his head, as Coyote carried on his way as if nothing had happened.

In Okanagan stories, Coyote, among other things, symbolizes the creative potential and mind power of humans, and the collective psyche of humans.

Coyote in that sense is our greatest power, but is also our greatest liability because we do not "know" as other animals, how to live our lives properly and sustainably in our ecology: we have to learn and remember our roles in the complex web of life. A salmon, for example, knows what river he/she is in and what direction she/he has to take to fulfil his/her life's destination and purpose. A salmon does not have identity crises (humans have certainly created major problems for salmon lately), or struggle with what it is to be fully a salmon. We humans on the other hand only have memory, experiential and collective memory and must learn from our world and each other. Coyote emerged from Okanagan epistemological evolution to show us the good and bad that our mind

power and creativity can manifest. That is why our stories, language and connections to our territory are vital to our existence and ongoing survival. In Harry Robinson's version of "Coyote Challenges God," (1989) Coyote gets into a conflict with the creator because Coyote challenges the creator and boasts that he, Coyote, is smarter, older and more powerful. Coyote then went on to move trees, mountains, and lakes, all with his mind to demonstrate his power. Unfortunately for Coyote, he could not put the trees, mountains and lakes back and he was told that his power came from the Creator and could be taken away. Ultimately, the Creator put Coyote on a boat, "to stay there until the end of the world." (Robinson, p. 119-122)

Wisdom and power expressed in Okanagan *Captikwl* stories are associated with age and experience, and it is clearly understood that we humans have the mind power to move mountains, rivers, trees etc, and if we express that power simply "because we can" then the *Captikwl* suggests that we will be caught up in hegemonies of self-importance with notions of dominance and superiority over others and natural communities. Power and wisdom are associated with the ability "to put things back" because we are part of a larger system of knowledge and evolution. If we cannot put things back in their place then our survival is threatened. The world can certainly resume its "everything that is moving and changing, recreating itself continuously" without us here. In other words, the earth will regenerate itself and continue with or without humans. Fox is the more rational, reflective, and responsible counterbalance to Coyote. The tension between the two can be expressed as, "Are we Fox or are we

Coyote?” The metaphor of the gathering, breathing and steps by Fox is understood as that we are at once Coyote and Fox. They symbolise collective humanity (in an Okanagan cultural context), and the emergence of a new consciousness, a new way of knowing as part of an ongoing evolution of knowledge. My research is the gathering of as many “bits” as possible of old and current knowledge, practices, attitudes, beliefs, artefacts, and consequences until what is assembled is appropriate to “breathe” into life, and ritualise into practice with the appropriate “steps.” The recurrence of this Coyote and Fox theme in the Okanagan story tradition is a persistent reminder to us that knowledge is not static. It is necessarily continuously recreating itself, and like the Okanagan stories and people, knowledge too must evolve in symbiotic relationships with the territorial ecology and larger world. Fox’s role certainly informed research involved in the realization of *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet*. *Sqilxw*/Okanagan knowledge bits were gathered over my lifetime, and the gathering effort became more concentrated and focussed on school development. The knowledge bits were talked about with families and elders and “breathed” into life. The new understanding was ritualized into practice by continuing dialogue and trying things out in the school.

*Captikwl* stories are connected to places, resources and practices within the Okanagan territory and over thousands of years the knowledge expressed through *Captikwl* through the medium of Okanagan language has nurtured collectively shared sets of values and ethical sensibilities. The land, the *tmxwulaxw*, knows us. Our knowledge comes from the *tmixw*, the spirits of the



ecology, and was continuously recorded and expressed in the *Captikwl* stories. The *Captikwl* story system is very much the spirits of the land and our ancestors talking to us. Our responsibilities as *Sqilxw* are to know the *Captikwl*, the accumulated wisdom that the natural communities have shared with us so we would survive.

### **3.2 Knowing the *Captikwl* and Relationships With Elders**

The question that began to nag me in the late eighties and early nineties, after hearing numerous references to the *Captikwl* and after so many elders had discussed these "legend stories" and determined that these particular ones should be shared, was, "Why so much fuss about these legends?" At first glance, they were similar to fables, and could be simplistically interpreted for a lesson or moral message. "By now I was very confused. This coyote story had so little in common with the quaint and timeless mythological accounts in the published collections." (Wickwire, 2005, p.11) I, like Wickwire, was confused about these stories that have been labelled "myths, folklore" and so on. Rather than turn to anthropological analyses such as Claude Levi-Strauss' works, I looked to Okanagan elders and the En'owkin Centre community, Okanagan and Indigenous gifted translators.

I did not realize the significance of stories at that time, but I also felt that using an Indian legend to teach reading, in particular comprehension skills, was not appropriate either. . . I did not hear traditional stories being told when I was a child; however, I heard many life experience stories. It was not until I started working with the Coqualeetza Cultural Centre, Sto:lo Sitel, and Elders' group that I began learning about the educational importance of stories." (Archibald, 1997, p. 96)

After a few years of learning more language, facilitating the study and interpretation of these *Captikwl* stories, particularly with Okanagan elders, I, in similar ways to Archibald (2008), began to see the interconnections, between *Captikwl* stories, and social, economic, and political relationships: metaphorical descriptions of governance, leadership, and responsibility informed by ecological understanding. The connections also extended from my experiences of living, hunting, working, and growing up with Okanagan and *Ntlakapmx* peoples, particularly elders. My emerging awareness was a maturing process through Okanagan pedagogy, experiential learning merging with story frameworks into a more synthesized understanding connected to my homeland. If I could discern patterns and figure a few things out with my limited amount of strands of knowledge, imagine the potential of generations of children with complex webs of *Sqilxwlcawt* surrounding them!

I also taught *Captikwl* based courses at the En'owkin Centre and University of British Columbia – Okanagan (UBCO). An example is the course, INDG 202: 'Okanagan Concepts and Frameworks.' I taught this course simultaneously in the same semester to a group of mostly Indigenous students, including several Okanagan elders/knowledge keepers at the En'owkin Centre , in Penticton and also to a group of mostly non-Indigenous students at UBCO in Kelowna. I was amazed at the different interpretations of the stories that came out of the two groups, and have surmised that the different linguistically framed interpretations which are informed by different epistemologies and worldviews were coming into play. The translations were not doing the stories justice as few

translations do. A significant difference was that the Indigenous understandings of Okanagan elders was expressed relationally about kinship responsibilities while the non-Indigenous understandings were mostly expressed analytically about individual achievement.

Consider the following example, *Senklip* and *N'cicen* (Coyote and Wolf), and consider what the value of the story might be.

*Senklip* (Coyote) overheard the pretty young women in the village talking about *N'cicen* (Wolf). They said, “*N'cicen* is so handsome and such a good hunter...and he is strong and powerful...*N'cicen* is fast...and so handsome.”

“Hah!” said *Senklip*, “*N'cicen* is nothing! I am powerful, much stronger and smarter than *N'cicen*. I get him to do work for me. I use him for my packhorse! I ride him around for picking olallies, *sia*! He’s my berry picking horse!”

*N'cicen* heard about *Senklip* bragging to the girls and he said to himself, “I’m gonna get that *usencut*, that loudmouth show off *Senklip* for saying that stuff about me.”

*Senklip*’s power told him that *N'cicen* was coming to kill him. When *N'cicen* burst into *Senklip*’s home, *Senklip* was pretending to be really sick. *Senklip* said, “I know you’re very powerful *N'cicen*, and I know you’re gonna kill me, and I’m too sick to fight you anyway. But before I die, I’d like to say my last words to my *stintima*, my grandmother, but I’m too weak to go see her. Will you let me say goodbye to my *stintima* before you kill me...and maybe help me a little bit.” *N'cicen* thought to himself, “I guess that would be alright,” and agreed to the request.

*Senklip* crawled out of bed, really shaky. Acting very sick, he told *N'cicen*, “I’m too feeble to walk by myself. Can I lean on you for support?” He leaned on *N'cicen* and said, “My legs are too weak, can I lay across your back?” *N'cicen* begrudgingly let *Senklip* lay across his back. *Senklip* then said in a feeble voice, “Your back is so bony. It hurts my sore aching body. Can I slide this mat underneath?” *Senklip* slid the mat underneath himself and on *N'cicen*’s back. “Oh,” said *Senklip*, “My arms are so weak. I can’t hang on and your hair is slippery. Can I put this little rope around your neck to hang on to? Otherwise I’ll never make it.” *Senklip* put the rope around *N'cicen*’s neck, just like a halter. *Senklip* then said in his weak, feeble voice, “I think I’m ready now *N'cicen*, *limlimt*, *limlimt*, thank you, thank you.”

All the young women were gathered outside *Senklip*'s house waiting for the handsome *N'cicen* to emerge. As soon as *N'cicen*'s head was out the door, *Senklip* sat up straight, kicked out his heels and spurred *N'cicen* as hard as he could with prickly pear cactuses he had attached to his heels.

*N'cicen* howled in pain and sprung out of the house, leaping, bellowing, and howling in pain and anger. *Senklip* clung to *N'cicen*'s back, dug in with his spurs and held on to the rope, laughing and hollering at the girls, "See, see, I told you women *N'cicen* was my saddle horse! Ha hah!" *Senklip* laughed and rode the howling, bucking, bellowing *N'cicen* all over the village. (Eneas, 1998, p. 38)

The mainstream students mostly focussed on Coyote's cunning, and using his wits to overcome a stronger adversary, which is a very appropriate interpretation and in line with Western cultural stories e.g. Jack and the Beanstalk, David and Goliath and so on. The Okanagan elders, however, had a very different interpretation. They said, for example, "Sometimes it's painful to be an older brother or sister when your younger sibling acts immaturely." (Delphine Derickson, personal communication, 2005). I thought more about the kinship relationships and the story. Certainly it would have been tragic if the older brother had killed the younger foolish brother in anger. That would have been a major family and community crisis and an incredible loss of creative and intellectual potential.

I have heard elders talking about leaders and the decisions they make, especially when decisions are made that impact the community. When a leader is struggling, making poor or self-serving decisions, the elders would say, "Doesn't know his *Captikwl*." This has initiated a personal mission of mine to know as much about the *Captikwl* story system as possible. I have read every written *Captikwl* story I could find including the Harry Robinson, Mourning Dove,

and En'owkin Centre books, and bits of the controversial Bouchard transcripts (the controversy is because Bouchard claimed copyright of the stories he was told by Okanagan elders). More importantly, I had the opportunity to hear many *Captikwl* stories from many elders, fluent speakers and knowledge keepers and also talk about *Captikwl* stories and Okanagan concepts that are expressed in the stories. My conversations at the En'owkin Centre with Jeannette and Richard Armstrong, Chris Eneas, Delphine Derickson, Archie Jack, Maggie Kruger, Andrew McGinnis and Thomas Pierre, and my friendship with Herman Edward and his mom, Isabelle, Rob Edward, Charlie Horse Squakin, and the Allison family, particularly Chief Barnett Allison and his wife Margaret, and Chief Edward "Slim" Allison and his wife Carrie. Through an accumulation of stories and experiences, visits, hunting and fishing trips, meals, funerals, projects and continued study of *Captikwl* stories and Okanagan concepts, I have a much greater appreciation of the *Captikwl* story system and the interconnections to Okanagan pedagogy, values, culture, epistemology and ultimately what it means to be a *Sqilxw* Okanagan person. evolving knowledge and that has been expressed in courses and projects informed by and which express Okanagan Concepts and Frameworks.

I have asked elders how does the *Captikwl* come into play when a decision has to be made that will impact the community, and, "How do you know what to do?" The usual response is, "You just know." I have come to understand that "just knowing," is connected to traditional ways of knowing, of being "educated" in an Okanagan way of acquiring knowledge, responsibility and

wisdom. When the patterns of stories, seasonal cultural-economic practices, repetitive speech patterns and metaphoric and conceptual terms expressed through stories over many generations through extended family and kinship networks and through every day life experiences are considered, “just knowing” becomes an intuitive wisdom, a synthesis over a lifetime of collective Okanagan pedagogy, ontology and epistemology, collectively nurtured and held values, responsibilities and kinship relationships that sustained the people for millennia.

The issue of “elders” and how to access knowledge from them has become both controversial and problematic because of a) negative experiences with earlier researchers who were mostly, non-Indigenous anthropologists, ethnographers, historians, linguists—“friends” who claimed copyright and control over Okanagan knowledge, etc, and b) influences and adaptations from Pan-Indian practices and protocols rather than from specific tribes and communities. Accessing knowledge, , has often been an expression of an individualized rather than a collective paradigm and furthermore, university research policies and methods had to be followed for the knowledge to be considered “valid, academic or scientific.” First Nations, of course, were part of the earlier “vanishing red man” theme that was popular when there were few or no Indigenous scholars in the university. Elders’ positioning in relation to research has not changed much because elders and the cultural knowledge they bring with them are still placed at the edge of research and knowledge production. They are often viewed as valuable living artefacts to be examined and mined before they are gone forever. A more proactive and transforming approach is to view elders and their

knowledge as part of a continuous flow and evolution of knowledge that is re-emerging as a natural process of multigenerational engagement: kinship relationships, where people know each other's genealogies, histories and languages. Elders, traditionally, are respected for their acquired experiential and cultural knowledge. They have earned status in the community for their work and application of wisdom to help and mentor others. This continues today. Certain elders are regarded as heads of large extended families, and are very influential in terms of major community decisions and selection of leadership.

It was once common for interior plateau peoples (*Okanagan*, *Ntlakapmx*, *Secwepemc* for example) to speak three or more languages fluently, and for translators to speak ten or more languages fluently. The use of English has been homogenizing and has largely replaced the use of Indigenous languages in family and community contexts. English is useful because it is a language that makes communication between different cultural and linguistic groups straightforward. Respective languages, however, have diminished and the larger cultural diversity of many Indigenous languages and correlating knowledge systems and interrelationships have diminished accordingly. The dominance of the English language and the diminished value for Indigenous languages have had dire consequences for younger generations who have become disconnected from their language, knowledge and culture—they have also become disconnected from their cultural identity. The cumulative effects are seen in high and disproportionate levels of social and economic crises. English language has also complicated our cultural practices. Knowledge, practices and protocols have

in many cases become an amalgam of this and that Indian way through the medium of English. For example, it is common for example to “give elders tobacco” if you want to talk to them about their knowledge. I have asked Elders about this, and Jane Stelkia’s response was, “I don’t smoke. Why would someone give me tobacco? If they want to know something they can do some work for me. I have lots of things to do at the ranch.” (personal communication, 1998) Another response was, “We have lots of tobacco. People give us lots of tobacco, and we help them, but it doesn’t put gas in the tank or pay our bills” (Mary-Lou and Ed Louie, 2004, personal communication). Tobacco is not something that is Indigenous to the Okanagan but it has become associated with spiritual practices, and there is not common understanding about its uses.

Another example that is confusing is the dropping of an eagle feather at a powwow; I was at a powwow when that happened to a young female dancer. An eagle feather fell from her regalia. The whole powwow was stopped and people were really concerned. The announcer said a veteran would come and try and make things right for the family. The young woman was devastated. I still am not sure about the significance. I thought about areas where there are eagles, where there are nests or where they gather to fish, they drop lots of feathers. I have walked around and collected them. I asked some of the people who know about powwows why it was such a major issue but no one knew why. My examples are not criticisms, but are meant to illustrate the absence of collective understanding, and that we often go along with practices without really knowing why we are doing it or what we are doing. The yearning or feeling that something in the way



we live our lives is missing is very strong. “That’s why we look for the wishing rock and play charades.”

From my childhood, when I visited dozens of elders with my dad, we brought meat, firewood, a box of apples and such, or just went and visited and chopped some firewood or helped around the place before we left. My uncle George actually gave me tobacco when I was a kid--to roll smokes for him. It is also not uncommon for certain adults to be seen taking their elders to the bank on pension day and then to the bar. All of this makes it confusing for youth, adults and elders because they/we are unsure about how to visit with each other and get to a place where we in our own cultural contexts can feel good about sharing knowledge, and where and when and to whom. A collective axiology is part of the practice and part of the goal of knowledge relationship building. With that in mind I have drawn upon *Captikwl* stories that have been formally approved by Okanagan elders through a publication process or approved through community sharing at gatherings and public events. A degree of judgment on my part certainly comes in to play, and certain bits of knowledge that elders have shared are not included in this thesis. Literally underpinning all of this is the *tmxwulaxw*, and the *tmixw*. This land knows us and while the *tmixw* have determined that they will help us survive, the *tmixw*, the spiritual ecology, can also be harsh and mean so we must practice humility, sound judgment, discretion, and maintain confidence and trust even though it may be painful sometimes.

### 3.3 Four Food Chiefs *Enowkinwixw* for the People to Be

*How Food Was Given* provides a framework and sustainable societal model for balanced relationships between these quadrants: vision/innovation, action/implementation, place/ecology, and family/community. This story has many versions with the same essential story line and varying degrees of detail. It is set in an era before humans came to the world. In the story, Four Food Chiefs were discussing through a traditional *enowkinwixw* process<sup>9</sup> how to give food to the people to be, the coming humans. The four chiefs were Bear, Salmon, Berry, and Root. They talked for many days, and they asked, “When the people to be come to this land, how will they survive here?” *Enowkinwixw* was used traditionally to address and resolve issues of serious concern to the community. It is not based upon conflict or debate: it is, rather, a clarifying, strategic planning, and unifying process, an organizational model. The challenge is not to convince others of your position. The challenges and the responsibilities are to contribute understanding to the collective and to consider and include the feelings and viewpoints of all others, and as a group come to the best possible solutions for the whole community, and the future generations. The decisions and strategies are shaped, balanced, and strengthened by the understanding and commitment of all facets of the community: Youth, Elders, Mothers, and Fathers, the Extended Family and all the associated roles and positions. My understanding was initially connected to Jeannette Armstrong’s Four Society model (2000) and the *enowkinwixw* process. I assisted Jeannette with some work she was doing

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<sup>9</sup> The dialogical process they were engaged in is *enowkinwixw*, literally, drops of meaning absorbed by the group mind to clarify and generate community consensus to a strategic action. The En’owkin Centre name comes from this concept.

with the Centre for Ecoliteracy in 1997 and we had a dialogue about what *Captikwl* characters would be good to represent the four societies. We initially chose four from *Captikwl* stories generally, based on their roles and relationships, turtle, blue jay, beaver, and bear.

I have come to understand that unless change occurs in the ways in which communities affect the land, the well-being and even survival of all of us is at risk. We can change this. For these reasons I choose to assist in joining a collaborative process to devise a better future. My contribution is in the En'owkin process . . . today we humans face the biggest of obstacles and so the greatest of challenges to our creativity and responsibility. Let us begin with courage and without limitation, and we will come up with surprising solutions. (Armstrong, 1999, p. 10)

After studying *Captikwl* stories, I realized that *How Food Was Given* metaphorically describes the *enowkinwixw* process (This was a revelation to me: my ancestors and no doubt quite a few elders, and Jeannette, already knew it and were waiting for me to notice). I connected the Food Chiefs to Jeannette's quadrants (bear/youth, berry/mothers, root/elders, and salmon/fathers) (2000, p.8-11), and combined these insights with the spider's web (*Sqilxwlcawt*) model. Using this teaching model I was able to facilitate culturally informed workshops throughout the Okanagan to address education and justice issues, and also designed and taught a course at UBCO titled *Enowkinwixw*. The following quote is from notes that Jeannette gave me which I included in workshop pamphlets.

The term is based on a metaphorical image created by the three syllables that make up the word. The image is of liquid being absorbed drop by drop through the head (mind). It refers to coming to understanding through a gentle integrative process.

En'owkin (**n'awqn**) is also the name given to our education centre by our elders, and it is meant to assist us in restoring to wholeness a community fragmented by colonization. The **Silx<sup>w</sup>** used this word when there was a choice

confronting the community. An elder would ask people to engage in **n'awqnwix<sup>w</sup>**, which requests each person to contribute information about the subject at hand. What took place was not a debate but a process of clarification, one that incorporated bits of information from as many as possible, no matter how irrelevant, trivial, or controversial the bits might seem. (Armstrong, 2000)

Knowledgeable elders, fluent in Okanagan language and *Captikwl* stories participated in the workshops. When I introduced the workshops, themes and topics and the process that would be used I would say, "I am not an expert. I put these things together, and I don't know if I have everything right. I am gathering things up and trying them out, so if I am wrong about something let me know. Everybody knows something. Nobody knows everything. The reason for doing this is to bring alive our ways of doing things by doing them, so we can change things for the kids and the grandkids. If it's going to work we have to learn from each other and teach and help each other." Elders were very encouraging and said keep at it. After I left UBCO in 2007, Jeannette Armstrong started teaching the *enowkinwixw* course, and I heard that she had a different Food Chief to quadrant alignment. I met with Jeannette in March 2010, and we talked about it and she explained the realignment and gave me an excerpt from her Ph. D. Thesis. The new understanding from that dialogue is expressed in the following section. I may be the first to reference her thesis, which is important to note as an expression of evolving Okanagan academic research and publication, an example that combines learning from traditional knowledge keepers and academically credentialed theoretical referencing.

The following is the story that was published in the *Kou Skelouwh/ We Are the People* trilogy. It is also a very condensed version of the larger *Captikwl* that

according to Isabelle Edward, “takes a week to tell in Indian,” and includes a network of Chiefs with diverse roles and commitments to the People-To-Be, for example, Juniper and Rosebush whose responsibilities are to help and protect the people spiritually. (Herman Edward, personal communication, 1999) In the longer story, through the network of chiefs, the principles of shared leadership and responsibility and shared personal commitment to the collective are clearly expressed, as well as the principle that everyone has potential to contribute leadership and maintain, improve, or add to viable kinship relationships.

In the world before this world, before there were people, and before things were like they are now, everyone was alive and walking around like we do.

All creation talked about was the coming changes to their world.

They had been told that soon a new kind of people would be living on this earth. Even they, the Animal and Plant people would be changed. Now they had to decide how the People-To-Be would live and what they would eat.

The four Chiefs of all creation are: Black Bear, Chief for all creatures on the land. Spring Salmon, Chief for all creatures in the water. Bitterroot, Chief for all things under the ground, and Saskatoon Berry, Chief for things growing on land.

They held many meetings and talked for a long time about what the People-To-Be would need to live. All of the Chiefs thought and thought. “What can we give to the People-To-Be to eat that is already here on earth?” they asked one another. “There seems to be no answer.”

Finally, the three other Chiefs said to Bear, “You are the oldest and wisest among us. You tell us what you are going to do. Bear said, “Since you have all placed your trust in me, I will have to do the best that I can.” He thought for a long time and finally he said, “I will give myself, and all the animals that I am Chief over, to be food for the People-To-Be.”

Then he said to Salmon, “What will you do?” Salmon answered, “You are indeed the wisest among us. I will also give myself and all the things that live in the water for food for the People-To-Be.”

Bitterroot, who was Chief of all the roots under the ground said, “I will do the same.”

Saskatoon Berry was last. She said, “I will do the same. All the good things growing above the ground will be food for the People-To-Be.”

Chief Bear was happy because there would be enough food for the People-To-Be. Bear said, “Now, I will lay my life down to make these things happen.”

Because Chief Bear had given his life, all of Creation gathered and sang songs to bring him back to life. That was how they helped heal each other in that world. They all took turns singing, but Bear did not come back to life.

Finally, along came Fly. He sang, “You laid your body down. You laid your life down.” His song was powerful. Bear came back to life. Then Fly told the Four Chiefs, “When the People-To-Be are here and they take your body for food, they will sing this song. They will cry their thanks with this song.”

Then Bear spoke for all the Chiefs, “From now on when the People-To-Be come, everything will have its own song. The People-To-Be will use these songs to help each other as you have helped me.”

That is how food was given to our people. That is how songs were given to our people. That is why we must respect even the smallest, weakest persons for what they can contribute. That is why we give thanks and honour to what is given to us. (Okanagan Tribal Council, 2004, p. 7-31)

Notions of consensus building and Action Research within a diverse community are described in the actions and concepts of the Four Food Chiefs. *Yelmixwem*, or chief, translates/suggests a gathering or weaving image, the one who continuously brings together the diverse strands. Bear is considered the “oldest and wisest.” The notion of “older” associated with power and wisdom is a recurring theme in *Captikwl* stories. When Coyote challenged God/*Kwulencuten* (Robinson, 1989), he boasted that he was older and more powerful, and demonstrated his power to move trees, lakes and mountains, all with his mind, and just because he could. Coyote finds out the hard way that his knowledge and

mind power come from *Kwulencuten* (all of creation) and that creation could remove his power. In that story, power and being older are associated with *Kwulencuten* who has the power to put things back in their place in the web of life. The ability and foresight to put things back in their ecological places is the wisdom that mediates the potentially destructive creativity and intellectual power of humans. Bear was the greatest in that situation, with his age and wisdom, to provide a sustainable vision, but it required the cooperation and life commitment of all the Chiefs and inclusion of those that could be considered undesirable, skunk, stink bug, and particularly Fly, for example.

The focus is on a desirable outcome that benefits everyone. One of the most famous quotations from Indians is from Sitting Bull: "Now let us put our minds together to see what kind of world we can leave for our children." And another is out of the Haudenosaunee tradition now known as The Great Law of Peace: "Now we put our minds together to see what kind of world we can create for the seventh generation yet unborn." Both of these are pragmatic constructions; both are about envisioning a desirable outcome and then negotiating the steps to go from here to the outcome that you want. (Mohawk, 2004, p.4)

Everyone has potential to be the greatest chief. The community gave the leadership responsibility to Bear because they knew his qualities were best suited for the challenge, and Bear's vision was balanced and complemented by *enowkinwixw* dialogue with the other chiefs. It was Bear, "the oldest and wisest," who had the experiential wisdom and spiritual knowledge to envision a stable and sustainable relationship for The People-To-Be. Effective community directed leadership requires the collective knowing each others' individual gifts and strengths so the community knows who to call on and give responsibility to in particular situations. Individuals with special knowledge or skills, through Okanagan pedagogical processes, have been nurtured and mentored by older

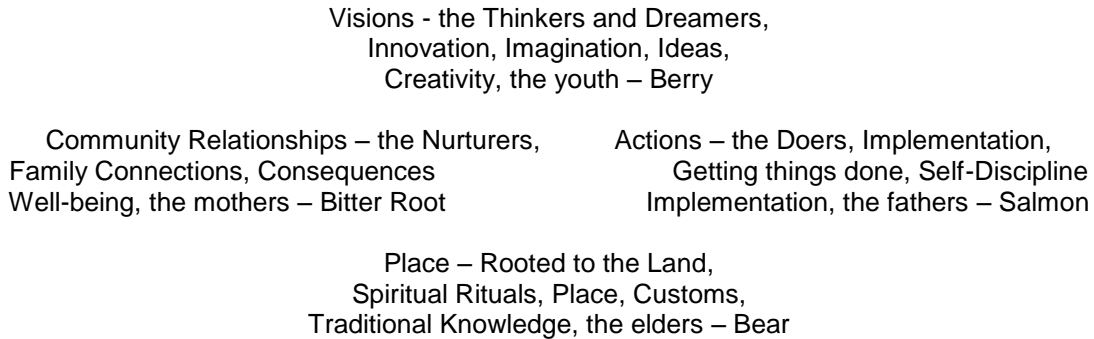
specialists throughout their lives. The community, through extended family learning and teaching relationships, knows its members and the members know the community, a social correlation of the land knows us and we know the land. Contributions, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant should not be excluded. This is symbolized by Fly who is annoying, lives on poop, and people generally do not like flies. Yet it was Fly who sang the new relationship into a cycle of renewal.

Figuratively, as a dynamic, Chief *Skmxist* [Bear] might be thought of as representing dependability or stableness. Stableness can be seen as powerful and desirable. The opposing force could then be thought of as “change” which could be represented by *Siya*, Saskatoon berry is the seed and inevitable disruption which is also desirable. Bitterroot or *Spitlem*, a root, figuratively represents an independent anchoring in place as a positive adaptive and nurturing process. The opposing point is Spring Salmon *Ntitiyix* as independent action and mobility and application of advantage representing a positive force of advancement. The number four, rather than a number in its numeric sequential function, identifies in the construct, the principle of opposing forces held in place by positive counterbalance to each other. Each counterbalance can be visualized as moving both toward and outward from the centre as an aspect of the dynamics within the circle. (Armstrong, 2010, p.213)

Berry's role is associated with youth and she symbolizes the importance of vision, change, innovation, and creativity, the seed of new ideas. Salmon represents action, implementation and discipline associated with the spawning cycle. He represents the fathers in the community. Bear, suggests the importance of stability and ecological practices. He is associated with elders, traditional knowledge and spiritual practices. Bitter Root, literally rooted to place, is associated with extended family and community wellbeing and is associated with the mothers of the community (Figure 5).



## A Quadrant Model of Society: Dynamic Tension, Diversity, Inclusiveness and Complementarity



**Figure 5 A Quadrant Model of Society**

Governance, teaching and learning—Action Research-- traditionally occurred in experiential/ecological contexts through the extended family system where the relationships are continuous, family based, and guided by love, respect, and responsibility, thus avoiding the Platonic separation of knowing and doing. (Arendt, 1958, p.225) The four chiefs, two males and two females, generally symbolise the youth, adults, and elders—no age or gender restrictions. An elder could have innovative (youth) associated qualities, and so on. In this framework, some of the stakeholders (children and future generations) are not included in the community leadership dialogue because they are the responsibility of the youth, adults and elders. This requires a substantial commitment to the people to be: children and future generations. The Chiefs committed their lives to the “people to be.” The goals and objectives are long term, and include the sustainability of human generations and ecological communities of the future. Enthusiasm and interactive creative expression are

symbolized by the songs in the story, songs of thanks and appreciation to the ecology which supports us. The Four Chiefs addressed what may be the most fundamental Action Research and policy issue for human interaction and survival, "What can we do for the people to be?"

The Four Chiefs' framework suggests the importance of balanced research from the four extended family parts of the community: symbolically the elders, youth, fathers and mothers. And the relevance of the data gathered/produced relates to critical imagination or *Sqilxwlcawt*. "The term refers to the things we do as specific individuals within our culture as a deliberate part of our existence. It is the deliberate part which is expressed as the creative process and the essence of being human and for which we have complete and utter responsibility." (Armstrong, 1991, 14) The Four Chiefs, symbolic of much larger and complex communities nested within and interconnected to other communities, are extending the metaphor of Fox gathering up the bits and bringing Coyote to life. The relevance of data and action research is determined by its relationship and value to "the people-to-be." It is of value to our children and future generations if it is balanced within the web of relationships described by the quadrants for then it is likely to be culturally sustainable and ecologically viable for the long term. Underpinning the Four Chiefs' leadership responsibilities is the reminder from the creator to have the power to put things back. The relationships are complex, with tensions and contradictions. The consequences of not taking responsibility, of abuse and disrespect to children, particularly our daughters, and the extended family, however, are clear, whether one believes

stories of Coyote and Coyote Rock, or ecologists (and most scientists ) and human rights advocates.

My reflection makes it very clear to me that Okanagan and or Indigenous stories which are metaphoric descriptions of complex social and ecological relationships for continuously evolving knowledge are very compatible with many academic research methods. Simple techniques, for example, the recording of individual contributions on flip charts, are useful to facilitate the *enowkinwixw* process in a contemporary workshop setting. I find that Action Research has dynamic elements in common with *enowkinwixw* community decision making. It's also apparent to me that Action Research is a rephrasing of much of Paulo Freire's theorizing: being actors engaged in making history, conscientization and praxis, and use of codifications to name the world (source is out of my head). Something missing, from virtually all of the non-Indigenous research methods, is the connection of research and knowledge to specific place, to territory. This in my view, is a reflection of "mind/body split" and disconnection of humans from a kinship relationship with the world. "Evidence based research" I believe could learn much from holistic, ecologically connected frameworks. Most of the "evidence" occurs in or on artificial structures such as normative groups and achievement indicators with no connection to land and in classrooms and square buildings made of and on top of concrete and steel. Much of the existing "evidence" (sewage, garbage, reduced ecological diversity, chemical pollution, electromagnetic fields, and so on) is ignored or not even considered until it is too late "to put things back."

Colonisation and the reproduction of dominant forms of cultural, social, and economic interests also compound research issues. An example of this occurred when I had the chance to facilitate an Okanagan community leadership workshop with Antioch PhD students. During the debriefing/discussion session, I was asked, “How do you manage to live in separate worlds of Western and Indigenous awareness?” What is clear to me is that it is the same world. However, in a world where diversity of cultures, languages, pedagogies, epistemologies, and ontologies are essential to world health and evolution--relationship issues, particularly, unequal power relations, are important to understand and appropriately manage. Essential issues in Indigenous research are survival, diversity and sustainability. I draw upon two traditions: at least 10,000 years of empirically proven sustainable Okanagan societal organisation, not a perfect society, but quite stable with good international relations, and Western knowledge through institutional contexts. Both of course are interconnected in history and practice to each other and to other peoples’ traditions. I believe further holistic research tied to specific places, territories or regions will help to clarify and mediate the tensions between colonising hegemonies and transforming praxis.

### 3.4 Four Okanagan “Organic” Leaders

This section describes four Okanagan organic leaders, Chief Johnny Chillihitzia, Chief Gus Gottfriedsen, Dr. Jeannette C. Armstrong, and Sarah *Samtic’a* Petersen, who span the era from 1900 to present in terms of their work and leadership. These four leaders are examples of Indigenous visionaries and knowledge holders who maintained *Sqilxw*-Okanagan responsibilities, practices, knowledge, and relationships. They are leaders who have kept alive the strands of knowledge especially in areas of the right to be Okanagan, storytelling, extended family, Okanagan theory and practice, and language recovery. Because of them and others, the current generation has the opportunity for transforming praxis tied to and informed by our ancestors and homeland—to be Okanagan.

The four leaders featured here are proven Okanagan leaders. It is important to note that their leadership is organically connected to many other individuals and communities. Chief Johnny Chillihitzia represented the Okanagan Nation as a traditional *Yelmixwem* in the Okanagan language. His positions were informed by strong relational accountability to his people and many First Nations in BC who formed political alliances. Chief Gus Gottfriedsen, an Okanagan, married into the *Secwepemc* and became Chief for many years, a continuing expression of thousands of years of kinship connections and formal alliances with our allies, the *Secwepemc* people. Gus is noted for his political leadership through intense eras of assimilation policy and cultural genocide. It is his role with his wife Millie, however, in maintaining extended family networks of caring

and responsibility, and mentoring numerous young men and women with leadership potential that is their continuing legacy. Dr. Jeannette Armstrong is the first Okanagan to receive her Ph. D. for research and work informed by and embodying Okanagan knowledge. Her work has been particularly important to spark the imagination and creative potential of a wave of Okanagan, Indigenous and mainstream artists, writers, scholars and educators. Sarah Petersen, perhaps the most active Okanagan elder in language recovery, was the first Okanagan language teacher to apply Total Physical Response methods, and founded the Paul Creek Language Association, which provides language-teaching resources to all Okanagan communities. Sarah inspired and mentored many young language activists and educators.

#### **3.4.1 Johnny Chillihitzia, *Yelmixwem*—Okanagan High Chief**



**Figure 6 Chief Johnny Chillihitzia**

Chief Johnny Chillihitzia, organizer, activist, diplomat, spokesperson for interior nations. (1900 – 1930s era), one of the last Okanagan High Chiefs during

the era when Indian Act political structures were imposed on the Okanagan people and British Columbia and Canada were unjustly dispossessing the Okanagan people from our lands and resources. Chief Chillihitzia led delegations to Ottawa and England to lobby the British Parliament and the Queen. His speeches and positions on land-claims and Aboriginal rights from the early 1900s, translated from Okanagan, are echoed today, as in his statement to the Royal Commission on Indian Affairs October 8, 1913 at Penticton:

Great White Chief, I come here as representing all these people. I wish to speak to you. I wish to hear from you as to whether this country belongs to you and your government or to the Indians. I came here specially to hear that question answered. If you claim it is your country then we are of opposite opinions and I am opposed to that view. The Indians say that it is their country and if you claim it they want to go to some big court house and have the matter settled. (Cited in OTC, 1994, p. 62)

And the 1926 Allied Tribes petition to Canadian Parliament,

The case that Johnny Chillihitzia made . . . was probably the most pertinent and relevant testimony, as well as the most eloquent, that the committee heard:

Long ago the Indians had laws, but since the white people came, the Indian laws are cast aside by the white people, and they impose their white man's laws on the Indians . . . Sproat came as a messenger from the Queen, and he said: . . . "The Queen has learned of your country, and it is a big country, and the Queen wants to keep your reserves, and put them in four posts. . . If you believe in the Queen and take her as your sovereign, she will take care of you always. . . . If in any way you have trouble in your country, you will speak to the Queen and she will send word over and have the trouble fixed up for you Indians."

The Indians did not seem to agree to have their lands in four posts, and then Sproat told the Indians that if they consented to have their reserves posted. . . . the Queen will send another messenger. "When the messenger comes again you will speak about your country; it is a big country, and all what is in it, and you Indians and the Queen will make an agreement." . . . (cited in Manuel, 1974, p. 93-94)

Canada's response to the organized resistance of BC Indian nations to encroachment and assimilation and their lobbying efforts to settle the BC land question is well known. Through the 1927 amendment to the Indian Act, Canada made it a criminal offense for Indians to pursue the BC land question. George Manuel said, "I do not know if this was the darkest hour in the history of the Parliament of Canada. If there were other moments when the forces of law and order were so warped and distorted. . . ." (1974, p. 95) Chillihitzia's leadership and diplomacy occurred during a period when BC and Canada's most blatantly unjust legislation was coercively applied to Indian peoples, yet he organized and brought an incredible number of Indian nations and leaders together and left a strong legacy for following generations to draw upon. Eventually old age slowed him down and he passed away in the 1930s.



### 3.4.2 Chief Gus Gottfriedsen



**Figure 7 Gus Gottfriedsen**

Chief Gus Gottfriedsen was a founding member of the North American Indian Brotherhood (NAIB) which became the National Indian Brotherhood and is now the Assembly of First Nations. A noted horseman, professional rodeo cowboy and contractor, BC Cowboy Hall of Fame inductee, politician, activist, businessman, historian, humorist and Chief, Gus was proudly Okanagan and from the *Nkmaplqs*, Head of Lake area near Vernon. He married into the *Secwepemc* people. Millie, his wife, was from Kamloops, and he became a part of that community, was Chief of the Kamloops Indian Band for years, and was a key figure in BC interior political organizing and the struggles of the 1930s to 1970s era. Gus and Millie had twelve children, and most went to residential school--as day scholars, something they insisted on and fought hard to achieve. Their kids only went to residential school during the day and came home at night. Their children Bob and Muriel were the first from Kamloops Indian Band to go to public high school (Muriel Sasakamoose, Personal communication, 2010). Millie

was very active in the BC Native Women's Society, was the first Indian woman to be Kamloops Good Citizen of the Year. She was the provincial and national Mother of the Year, and received the Order of Canada for her work. Millie taught cultural workshops in many communities, and many learned how to make moccasins, gloves, dresses and so on from her, and as noted elsewhere in this thesis, one of the first Indigenous fashion designers in the province. They also raised about forty foster kids, and took in a few reckless young Indian cowboys like myself. Their active nurturing roles through extended family networks of responsibility and relationship building continue to resonate throughout interior First Nation communities and this in the era when residential schools were in place to destroy Indian extended family cultural knowledge reproduction.

Gus loved wordplays, figurative speech and metaphors and had many insights on Indian leadership and he expressed them with a wry sense of humour. Gus popularized the phrase, ". . . since time immemorial." When he heard about chiefs not doing so well in a negotiation or conflict he would shake his head and say, "Our chiefs . . . always takin' a knife to a gunfight." He said, "Indian politics are the dirtiest politics. You don't want to get involved in that." And then he would ask, "You know what the best kind of Indian leader is? . . . When you stab him in the back . . . he just walks away with your knife." In my studies as I learned more about critical literacy through Freire and others, and experienced the intense emotions and conflicts involved in Indian politics and the need to proactively transform the negative tensions and emotions into positive relationships and new understanding, Gus's figuratively expressed insights on

hegemony, the politics of distraction and the pragmatic use of humour would continue to resonate for me. In Indian politics and Indigenous transforming praxis, a sense of humour is critically necessary.

Gus shared his experiences with the North American Indian Brotherhood, the political struggles and many of the leaders involved, both *Sama* and Indian. Gus spoke of a major Indian political gathering held in Kamloops when the NAIB was being formed. He said, “There were chiefs and Indian people from all over the province that came to get organized about Indian rights. The hall was packed with people and Chief Simon Baker was up at the podium. Si was a really good public speaker and talked about the challenges Indian people faced and what they were doing to improve things in his community and how we needed to be organized and work together. Si could really make a strong speech and the people were really listening to what he had to say. Then someone poked their head in the door and said, ‘the bus is leaving for the big bingo.’ People looked at each other, and then everybody got up and started lining out the door as Si was speaking. Soon the hall was empty and there was just Si standing at the podium and me sitting there beside him. Si turned to me and said, ‘Well buddy . . . everybody else got up and left. Why are you still sitting there?’ So I said, Oh . . . I’m the next speaker.” (Personal communication many times in the 1980s) Years later in 1999 when I was a student at SFU, I was sitting in the audience at a First Nations student event in Vancouver, Chief Simon Baker was the guest speaker, and he told the same story! From his perspective of course but it was the same

story, a clear example of stories and relationships resonating in multiple communities.

I had many enjoyable experiences and talks with Gus but some were tragic as well. I was with him when he got a phone call and heard that his grandson had committed suicide. It really shook my old friend up of course and because I was the young man with him, he asked me, “Why do they do that? What makes a young man go that way?” I was twenty at the time, and his grandson, who was also my friend, was a couple of years younger than me. My sense then from being involved in the tensions of growing up and maturing was, “No place to fit in. We don’t know our Indian selves or ways but it seems a lot of older people think we should know and we feel stupid if we try to find out, and people say we should already know that. We know we don’t fit in the *Sama* places. Most of us feel lost. We can’t find the answers in the party places, but there’s always plenty of feel-good and violence, and sometimes people decide to go that way.” The partying, drug and alcohol focused people and places became our central community. It was in that dysfunctional arena that young Indians tried to figure out identity issues and what love and relationships were about and the outcomes tended to be very destructive. That was the gist of my intuitive understanding back then. Since then, I have found that my intuition was quite accurate, although it took a long time before I did anything to change things.

### 3.4.3 Doctor Jeannette C Armstrong



**Figure 8 Jeannette C. Armstrong**

Armstrong is executive director of the En'owkin Centre in Penticton. Her many books include the novels *Whispering in Shadows* (2000) and *Slash* (1985), as well as *Breathtracks: A Collection of Poetry* (1990) and *The Native Creative Process* (1986) on which she collaborated with renowned architect Douglas Cardinal. She also co-edited *We Get Our Living Like Milk From the Land* (1994). She was appointed as one of seven judges to the *First Nations Court of Justice* called by the Chiefs of Ontario, and she has spoken at universities around the world and has been a keynote speaker at the *Bioneers Conference* and *The World Council of Churches*. She received *Ecotrust's 2003 Buffet Award for Indigenous Leadership*. She serves currently on the *Canadian Council for UNESCO*. (Stone and Barlow, 2005, p. 12)

Jeannette's reputation is well earned, founder of En'owkin Centre ([www.enowkincentre.ca](http://www.enowkincentre.ca)) and En'owkin International School of Writing, international Indigenous activist, theorist, and educator . . . With all of the noted public commitments and extremely busy schedule, she makes the time with

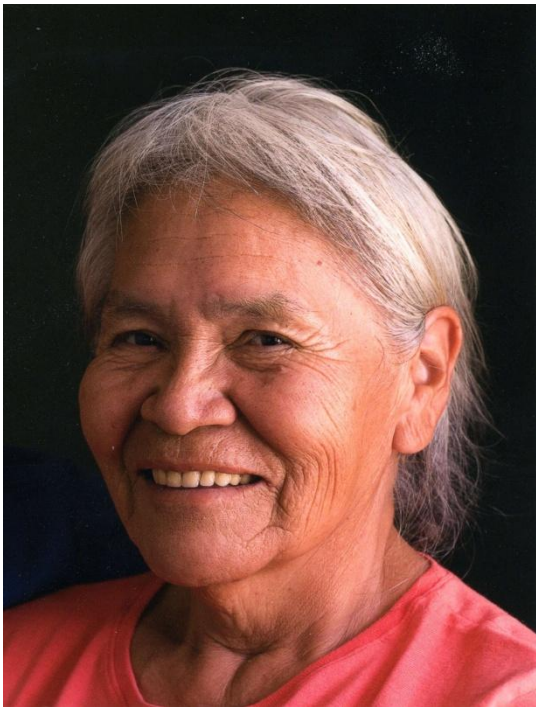
others to visit, harvest and maintain the relationships with the *tmxwulaxw* that our ancestors have established for us, and she does so as a mother, aunt and grandmother.

In my own student experience, after I left En'owkin and went to the University of Lethbridge, I would phone Jeannette at five in the morning to talk about whatever Indigenous knowledge issue I was struggling with at the time. She never complained about the time but would speak freely and have a candid discussion to help my understanding. When I think of the number of other Okanagan, Indigenous students, leaders, and colleagues, also calling her, her degree of commitment is apparent. Later when I became a colleague of Jeannette's as Education Director at the En'owkin Centre, our roles and commitments left little time to have individual dialogues. The occasional long drives to another community for meetings or projects where we could chat and discuss *Captikwl* stories and Okanagan concepts, however, were instrumental to clarify and expand my understanding of Okanagan concepts and frameworks and subsequent community work and theorizing.

I have noticed that when we include the perspective of the land and of human relationships in our decisions, people in the community change. Material things and all the worrying about matters such as money start to lose their power. When people realize the community is there to sustain them, they have the most secure feeling in the world. The fear starts to leave and they are imbued with hope. That's the kind of work I'm involved in at the En'owkin Centre, building community in our region, and not just among Indigenous people. (Armstrong, 2005, p. 17)

The Okanagan praxis that she has facilitated, and continues, provides vibrant foundational and relational strands of knowledge and practice for Okanagan, Indigenous, and mainstream scholars, leaders, community members and families to connect to and expand their own webs of creativity and survival.

#### **3.4.4 Sarah *Samtic'a* Peterson**



**Figure 9 Sarah Samtic'a Peterson**

Sarah Peterson is an elder from the Similkameen Valley who has been a kind, thoughtful and pragmatic leader in Okanagan language recovery and programs. She is not as well known as the other leaders mentioned in this section. Her contributions to language recovery through the mentoring of language teachers, curriculum development, and language programming, in Okanagan communities on both sides of the Canada-US border, are substantial,

and have certainly been instrumental to the culturally informed language program at NSS.

I got to know Sarah in 1992 when I organized a community literacy project with the Lower Similkameen Indian Band for a couple of years. Sarah and I worked together to offer literacy sessions (in English), and Okanagan language lessons. Sarah was one of the first educators to apply Total Physical Response (TPR) methods. Her voice and a group of us turning, stopping, walking, jumping, “*axelmncut, tlep, xwist, letpmncut ....*,” in yards outside of homes where sessions were conducted remain a vivid memory. Those activities have been unforgettable and have formed threads of possibility that have informed my work with the NSS project. Sarah inspired many more language activists, teachers, and community programs.

Sarah, with Larae Wiley, a *Sqilxw* language teacher and activist, and Larae’s husband, Chris Parkin, a *Sama* who more importantly has been a dynamic and very successful Spanish language teacher who shares his wife’s commitment to *Sqilxw* language revitalization, founded the Paul Creek Language Association, an association to support Salish language recovery and develop Okanagan language curriculum and resources ([www.interiorsalish.com](http://www.interiorsalish.com)).

Curriculum resources Sarah and the PCLA have developed were used extensively during the first two years of NSS’s operation, and we continue to make use of the story kits, colouring books, song lyrics, and theme units which now include eco-science and *Captikwl*. PCLA recently developed Math



curriculum sets from grades one to four, completely in *Sqilxw* language. PCLA has contributed *Sqilxw* language acquisition resources to others for years, and in September 2010 made use of their own work when the Salish School of Spokane opened its doors ([salishschoolofspokane.org/](http://salishschoolofspokane.org/)).

The NSS Parents' Committee has recognized Sarah's contributions to our school at the annual NSS Concert Showcases, and have initiated the process to have Sarah nominated for a National Aboriginal Achievement Award. Sarah's commitment to language and knowledge recovery and the *Sqilxw* resources produced by PCLA, were inspiring and substantive because that supportive encouragement and curriculum helped give the *Nkmaplqs I Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet* parents the confidence to achieve our transforming vision.

### 3.5 How Turtle Set the Animals Free: Transforming Vision

Eagle was very fast. He raced all the animal people and beat them. Even Fox and Wolf lost. All the people who lost these races became Eagle's slaves.

Eagle was Chief of all the animals, except for Turtle who lived with his partner Muskrat. They were free because they were the only ones who did not race Eagle. They knew they could not run very fast, but one night Turtle had a dream. He was told, "You must race Eagle tomorrow to free the Animal People. They must be free when the People-To-Be come."

In the morning, Turtle told Muskrat, "Get up! Go for a swim! Get ready! We must race Eagle."

"You cannot beat him, Turtle!" Muskrat said unhappily, "You cannot beat him! He flies too fast."

"I know. All of our people lost before, but my dream told me to race and win," Turtle replied. Together the two friends went to Eagle's camp. Turtle told Eagle, "I want to race with you tomorrow."

"All right, Turtle," Eagle answered. "Tomorrow we race, when the sun comes up. If you win, the Animal People are yours."

"Yes," Turtle agreed.

"If I win, Turtle, I will keep you here. You are betting your life on this race."

As Turtle crawled away, all the Animal People laughed, because they did not think they would ever be free.

Next day, Turtle met Eagle for the race. Eagle told him, "Choose your place, Turtle. I will race you any distance you decide."

"Any place?" Turtle asked.

Eagle replied, "Our people hear me. Any place, Turtle."

Quickly Turtle said, "Then carry me up in the air, Eagle. I will tell you when to drop me. From there we will race. Whoever reaches the ground first wins the race."

Eagle began to get worried. He took Turtle high up. When Turtle yelled, “Let go!” Eagle dropped him. He fell like a rock. Eagle tried to catch up to him. Turtle stuck out his head. “E-e-eee! Hurry, Eagle! I will beat you!” The Turtle pulled in his head and fell faster.

The Animal People watched. They all shouted for Turtle. Muskrat jumped around and his tail whipped the air. His partner was winning. Eagle was close! He thought, “Turtle will hit the ground like a rock.”

Turtle did, but he stood up and told the Animal People, “Now I will be Chief in making this decision. You are free. Go where you like, Animal People. Anywhere! The Animal People scattered. They would tell the People-To-Be about the first races.

Turtle spoke to Eagle, “You know, I cannot always beat you Eagle, but I had a dream, and I learned how to beat you. I will never overtake your speed. You will always be the fastest one. You will always catch what you want to eat. When the People-To-Be come, they will dream too, and they will learn from their dreams. Just as I did.” (Kou-Skelowh, 2004, 63-87)

How Turtle Set the Animals Free has been an inspiring and empowering story with particular relevance to dreams and visions with the emancipatory potential to “free” the people from colonising hegemonies and daily life practices in colonial institutions (school, governments, industry, business, careers) that have become expressions of the culturally invaded. I have used this story in many university classes to generate dialogue about Okanagan worldview and about what *Captikwl* stories have to offer about knowledge and relationships. In classrooms where the student numbers were mostly mainstream, the initial interpretation was consistently a dialogue about the similarities to the race between turtle and hare from Aesop’s fables, and expressions of individual determination, resourcefulness and accomplishment. In a classroom where there were five Okanagan grandparents however, the interpretations were dramatically different. When I explained that what mainstream students saw in the story was

the struggle by Turtle to overcome Eagle, they were shocked. They did acknowledge that Turtle's determination and creativity were important, but Turtle's struggle was not the essence, main theme or climactic moment of the story. Interrelated linguistic patterns and worldviews, of course, inform different interpretations. For the Elders, the value and essence of the story was when the animals were watching the race and realized that they could be free (Delphine Derickson and Hazel Squakin, personal communication, 2005) and "They all shouted for Turtle."

Turtle's work and the animal people seeing their own potential "to be free" connects to Smith's notion of transforming leaders "a critical mass of Indigenous intellectual talent and change makers who would also have a strong commitment and consciousness about being Indigenous and contributing to Indigenous development (2008, p. 21). In a metaphoric and literal journey, Turtle is reconnecting the animal people, including Eagle, to the *tmxwulaxw*, the territorial ecology that takes care of us, and re-establishing the diverse animal people into their roles and responsibilities in the complex web of life interaction. The race of course is also very symbolic in its hegemonic expressions of competition, winning and getting ahead of others that "tend to saturate the consciousness" of the people (Apple, 1990, p.5) and submerge the conscientization of the people (Freire, 1970). There is also a practice described in the story that elders have established as a daily routine, "going for a swim" or bathing in the water before sunrise. This cleansing ritual is widespread through day-to-day life activities and is fundamental to many spiritual practices related to hunting, and coming of age.

The importance and power of water flows physically through the land and dialectically through the *Captikwl* story system, the story, storyteller, audience, daily practices, the environment and ecology all interconnecting.

It is true that the Okanagan peoples have been colonized. The vast majority of our lands and resources have been removed from our control and our children have been physically, spiritually, and intellectually removed from their extended families and communities through residential schools, the Indian Act, public schools and on and on... It is also true that our *Captikwl* stories and our language have survived, and through them our ancestors and territorial ecology continue to provide us with the means to live sustainably and responsibly as *Sqilxw*/Okanagan within our own ecosystem. The group of parents and extended families who initiated and established *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet*, struggled much like Turtle and Muskrat. Others in the community criticized NSS and did not see the potential or value of our children learning their language and cultural knowledge. After four years, the children who have come through the school, like Turtle in the race with Eagle, are demonstrating to the community that is possible to be *Sqilxw*, to be Okanagan, speak our language, and free ourselves from the domination of colonizing hegemonies.

## **CHAPTER 4. COYOTE LEARNS FROM OTHER INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND PLACES**

This Chapter continues with the literature and orature review and focuses on learning relationships particularly with Maori and Secwepemc peoples and their transforming projects. This section addresses the question, what can the Okanagan learn from other Indigenous peoples' experiences, knowledge and transforming praxis? All peoples know a lot, one set of people does not know everything. Indigenous Peoples can engage in dialogue, learn from each other and grow stronger as part of a vast diversity of Indigenous peoples and knowledge systems. Through respectful engagement and sharing, generating understanding and appreciation for the diversity of peoples and cultures new ideas form, paradigm shifts occur, and networks expand. Webs of sustainable relationships are created.

Coyote, with the ability to fight and destroy people eating monsters, and whose special role in creation is to help the people, also travelled to other places and brought back knowledge to the Okanagan people. Coyote also developed new relationships of survival and kinship. This is similar to the role of Kokopelli that Cajete describes.

Kokopelli plays a role in Pueblo stories of the "first times," or origins, and is depicted in many forms in Pueblo prehistoric, historic, and contemporary art. He is the archetype of the communicator or teacher in the sense that he was the bringer of news, seeds, and goods. Kokopelli then is also a type of life bringer, a representation of the creative spirit that resides in each of us as in all natural

forces. . . Native people have been good observers. They understood that things were always in process, that things were always being destroyed and then created once again in new forms. These basic ideas of science, evolution, of ways of understanding ecological processes are deeply embedded in symbols like Kokopelli that represent the creative process in nature, human beings, and even the evolution of thought. (2000, pp. 32-36)

In building connections and networks of cooperation and support, there is much to learn from other Indigenous peoples' projects that can be applied to our own language and knowledge recovery projects. Although Indigenous peoples are very different in many ways, languages, territories, customs, and so on, there are many shared experiences, challenges, values, and sensibilities.

An awareness of another common bond has also been growing among the colonized peoples of the world. Whenever a tribal people have come under the domination of a European power, there has been the common experience of colonialism. Were this a political experience that did not reach into the very roots of our being, striking at the very heart of our view of the world, it would not have forged such a compelling bond between such distant peoples. (Manuel, 1974, p. 4)

The "Captain Cook connection" (Smith, 1999) is especially noted in this thesis because of the shared colonial experience with the British Empire between BC First Nations, Hawaii, and Aotearoa/New Zealand. Learning from others is one facet of relationship building because when we in turn reach out to help other Indigenous peoples, we too become stronger, individually and collectively. I often wondered why Maori scholar Graham H. Smith made such a commitment to travel the world and help facilitate the emergence of Indigenous Transforming Praxis in many sites globally, but particularly in the Pacific Rim and North America. From my visits to *Aotearoa* (NZ), it was clear that he was a key intellectual leader in the Kaupapa Maori movement there, and his people wanted him back in *Aotearoa* to continue his work and leadership. Smith's commitment

was not only to Maori interests but to the transformative potential of Indigenous knowledge and praxis globally. Smith has resolutely, and respectfully, worked to ensure that actual positive change was and is occurring, something that Indigenous scholars in North America were also actualizing,

The task of starting a slow stampede, however, forced us to reconsider some of our intentions in writing *The Circle Game*. Originally, not only did we want to recast the conventional ways of thinking about Residential Schooling, we wanted to connect the oppression of Indigenous North Americans to similar (not identical) issues worldwide, past and present. The “divide and conquer” strategy employed on our Reserves is itself more general, and there are many peoples, in Canada and throughout the world, with whom we could make common cause when our issues converge (while maintaining mutual respect when they don’t). To put it even more simply, we should have more friends than we have and be more friendly toward other progressive movements than it has worked out in practice. (Chrisjohn, 2006, p. 264)

It is the global Indigenous peoples' transforming praxis, not individual or isolated peoples, First Nations, bands, or tribal councils that will actually change the world in terms of improving the conditions and ideological contexts from which relationships of conquest, power and exploitation exist and are reproduced. Each community or tribal group, as part of a larger diversity must be alert to hegemonies that are counterproductive to transformation and serve to keep Bands, First Nations and tribal groups, isolated and in conflict and competition with each other through “us and them” relationships while colonizing patterns are maintained and reproduced. Indigenous strategies and projects for language and cultural revitalization have potential, like Coyote, to be emancipatory or destructive. Mohawk reminds us that,

Revitalization movements, whether religious or secular in inspiration, tend to incorporate a form of idealism that is intolerant of those who do not share the group's beliefs or identity. Tolerance—the willingness to accept that there may be



other ways of being in the world that are different from but no less legitimate than one's own—cannot co-exist with this view, since legitimizing those seen as "other" destroys the exclusive legitimacy of the movement and the privileged identity of its followers." (Mohawk, 2000, p. 264)

Mohawk goes on to say,

The antidote to these kinds of movements is to defuse intolerance. . . People who embrace combinations of nationalism, religious intolerance, and racial distinction tend to be alienated from all other peoples. To the degree a people or nation can be taught to respect the principles of pluralism and tolerance, the prospects of militias committing slaughters and armies participating in wholesale ethnic cleansing are dimmed. To the degree that pluralistic thinking is not respected or practiced such events await opportunity. To this, history is our witness. (p. 267)

I went to *Aotearoa* in 1999 as part of a Master of Education cohort with a group of Indigenous scholars. We were told that the Maori communities we visited would expect to hear our languages and songs, and they would expect us to know some of their songs. Some in our group knew their respective languages. Most of us had to cobble together poorly pronounced bits of translations that we got fluent speakers from home to help us with, and Graham Smith taught us some Maori songs. The significance of that relationship did not become clear to me until recently. I have written in the past about diversity and tolerance, that the Okanagan struggle for self-determination and autonomy is inclusive of the many Indigenous peoples globally because their survival and vitality is tied to and symbiotic with ours. Indigenous networks and working relationships are now global (Cohen, 2001, p.2). So . . . what can we learn from the Maori? The Maori wanted and expected to hear our languages and songs even though they obviously could not understand them, and they expected us to learn about them. The Maori were very warm, gracious hosts who made sure we

did not go hungry (everyone loosened their belts a few notches on the trip).

“When gatherings are held, providing food for the visitors is still a major mark of tribal hospitality and wealth” (Smith LT, 1999, p. 97). Sharing the wealth, practising and expecting tolerance and pluralism, that is an inspiring example of what we can learn from the Maori. Building relationships by visiting, sharing, friendships, and extending kinship, increases potential for new ways to emerge: new ideas, new technologies, and an expanded web of relational accountability. George Manuel, in the 1970s, began building those networks of diverse Indigenous peoples with shared experiences of resistance and conscientization.

. . . when I met with the Maori people, on my first trip beyond the shores of North America, if I had said, “Our culture is every inch of our land,” the meaning would have been obvious to them. Wherever I have travelled in the Aboriginal World, there has been a common attachment to the land. . . Our customs and practices vary as the different landscapes of the continents, but underlying this forest of legitimate differences is a common soil of social and spiritual experience. (Manuel, 1974, p. 7)

Smith's metaphor of the journey and the destination as an expression of transforming and reflective praxis comes into play. "If self-determination is the destination, then we must be self-determining to get there" (2009, p. 26). To avoid cooptation or simply reproducing colonial relationships of the powerful and the dominated in our own communities, our projects and our work must embody the principles and values we express as important: tolerance, sustainability, diversity, respect, all tied to our territorial ecologies. The better conditions and hopeful legacies that we envision for our future grandchildren will not occur if we continue the conflicts, tensions, and factions. Some of those bad habits have become very ingrained in our community practices and relationships, and we

have to be alert to them because they are powerful, subjugating forces. I will elaborate in the next chapter on the colonizing hegemonies at play in Okanagan, First Nation and Indigenous contexts.

Smith's role in the development of new relationships between Indigenous peoples and the nurturing of a critical mass of Indigenous scholars as he has affirmed many times is not about personal or individual achievement. "I am simply the point of a vast triangle of people whose work and determination have informed and sustained my knowledge." (paraphrased from several public lectures 1999-2006). Through Graham, lines of access and reciprocity have been established. Many notable Maori leaders and scholars have visited BC and the Okanagan. In this chapter, I interview Maori Chief, Aubrey Temara. Aubrey's insights and encouragement were certainly instrumental to provide an experiential underpinning to my theorizing of Okanagan research and knowledge and the realization of the Okanagan schooling project.

The Maori also played several roles closer to home. Chief Atahm School (CAS) is a language and cultural recovery project from our neighbours and relatives, the *Secwepemc*. CAS in fact is only one hundred kilometres from my home and community, *Nkmaplqs*, at the Head of Okanagan Lake. Oddly enough, and despite the proximity, I went to *Aotearoa* several times, before I visited CAS and got to know the people involved with the transforming praxis, networking, internal and external capacity building that was going on there. Since that time, CAS and their staff and community members have played a key role in support, training, and guidance in NSS's start and development. In my

experience, there are parallels between a personal sweathouse project and getting NSS going. I was going to build a sweathouse, a couple, one for my daughter as well. I found a good place and built them. Because I left *Nkmaplqs* when I was a small child and I returned in 2004 with my family, I did not know where the good rocks were. One of the people who has taken on cultural responsibilities in my community is my cousin Eric Mitchell. I went and told Eric that I built a sweathouse and was looking for good sweathouse rocks and did he know a good place to get some. His response was, "Well . . . you could look by your foot there, along that bank, and on that hill . . ." (personal communication, 2004). The knowledge and inspiration from the Maori experience was integral, but awareness of resources at home and close to home was essential. It seems obvious in retrospect, but colonization and re-formations of colonial relationships (for example the Indian Act that continues to govern our lives on reserve) have resulted in the weakening of our tribal collective memory, independence, and initiative that once occurred almost solely from our territorial ecology. Chief Barnett Allison's words, "Everything we need is here" (personal communication,) resonated once again, and Eric's response echoed that understanding of self-reliance and appreciation of what we have.

#### **4.1 Gathering Bits of World's Indigenous Peoples' Praxis**

This literature and orature review is a convergence of critical theory, Indigenous transformative theory and practice, and Okanagan oral tradition and traditional knowledge. As an Okanagan scholar and political leader, I am immersed in the tensions between Indigenous and Western knowledge and

practices. In 1999 and 2004, as a guest of the Maori, I experienced firsthand the *Te Kohanga Reo* language nests, Maori immersion schools at primary and secondary levels, and postsecondary projects in New Zealand. Maori have contributed much, for Maori and other Indigenous peoples, and the larger global society, in terms of animating Indigenous knowledge and challenging Western dominance and hegemony, and much of this has occurred within the university.

Theoretical and intellectual validity through engagement with the ‘traditional intellectuals’ within the academy is an extremely important ‘gate’ that has been mostly inaccessible in the past. The conventional policies and reforms (that have usually been developed by Pakeha [non-Maori] and implemented over Maori) have only had a limited impact in transforming Maori. The crises within education and schooling faced by Maori largely remains despite a range of ostensibly well-intended actions. Part of the explanation for the failure of many of these Pakeha inspired interventions is the insufficient attention paid to developing fundamental structural change at the level of power, economics, ideology and politics. The reason for this, is that to do so, would destabilize some of the major structures on which Pakeha power and control over Maori is (re) produced. The ‘new’ strategies that are evolving from within the Maori communities themselves are, forcing their way through the ‘gate’ of intellectual and theoretical legitimacy mostly on their own terms. (Smith, 2002, p.11)

It is clear that Indigenous knowledge can be a liberating and transforming force when respectfully, resolutely and alertly, applied. Critical examination of past colonial conquests, dislocation, repression, ethnic cleansing and cultural genocide and their continuous influence on the shape of contemporary structures and relationships has only relatively recently emerged in Western discourse through critical theory. The “Frankfurt School” of critical theorists, which emerged in response to the Holocaust, in Nazi Germany, and the work of Brazilian activist and theorist Paulo Freire have been catalysts for the development of systemic critical frameworks such as policy archaeology.

It examines the naming process, the process by which problems enter the gaze of state and policy researchers . . . the focus is to investigate the intersection, or better, the constitutive grid of conditions, assumptions, forces which make the emergence of a social problem, and its strands and traces, possible. . . Policy archaeology suggests that social regularities are ‘productive’ and ‘reproductive’ in the sense that the regularities constitute what is socially visible or credible, but the regularities do not literally create material reality. Instead they constitute what is socially selected and verified as real. . .

Why are the most vulnerable groups seen as a social problem and the most powerful groups not seen as a problem within dominant public and academic discourses? What is it about our society that has produced this monstrous result? (Scheurich, 1994, p.299)

The garrisons of colonization are not crumbling; they are continuously reproduced. There is a danger, when looking for “the tools” to move toward self-determination and language and cultural revitalisation, of becoming immersed in methods that pose lots of questions but do not express or embody transformative, ecological and creative organic relationships.

New relationships, however, are forming and new structures are being put into place, despite the continuous re-emergence of colonial relationships exercised with new strategies. Several examples come to mind. I attended the Chief Atahm School’s “Let’s Get Talking” language revitalisation conference and the school was involved in fascinating literacy acquisition research with Thompson Rivers University. Using rhyme, rhythm and movement rather than the ABCs (Walton, 2006), children were acquiring literacy in *Secwepemc* and English quickly with high competency and retention levels--and were having so much fun doing it. A few years ago, I taught an Okanagan History course based on the Okanagan *Captikwl* story system. The classroom dynamics were unique: five Okanagan grandparents and two *Sama* grandmothers aged 82 and 88 signed up

for the class. In courses I teach, I ask that students share what brought them to the course and what are their expectations. This gives students reflective insight so they can determine whether they learned or remembered anything worthwhile later on. Amy, the 82 year old explained why she signed up, “I have always been interested in what Indians are about. All we ever hear about them is blockades and violence and I thought, they can’t be all bad.” By the end of the course, strong friendships and relationships of understanding had formed between the Okanagan and *Sama* Elders and the younger students in the classroom—and all of the Elders signed up for courses in the following semester. One Okanagan grandfather is now doing graduate research at UBCO about the impacts of changes to the Okanagan watershed. These changes are significant and critical to the potential for structural change, social justice, and our responsibility for coming generations to have a healthy planet and respectful and cooperative relationships.

The historical, political, social and cultural experience of men and women can never be acquired outside of the conflict between those forces that are dedicated to the prevention of self-assumption on the part of individuals and groups and those forces that work in favour of such an assumption. . . . The socio-political solidarity that we need to build today to build a less ugly and less intolerant human community where we can really be what we are cannot neglect the importance of democratic practice. Purely pragmatic training, with its implicit or openly expressed elitist authoritarianism, is incompatible with the learning and practice of becoming a ‘subject.’ (Freire, 1998, p.46)

Indigenous processes for consensus building with inherent respect for cultural and ecological diversity have much to contribute to real democratic practice. Indigenous peoples do not have all the answers, and understand that, but do have much to contribute to sustainability, diversity, and community

building in a global dialogue. Shuswap Elder, George Manuel both initiated dialogue and asserted Indigenous voice and position.

Indian people have never completely left our Old World, the Aboriginal World . . . European North Americans are already beginning to work their way out of a value system based on conquest and competition, and into a system that may at least be compatible with ours. If those values are really shared, technology can be harnessed to them to make the transition both easier and less painful. But I think technology will never be harnessed to our ways until we respect it as we have been taught to respect the animals, the water, the land, and the air. (1974, p.266)

Manuel also played a key role as president of the National Indian Brotherhood in the 1973 production of *Indian Control of Indian Education*, a position and policy framework that became a catalyst for First Nations controlled education projects in Canada. Manuel's vision for a cooperative shift in values and healthy cultural and biological diversity is shared and asserted in discourse from our Hawaiian relative.

Forms of our cultural consciousness, grounded in the collective memories of our historical events, language, social traditions, and community life, continue to exist among indigenous peoples. While we have lived as subordinate communities in the past, and continue to be stigmatized by both external and internalized perceptions of inferiority and deficit in our struggle for our post-modern survival, we are nevertheless prepared to engage in historical discourse and social negotiation with mainstream powers during this strategic era of Indigenous peoples' decolonization. (Ka'Ahanui, 2000, p.14)

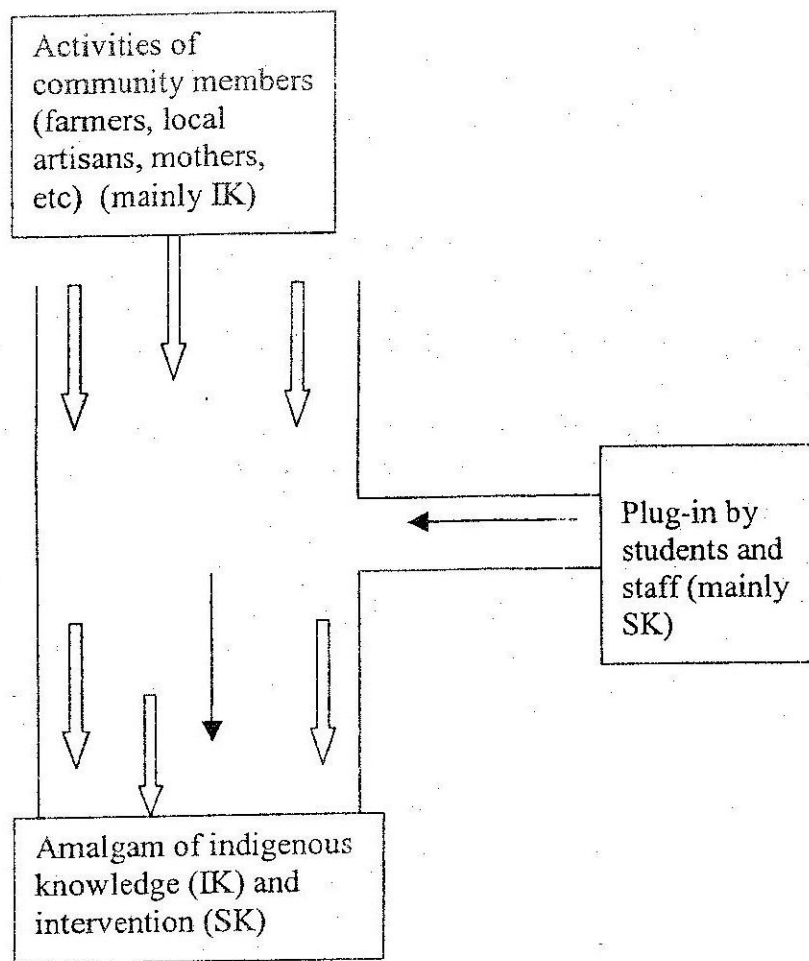
In May 2004, I worked with Ghanaian educators to modularise a community development diploma program in their country through the University for Development Studies (UDS) The University for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Africa. I learned firsthand (once again) that the struggle for Indigenous knowledge is global, that it is also complex and contradictory, and there are severe limitations in terms of context and environment to the theorist, educator or practitioner who does not



know the people or the land with whom he or she is involved. I have just eliminated a lot of researchers (and myself) as irrelevant when positioned objectively towards Indigenous peoples, but that is the way it is. I was recruited to participate with the Ghanaians because I have some experience in community engagement and community driven projects. Because I did not know their land, language(s) or communities, all I could do was share my experiences and at least help edit some documents. The timeframe did not allow the Ghanaians to visit and spend time getting to know my people and communities. We did engage in meaningful dialogue and found similarities in our Indigenous ways of community. A fascinating linguistic feature emerged when I asked the Ghanaian community workers/scholars how many languages they could speak fluently, that is speak all afternoon without having to use another language. They started thinking about it and counting, mentally eliminating languages that they could not speak for hours at a time, and each of four people could speak at least six languages fluently! They said that their peoples grouped around villages, which were the central hubs of interaction, and through visiting, bartering and kinship it was natural to pick up a variety of languages. In the interior plateau of BC, it was once common for *Sqilxw* people to speak three or more languages. My uncle Walter Archachan is one of the few remaining who is fluent in Okanagan, *Ntlakapmxcin* (also known as “Thompson” language), English, and is passable in *Secwepemc*. If the African peoples and my ancestors’ Indigenous ‘education systems’ could produce those levels of multilingual fluency, aspirations of Okanagan and English fluency for Okanagan children seemed more doable.

An examination of African cultural resources reveals a body of knowledge about community values, collective responsibility, and social security arrangements, as well as about practices of communal governance and health provision. All of this knowledge is useful for developing social and ecological sustainability. (Dei, 1993, p79)

Dr. Sah Dhitto, Pro-Vice Chancellor of UDS presented an overview of vision, goals, and programmes. Fundamental to UDS is the 'Plug-In" principle (Figure 9). The visual metaphor is a very practical theoretical tool in terms of positioning and privileging Indigenous knowledge, taking for granted its legitimacy, and including complementary or “bettering” streams from Western discourse. Colonizing patterns of conquest, exploitation, assimilation and homogenization are thus transformed to patterns of continuing Indigenous knowledge systems, expressed through evolving cultural diversity of Indigenous peoples connected through collaborative and respectful relationships with other peoples, ideas, and knowledge systems.



**Figure 10 Plug-in Principle**

The salient points about the principle are as follows:

So-called "scientific knowledge" cannot replace existing knowledge or situation; it only "better" it. Thus we (staff and students) are "bettering" agents not change agents.

The plug-in (intervention) is narrower as compared to existing knowledge (in any society or community).

To successfully plug-in, there is need to thoroughly understand the existing situation. That requires some level of acceptance of interventionists (staff and students) by the people. Thus, staff and students need to spend time in the communities and with community members.

The amalgam of IK and SK is very much dependent on the degree to which interventionists understand and appreciate the existing situation. The understanding and appreciation of the existing situations help to modify intervention strategies to suit particular situations. (2004)

Cultural revitalisation and survival for Indigenous peoples is not a prescribed exercise by a Western expert (Indigenous or not); it is a project of engagement, creativity and evolution. The UDS 'plug-in principle' later informed my work in the *Nkmaplqs* school project when it came to positioning and privileging Okanagan knowledge in the daily and overall curriculum plan and schedule that children, elders and teachers would engage. Indigenous knowledge must be privileged, its validity and legitimacy taken for granted. Scientific or Western knowledge then plays a complementary "bettering" role to Indigenous education and community well-being rather than a colonizing role of erasure of Indigenous history, knowledge and cultural ways.

The above noted Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics are similar in their expressions of the need for continuous public dialogue and praxis "about what is important, good and just" (Arendt, 1958). There is a Western tendency to look for understanding in an analytical, how it works paradigm, and an Indigenous tendency to look for relationships in a how are we connected paradigm. These paradigms complement each other. It is essential, however, that Indigenous knowledge systems continue to flow as described in the plug-in principle. The confluence of knowledge systems must be a bettering dynamic rather than a destructive act of assimilation and genocide. The opportunities for dialogues involving diverse cultures and knowledge systems have the creative

potential for new, powerful conceptual and practical frameworks to emerge—and we will resolve the policy issues of power, control, domination, and sustainability.

## **4.2 Kura Kaupapa Maori Schooling: A Maori Grandfather's Insights**

My discussions with Aubrey Temara, Maori Chief, Senior Maori Business Manager, Wananga (Maori University) Director of Maori Adult Education, Faculty, Land Claim Negotiator, father and grandfather, quickly became expressions of visiting and critical imagination, in accord with “*stim aspu-us?*” (What is on your heart?), a common Okanagan phrase to initiate dialogue-- which also resonates with “a connected idea that combines both heart and cognition for a fuller richer experience of an idea or thought. Na’au also refers to the heart and intellect.” (Meyer, 2000, p.197) This as research is the gathering of “bits” through hospitality and dialogue so experience and shared knowledge can inform new understanding to “breathe” into life, and ritualise into practice with the appropriate “steps.”

Aubrey is a Chief of the *Tuhoe*, an isolated tribe in Aotearoa. Many of the first Maori language teachers throughout New Zealand came from the *Tuhoe*. The transcription has been edited for brevity and clarity, and is included to express the knowledge relationships that emerge through dialogue. The data/information that came out of the dialogue interview is extensive, insightful and pragmatic. It connects directly to issues in the Okanagan and BC region. The speech patterns are noteworthy in terms of repetition and emphasis; they resemble the speech patterns of Okanagan elders, who like Aubrey learned

English as a second language. The interview method is a combination of Storytelling/Narrative and Life History interview. Following the interview is a *Sqilxwlcawt* framed commentary noting insights of particular relevance to Okanagan pedagogy and the *Nkmaplqs* project. It addresses many of the fears and questions associated with Indigenous schooling projects through dialogue and extended family and community contexts that Okanagan parents and extended families can relate and respond to. The narrative exchange is presented, rather than a summary of points, because we are the people of the stories, and visiting and exchanging is a cultural practice of both Okanagan and Maori and a necessary means to strong relationships.

I was at a meeting several years ago to help resolve a conflict between administration, elders, and the staff of a Residential School Healing Project. A member of administration lamented the poor turnout of elders and community members at crucial meetings, and then went on to elaborate for about an hour on micro and macro level research, implementation of policy, statistical analysis, and on and on. Herman Edward, a respected traditional knowledge keeper, then spoke in Okanagan. Most of us in the room did not understand what he said. Felix Squakin, an elder who is no longer with us, then spoke with a voice synthesiser. He said, "I agree with Herman. I get so mad. I love my community. I visit with the elders. I know what they think about, but I get so mad at these meetings because I don't know what the hell you educated ones are talking about! Save your big words for when you argue with the White man. Don't talk to us with them big words. I don't have much time left (removed hat and showed

chemotherapy results), but I love all of you and I teach what I can.” It was powerful. No one was singled out, but all the “educated” folks got a good lesson in languaging and exclusion, and the event highlighted the necessity for excellence in both Okanagan and English. There are many Okanagan community members, some with academic skills and credentials and some with plenty of smarts but without academic backgrounds, who have indicated their interest in reading this thesis. This narrative dialogue intentionally extends Indigenous story ways so elders, and others who are not familiar with academic prose, will know “what the hell I am talking about.” I have a responsibility to speak to academic and community audiences.

**Transcription of Interview:** (2003)

Bill Cohen (BC): We spent four days traveling around, talking and visiting fishing, hunting and berry picking sites, and communities, and found that a lot of the experiences and challenges of the Okanagan people and Maori people are shared. One of the projects I’m involved in is creating an Okanagan cultural immersion school, and language immersion is a big part of that. In our talks, exchanging stories, there were a lot of similarities. One that we talked about is that before the *Kohanga Reo* pre-school language nests and *Kura Kaupapa* Elementary Schools (both are total Maori language immersion) were implemented and in place as an option there was a lot of concern in the Maori community, and it’s similar to what is expressed in the Okanagan community now, that culture and language would be detrimental to student success in the larger society. I want to explore that. What’s really interesting to me is that your

first language is Maori, you grew up in a Maori speaking family and community, and you are a father and grandfather and some of your older kids didn't go through the *Kohanga Reo* (language nests) and *Kura Kaupapa* (Maori immersion schools) schools, but your youngest one did, and you've been very active in your community in politics, social and cultural affairs, and education – so what I want to look at and focus on is now that you have experienced one of your own children go through the Maori immersion schools, I want to look at some of the results or outcomes, in terms of rights, identity, values, success in mainstream institutions and the relationships between the Maori community and the larger community. People feared that these Indigenous focused schools would segregate or ghettoize children. I want to get some feedback on those things.

Aubrey Temara (AT): Okay, it's true my youngest child, she's nineteen now and she is at the University of Waikato and she's come through the system, beginning with the language nest and on through to the next step, the *Kura Kaupapa Maori* schools in New Zealand, and she's done extremely well. But I've got to say that I had major, major reservations at the very start. I thought it was a huge risk, and I even questioned my own integrity in terms of the future of my child, and whether or not I was putting her through something that may not turn out what I was hoping it would achieve. Anyway, I did that with all of those reservations in the back of my mind. However, what did not escape my mind that this was an opportunity for my child to be taught in the medium of communication (Maori language) that I was never given an opportunity to utilize in my own learning – my own formal learning. And that has come home to roost in terms of



the results and outcomes for my child, but I still have some reservations because the fact that she's been able to chip on through into university and hold her own has not been because of her own ability, or entire ability or total ability of the school. I mean, English is something that every child must have. We can't escape it. If you haven't got English, you can't compete. No two ways about that. I busied myself over a number of years trying to keep that part up for my child. Now the problem with that was that there was not a great deal of writing, so when it came to writing, the writing part of English let her down a little bit. But no problems with understanding English, speaking English, and all those sorts of things, but spelling was a problem, and that has to do I think with the phonetics, I suppose of the spoken language. Whilst she was at Kura Kaupapa Maori and doing everything in Maori, she was also speaking English, but visually in terms of paper and scribing, she wasn't seeing English language on paper. But those are some of the risks, the risks that I believe we still face with the language nests and coming on through the *Kaupapa Maori* schools.

I caution people who are intending to replicate the New Zealand model that they are using now. I'm not saying that it ought not to be replicated, but I am saying that you must always be conscious of the fact that there is another perspective in life in terms of employment and universities, and if they don't have the English language then they are going to suffer – our children are going to suffer. But what I want to say is that the language nests provided the building blocks if you like for further development, and so whilst we didn't have the kinds of teachers that we have now, when the language nests were introduced fully into the system if you

like, we do have now the critical mass, if you like, of a school base that can teach our children at that early level. But we still have a shortage of qualified and good teachers in *Kura Kaupapa Maori* and that's deadly serious as far as I'm concerned. We're working on it, and it's coming through, and, getting on into the Wananga (Maori university) of which I also belong. These are all building blocks, of the careers that we are hoping to build for our people. At least they'll get away with having a bit of a chance in life.

So here, my part in the education sector is the unemployed, no-qualifications, second chance learners. That's where I am at. I manage a small multi-sited organization which is based in Wellington, and I am very critical of the numbers of people that are coming through into my area, and people are coming through *Kaupapa Maori* schools basically illiterate in English. They cannot write they cannot read English, and we are still working through those problems, but I think those are teething problems that we are dealing with out there at the moment. So be it, having to deal with the molars, if you like, so... whilst the scenario is an encouraging one, it's not a utopian one. It's not a utopian one. We have a lot of work to do.

BC: That's one of the big challenges that we're faced with in the Okanagan, and that's to mediate cultural identity, rights and aspirations with economic necessities and relationships with the larger world, and I'd say that we want all of that. But just on a kind of reflective note, when we look at those students that are coming out with different levels of skills and abilities, both in Maori and in English in terms of knowledge and ability to apply it, supposing that it never happened, or

looking at how it did happen, what kind of social changes have occurred? Overall is it a good thing, or if it never happened, what might have been the scenario?

AT: Interesting, interesting question, where would we be? Because we will never know had we not introduced what we have in place whether or not there would have been a better change or better life. But I am bound to say that the education system was not delivering to our needs twenty, thirty years ago, when we consistently found ourselves at the bottom of the heap, you know, so there had to be a better way. The language nest is not something that we designed; it's something that came from somewhere else. I'm not sure where it came from actually, but certainly I think that the experts in education, like yourself, would acknowledge, that it is much easier for a person to learn in his own language the things that he or she needs to learn in life. I certainly know that as a child, before I started in school, that the only language I spoke was Maori, so it was very much a foreign thing when I arrived at school and the communication was English, so I found it very difficult to learn things because I could not understand what the teacher was saying. It took a long time for those sorts of things. Even when I went to college I was finding it difficult to understand a lot of things, but when people explained a bit of this to me in Maori immediately, the cross over (to understanding) was immediate. So here, I'm not sure to be honest if the changes that we are now experiencing through the introduction of very Aboriginal ways of doing things might have been any different to what it might have been before that. But I do know for sure that the *Kaupapa Maori* (philosophy or way) being developed, there will come a time, and I have no doubt about that, when our

schools in *Kaupapa Maori* will flourish. Our problem right now is that we don't have all the resources in terms of the material, the written material, stuff like that, and enough qualified teachers to enable us to learn as we should be learning. And that's our problem at the moment, what we are going through today.

BC: I'm going to go back to the reservations and risks. There was a really clear era in the BC Indigenous nations and the Okanagan Nation where a lot of parents that are now grandparents and great grandparents (and many are gone now) made a conscious decision not to teach their kids their own language in order that the kids would do better in school and in life. But that didn't help at all. The residential schools had a lot to do with this attitude. What it created was emptiness, or a lack of or uncertain identity. We went through a period of intense family dysfunction and alcoholism. But we survived, thanks to our community leaders, traditional values, and determination. There was a lot of disconnection to the land, a lot of buy in to non-Native values. There was migration to the cities, and a lot of people got disconnected, and what happened was that without identity, language, and cultural knowledge the social stats were just terrible, and they still are –anything that measures good things we're at the bottom, and anything bad we're at the top.

AT: (Chuckle) I can relate to all of those, Bill.

BC: I believe, and it's a vision, that we should be able to have both, have it all. Our kids should be able to excel in Okanagan, and excel in the larger world as well.

AT: Well the interesting thing is that before Maori schools came along we had a core of people who were bi-lingual, bilingual teaching, in other words; part of the curriculum was taught in Maori, and the other part was English. These things went hand in hand most of the time and there was some interesting results – very interesting results – I think it's true to say that one of the leading schools back in New Zealand, and I'm talking about *Te Wharekura o Rakaumangamanga*, [BC: Yeah, I was there.] has gone back to bilingual teaching. Now I don't know enough about the issues, I'm not in an advisory situation, but the issue is not so much going back to bi-lingual teaching, but at what point should the English language be introduced into the schools. There are some schools that don't introduce the English, into the schools until just before going to high school from primary. The dynamics around that are interesting. I mean that's thrown a bit of a brick in the works. I think the essence of *Kaupapa Maori* schooling is still correct in terms of the principles of why it was introduced, but I think those things will remain always. But the key thing to recognize in terms of education for your people is at what point you should begin to introduce the English language. You and I know that without English, you and I are not going to get a job unless we own the bloody economy of this country (Chuckle).

BC: That's one of the things that we would like to have, that we have a lot of work to do to get to the dilemma that your people are having now. By the time we do there will already be a fair amount of research – and there already is-- about to what ages children need to be immersed in their language to keep it and use it for their lifetimes.

AT: But take nothing away from *Kura Kaupapa Maori* in terms of restoring pride in a child. Take nothing away from *Kura Kaupapa Maori* because it's all there. If a child can acknowledge just who he or she is through her links to the land, through her links to the past, her ancestors, her language, and all of that makes that child a prouder child and one with a sense of belonging, and I think that's the importance of Maori schooling. My baby, I thought would never be able to handle mathematics, trigonometry, geometry, algebra, and all of those things, calculus, but using the media of Maori, she excelled in mathematics. She excelled in mathematics. And you know, when they started speaking English, and using English as a method of teaching inside the school, she had problems understanding some of the concepts in mathematics and stuff like that. But through Maori language she excelled in mathematics, and that is a subject that universally I think Aboriginal people are pretty weak in, but, that was a turn up.

BC: One of the things that I've talked over with a lot of the elders and community leaders as well concerns the issue of rights and responsibilities connected to place, land, specific place – our territory. Those are also interconnected with the BC provincial laws and the larger Canadian laws, and all the history, the history of colonization, legislation, court cases, the Indian Act and all of that. What it comes down to is that our rights and responsibilities exist in our practices, our language, and our relationships to our land, and you know when we talk about our different languages, the concepts, the relationships and communications are different. The bottom line is that without our language, our practices and our traditional frameworks of knowledge, our kids, and all of us will become

assimilated and will not have the chance to exercise our rights and responsibilities and live as Okanagan people on our territory in a larger diverse society and world.

AT: There's been a huge renaissance in Maori. I can say that my own child had a very useful part to play in that, because our tribe – the *Tuhoe* tribe – was considered to be one of the last of the Mohicans if you like, to come to heel, and to be brought to heel by the colonial people, and that's true. We are essentially a very isolated tribe and based in the bush and in the hills, if you like. In the 1880s we implored the government to leave us alone, and the government almost did leave us alone, and almost did give us our own sort of empire. "These savages, these natives are not going to be any trouble to anybody, way up in those hills, leave them be." They actually created an act called the *Te Urewera* District Native Reserve 1896." It gave us a little bit of leeway to run our own affairs, but it never came across, ten years later, that was taken away from us, and that is the basis of one of our treaty claims at the moment. But heading back to the question in terms of the value we put upon ourselves, the assimilation schemes that you talk about in our place in the 40s, 60s and all through the 70s, that had a great deal to do with dislocating and disenfranchising our people from who we are in terms of our language, our *Kaupapa* links and our genealogical links to who we are and stuff like that. But our tribe remained resolute in terms of hanging onto our language, and even in spite of that we were losing the language. But other tribes had lost it. They'd lost it, not altogether, but it was on the way out, and I've got to say we were in danger of doing that as well, until we started some cultural

things to bring us together. The *Wananga*, which were basically workshops, tribal cultural workshops, we started up in the 1970s. The number one thing that we had to do was to get the elders right and they themselves acknowledged that if we are going to get ourselves right handing down the language, the knowledge, and the values that our ancestors once had, then they had to get themselves right. Tribally, we had all sorts of differences in terms of protocols and so on from one *Marae* (similar to an Indian reserve) to the next *Marae* to the next sub-tribe, and we said “We believe.” One of our great leaders, John Rangihau, led us through that period of standardising our customs, standardising our practices, and standardising our beliefs; and to the great credit of our elders because they came to the party. They came to the party because they accepted that if we were going to get from one side of the tribe to the next, then there was needed to be a tie with ourselves in terms of our beliefs, values, practices and principles and those sorts of things so that was always important. And to this day we say to our children, you must not forget who you are! It doesn’t matter where you go in the world, you must not forget who you are. And it starts way back there. So I don’t know if I’ve answered your question (chuckle)...

BC: Oh I think you were on the right track (laughing) that our rights as a people go hand in hand with the land, language, practices and identity [AT: Yeah!] and we can carry that anywhere in the world into any institution.

AT: Well other tribes actually look upon *Tuhoe* because we have so many people that are teaching in language nests in other tribes. They would always get these *Tuhoe* people because they have got the language, but once they’ve got their



levels up then, “off you go *Tuhoe*.” (chuckle). But other tribes considered *Tuhoe* to be the repository of the language.

BC: It was nice to hear that the elders really cooperated and collaborated in creating understanding and alliances for the good of the Maori.

AT: Well I've got to tell you that it actually wasn't that easy. To the great credit of John Rangihau, who was one of our better leaders, he managed to convince our elders that they had to do that, so we are the beneficiaries of that wisdom.

BC: I think that we are collectively the beneficiaries of that wisdom, the wisdom acquired through practice informed by Indigenous knowledge and aspirations. Well, *limlimt*, Aubrey, you've really been a lot of help, We have been travelling around and visiting some country and people, and sharing experiences without the recorder on, is what sticks, more than what's on the tape. It's to experience it, to feel it.

AT: It's been a pleasure Bill, the pleasure's been mine, all mine. The honour has been mine. The privilege has been mine. Being in Canada and travelling up into Okanagan country, that was awesome and meeting with your people, that was absolutely awesome and I will value and cherish that experience and I hope to come back again, and I know I will come back, and I will bring my wife back with me, and hopefully that's not too far away.

BC: Yeah that will be real nice. As my Dad said, “Don't forget the trail back.”

AT: (Laughing) Oh that was good, I'd never heard that term 'trail back,' and I picked up on that, "don't forget the trail back," and I'll absolutely cherish that.

END OF INTERVIEW

### **Reflective Commentary and Analysis of Interview**

Completing some of the traditional friendship and alliance building practices (walking the land, visiting, hunting, working and eating together) contributed much to the respectful friendship and alliance that was formed, many insights from experience were shared, and the network will continue to expand. The collective vision nurtured by cultural workshops, the *Wananga* workshops Aubrey mentioned are similar to the *enowkinwixw* workshops described in this thesis to facilitate a culturally informed organic praxis through the realization of our own community school.

The shared struggle for indigenous knowledge has been strengthened. Traditional philosophy or cultural ways applied to contemporary Indigenous projects are effective to guide a selection of research techniques and methodologies. What the Maori have been able to achieve is remarkable, and it also clear that the Maori cultural renaissance has been an intense struggle both internally and with external colonial or mainstream institutions. What the Okanagan and other Indigenous peoples can learn from the Maori experience through sharing and networking with the Maori is not how to replicate the Maori methods but how powerful Indigenous methodologies and frameworks can be when developed and breathed into life for contemporary applications. This global

network of diversity and cooperation also share much experience in terms of resistance struggle and decolonization.

The *Te Kohanga Reo*, the Maori language nest, and the *Kaupapa Maori* Schools, which have proven to be successful, can be assessed with the *Sqilxwlcawt* model. My assessment is general and based on my experiences visiting multiple projects in *Aotearoa* with Maori educators. I do not pretend to know a lot about Maori people, but know enough to make the following observations. A strong circle was formed in the community sphere by Maori educators, which filtered/blocked *Pakeha* social, economic, cultural, and political dominance in the schooling system. The children, at the centre, are thus at the centre of *Kaupapa Maori* (Maori philosophy or life way), and the pedagogy of the school is effective because it incorporates Maori social mechanisms, extended family, the ring through which the teachers and students interact. Genealogy is a key feature of extended family, and combined with Maori symbols, architecture, art works, and a culturally informed learning process conducted in Maori language, the web of relationships ties the Maori securely to their ancestors and territories. The strength of the centre/the children resonates out through the Maori community networks and comes back.

With the NSS project, I kept in mind the advice from John “Barna” Heremia which I paraphrase, “Our teachers must know the families of their students. If they do not know them within a certain amount of time, they are terminated.” (Presentation at *Te Wharekura o Rakaumangamanga* School NZ, 1999) In many of the *Kohanga Reo* and *Kaupapa Maori* schools I visited,

students referred to the teaching staff in family terms in Maori language, father or mother for example. Music and singing were also noted as outstanding features of Maori teaching and learning. Children were singing their language into life, doing it collectively and asserting pride and ownership through their own voices and this literally, rhythmically resonated to their own and connected communities. The extended family structure, music and song curriculum are featured in the *Nkmaplqs* project.

### **4.3 *Secwepemc* Transforming Praxis: Chief Atahm School**

The Okanagan and *Secwepemc*/Shuswap peoples are neighbours and inextricably connected through thousands of years of intermarrying, trade, alliances, and the occasional feud. The historic Okanagan Shuswap Confederacy continues to be honoured by traditional people from both nations, and leaders from both nations have engaged throughout the past 150 years to resist colonization and assert and protect our rights. George Manuel's substantial presence in this thesis is a continued expression of those relationships. In my extended family web, I have *Secwepemc* in-laws, nieces, nephews, and many relatives. Some of my cousins' wives are *Secwepemc* and their children attend Chief Atahm School (CAS), a successful Indigenous immersion school. In BC, CAS has been the lonely leader in language and cultural recovery schooling for twenty years, because until NSS started CAS was the only First Nations immersion school in the province, certainly the only school that was nurturing children fluent in their language and academically capable beyond the school. There are children in NSS with *Secwepemc* parents or grandparents and vice

versa. There are extensive extended family connections between the communities where CAS is located (*Neskonlith* Indian Band, Adams lake Indian Band, and Chase area) and *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet* (NSS) (Okanagan Indian Band, Vernon, Armstrong, North Okanagan area) This school year (2009-2010) we had several new students register at NSS; their previous school was CAS. As the two schools continue to develop there will likely be more children attending both schools, and children could potentially become fluent or proficient in Okanagan and *Secwepemc* languages. There are past, current, and (no doubt) future, extensive webs of kinship connecting the Okanagan and *Secwepemc*, and that has characterized the relationship that has developed between the two projects. NSS was created in 2006. CAS was created in 1991, so CAS is like our older sister. CAS has assisted in guiding, nurturing, and supporting the development of her younger sibling, the NSS project. CAS also had Maori connections; Kathy Michel was inspired by a visit to *Aotearoa/NZ* to come home and start a language nest,

In 1987 a small group of parents worked together to stem the loss of the *Secwepemc* language in their community by starting a language nest. The language nest model was borrowed from the Maori “Te Kohanga Reo” early childhood immersion program ([www.kohanga.ac.nz](http://www.kohanga.ac.nz)). The success of that program led to the creation of Chief Atahm School in 1991.

Today, hundreds of children have benefited from being immersed in their ancestral language surrounded by a nurturing circle of elders and teachers. Chief Atahm School seeks to continually improve their program with the development of an educational framework that privileges *Secwepemc* knowledge, language and culture. ([www.chiefatahm.com/home](http://www.chiefatahm.com/home), 2010)

In cultural work at En’owkin Centre and Okanagan University

College/University of British Columbia - Okanagan and in community discussions

when language issues were the topic, Chief Atahm School would often be mentioned, and that they were doing good work. I first went to CAS in 2004 with then UBCO Dean of Education Ron Goddard to observe classroom methods and learn more about CAS. That initial visit was certainly inspiring and motivating. After that visit, I made several more visits and NSS staff (teachers, elders, and our language assistant) enrolled in CAS annual language conferences and summer training sessions. Our staff got to know CAS lead staff: Kathy Michel, Janice E. Billy<sup>10</sup>, Stacy Michel and Rob Matthew as well as Kathy and Janice's parents and uncle, Joe and Ann Michel and Larry Michel, educators who are also fluent elders with significant contributing and supporting roles to CAS in terms of language, cultural knowledge and leadership. Joe Michel's educational leadership was recognized recently with a National Aboriginal Achievement Award. CAS welcomed the NSS people, shared what they had, experiential knowledge, advice, Natural Language Approach, TPR and TPR Storytelling (an extension of TPR methods abbreviated as TPRS) methods and curriculum packages and materials, encouraged and actively helped with our project. There were phone calls to CAS to ask questions and get advice. Janice Billy consistently attends and supports the NSS annual student showcase performances.

In my community, and others in the interior, I realized that every year, people would go to the CAS conferences and summer sessions, enjoy the fun, interactive workshops, and the dynamic, inclusive teaching styles and

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<sup>10</sup> Because there are several people with the name, Janice Billy, it is important to note that in this thesis all Janice Billy references are to Janice E. Billy of Chief Atahm School.

personalities of Janice Billy, Kathy Michel and Stacy Michel. Then go home and continue the same old ineffective techniques of single words – animals, colours, numbers, repeat after me, pronunciation drills--and no immersion. Most language classes in my experience were conducted in this manner, and learners would lose interest, tune out and drop out. Instructors would get frustrated that learners were not remembering what they were taught. Learners could recite words and knew Okanagan sounds for things in English, but did not understand conversation or express phrases beyond memorized scripts. We wanted more than that for our kids and CAS provided insightful, pragmatic guidance with training and materials. More importantly, CAS shared experiential wisdom and encouragement to maintain confidence when our own community members tried to close our project down, found reasons to criticize and nitpick our project, and generally tried to convince parents that they were stupid for wanting their kids to be Okanagan and speak Okanagan.

Kathy Michel and Janice Billy did workshops and demonstrations at the Okanagan Indian Band community that were pivotal in tipping the balance of political support needed to continue. A community dinner was held June 12, 2006 at OKIB's Head of the Lake Hall and Kathy and Janice did a presentation about how CAS got started, what worked for them, and how their kids are doing when they go into public high school and university. They confirmed that their kids are having much success in high school and post-secondary. For example, CAS students' math proficiency was noticeably higher than the School District average, and the local high school asked them about Chief Atahm's math

program and implemented it. The key point about student success is that they are also fluent speakers of *Secwepemc* language, and this has helped them. Knowing their own language gave them more thinking tools as well as much cultural pride and identity with the ability to speak to each other, and speak to elders in their own language. When they started, there were only 20 fluent elders in their community. Since then, over 100 new speakers have emerged from CAS. Janice provided an interactive demonstration of Total Physical Response (TPR) language teaching methods used by CAS. It was very effective. Everyone in the hall was participating and actively learning *Secwepemc* language. The children gave a very special and unexpected endorsement. The adults were so engaged in the TPR session that they did not notice at first that the kids all came in from outside and were actively participating in the TPR session alongside their parents. Okanagan parents, community members, and children were all actively learning *Secwepemc* language together; a very special event that gave an idea of what is possible for our kids.

In the 2009-2010 school year, field trips to CAS were organized so children from both schools could see and interact with other kids, their relatives, also learning their language. Field trips combined culturally informed relations, knowledge, and science learning outcomes with visits to the noted Adams River salmon run. NSS hosted its Fourth Annual NSS Concert in June 2010, an event that includes musical and dramatic performances from six other Okanagan schools. In 2010, the annual concert was combined with the Sixth Annual Okanagan Traditional Games, an Okanagan “track meet” that all Okanagan



Nation schools participate in. In 2010, CAS participated in both. It was wonderful to host our *Secwepemc* relatives and see our children singing, running, playing, eating and camping together.

Sarah Peterson and her group, the Paul Creek Language Association (PCLA) were instrumental in providing Okanagan language curriculum resources and teaching workshops to NSS, especially in the first two years, and we continue to utilize their newly developed language acquisition resources. The PCLA in addition to their own work had extensive ties to CAS. The beginner and intermediate sets of Okanagan TPR curriculum packages that included a sequence of themed learning units, activities, and teaching aids were CAS curriculum sets translated into Okanagan by PCLA.

#### **4.4 Key Insights Learned from Maori, Chief Atahm and Other Indigenous Projects**

There were certainly valuable learning experiences provided by the Maori and CAS mentoring relationships. It is noted that the Maori and *Secwepemc* projects are connected to other Indigenous and Western research, theory and practice. The following are key insights from, and through, learning relationships with the Maori, *Secwepemc*, Ghanaian, Piegan, and Indigenous peoples mentioned. All could conceivably be credited for each bullet, but I have noted the people and/or project whose practice emphasized a particular bit of wisdom or inspiration that reinforced and connected to *Sqilxw/cawt* pedagogy and helped guide the development of *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet*.

- *Take the legitimacy and value of your peoples' knowledge for granted. Do not replicate, make your project your own community's project informed by the traditional knowledge of your people and territory. Maori*
- *Privilege the language, cultural knowledge and aspirations for knowledge of your Indigenous nation. UDS (Ghana)*
- *Teach the language in a loving way. CAS*
- *Total Physical Response (TPR) and TPR Storytelling are effective methods of beginner and intermediate language acquisition. Varying lessons, including all students in activities and always ensuring comprehensible input are critical to facilitate language acquisition through immersion. CAS*
- *Do not separate language and culture. There has been a tendency to "teach" language in a classroom and then switch to English to teach "culture" out on the land (for example, hunting and gathering, seasonal and territorial knowledge). CAS*
- *"Get your Elders right." Aubrey's comments and my experience with CAS suggested that Elders/fluent speakers must get beyond pronunciation and dialect issues and differences. The extended family approach would put children and the language into the centre of Sqilxw pedagogy, and those issues are resolved through*

*the complementary streams of knowledge, language, caring and practice flowing into the centre from Elders, language assistants, teachers, and family. Maori and CAS*

- *Experiencing schools where Maori and Secwepemc children were eagerly and effectively learning their respective cultural ways, as well as state prescribed curriculum and world knowledge, in their own languages and cultural contexts was a major and continuous inspiration. Maori and CAS*
- *If self-determination is the destination, the journey must be self-determining to reach the destination. Maori (Smith)*

Several hegemonies regarding the “Maori revolution” have emerged recently in First Nations language recovery discourse in BC. “The Maori only have one language so it is easy for them to recover their language. In BC we have thirty-six languages.” The Maori, like any Indigenous people facing language and knowledge erosion as an effect of colonization, or like any First Nation or tribal group in BC, have only one language to revitalize, their own. In Aotearoa, I witnessed the same pronunciation, proficiency, dialect issues that occur in Okanagan communities amongst fluent speakers, and tensions between sub-tribes of Maori are similar to tensions between Bands and First Nations here, historic rivalries, feuds etc., and that connects to the next hegemony. “Other languages are easier to learn, because they are easier to pronounce. Our language is harder to learn.” Language and cultural knowledge recovery are not

matters of dialect or pronunciation. They are matters of education and practice.

The practice of self-determination includes identifying and discarding hegemonies that serve to maintain the current conditions of language and cultural knowledge decline. A key “lesson” from Maori, CAS, and Piegan projects is to get on with it, no excuses.

Don’t ask permission. Go ahead and get started, don’t even wait five minutes. Don’t wait for a grant. Don’t wait, even if you can’t speak the language. Even if you only have ten words, Get started. Teach those ten words to someone who knows another ten words. In the beginning, I knew thirty words, then fifty, then sixty. One day I woke up and realized I was dreaming in Blackfeet, (in reference to Piegan, Kipp, 2000, p. 8)

## **CHAPTER 5.     *Sqilxw* RESISTANCE (WITH STRANDS OF TRANSFORMING PRAXIS AND CONSCIENTIZATION) TO COLONIZATION**

This chapter describes patterns of colonization in Okanagan and First Nation communities, and *Sqilxw* expressions of cultural and intellectual resistance, and colonizing hegemonies, tensions and undercurrents at play as intergenerational patterns of “self-colonization.” These are the shifting fields in the ‘war of position’ between being *Sqilxw*-Okanagan and the forces of assimilation/cultural genocide. Resistance is placed foremost because that is what Okanagan peoples were primarily engaged in. Conscientization and transforming praxis were also occurring as dynamic strands of knowledge and activity in smaller community patterns. Weaving evolving Okanagan knowledge, language and practice with conscientization, resistance, and other Indigenous peoples’ experience and transforming praxis is an expression of transforming praxis. In this chapter, I will continuously “loop” back to negative patterns of colonization with transforming “tools” to mediate the complex and contradictory emancipatory and self-destructive potential of *Sqilxw* Okanagan communities. The processes of Okanagan conscientization and transformation became part of the methodology for this study.

## Introduction: Tommy Gregoire's Warning

This is the Creator's land. It is our lifeblood. We are here to defend the land. Our situation is now risky. Everyone needs to know what the history really is. I am encouraged when my people defend the land. We have a right to be Okanagan. The Creator gave us that right. We looked after that right by looking after the land. We cannot stop. Be brave because the future needs us to be. (Translated from Okanagan) Tommy Gregoire, Spokesperson of the Confederated Okanagan Shuswap Traditional Alliance, October 1993. (Cited in Okanagan Tribal Council, 1994, p. x)

A prophecy often shared at public gatherings by the late Tommy Gregoire, well known throughout the Okanagan as a knowledge-keeper of Okanagan laws and traditions, was that "One day, the government man is going to ask the Indians, 'What is your name? Where are you from? Who are you?' If you can't answer in your language then the government man will take away your land and your rights." Tommy and his wife Mary made sure that all of their children knew their *Sqilxw* language, knowledge and responsibilities. Their daughter, Pauline Archachan (nee Gregoire), continues to give language, knowledge and love to our children as lead elder in *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet*, a strong connection to our *Sqilxw* ancestors' epistemology.

Our ancestor's abilities to foresee the future and make predictions is one of our ways and rights that is no longer commonly practiced, and is one of the ways of knowing that is a goal for our children. We want our children to be able to look far ahead into the future. The Okanagan, in our history, were well regarded for their visions. If we look at Tommy's warning to us, and examine the patterns of language and culture erosion, government legislation, court decisions, the global Indigenous Peoples' movement, and current government strategies

employed against Indigenous assertions of rights and title, a “zero sum game” (Apple, 2000, p.26), or gains, for “Aboriginal People” in Canada becomes apparent. Zero sum means that Aboriginal peoples, First Nation, Inuit, and Métis, rights and resources do not increase. The rights and resources decrease or remain at zero growth, and the illusion of progress, or the illusion that “We’re winning,” is generated by continually redistributing the same or less level of resources to Aboriginal groups who are competing for those same resources and limited gains at the expense of other Aboriginal groups. This keeps Aboriginal groups in Canada busy fighting and competing with each other and disconnected from collective strategic involvement with Indigenous rights in Canada and at the global level where human rights based on distinct Indigenous languages, cultures, and territories are continually more acknowledged, especially at the United Nations as more countries support the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples. If this were not the case, then First Nations’ languages, territories, economic practices and independence would not have continued to decline. Canada, United States, Australia, and several other countries that have been built on the exploitation of Indigenous peoples’ populations, resources and territories, have been unwilling to acknowledge that Indigenous peoples exist and have rights, title and responsibilities. Canadian and other similar governments historically have applied tremendous pressures to eliminate Indigenous peoples’ connections to their homelands through various modes of cultural genocide: the reserve system, assimilation policies, residential schools, the BC “Treaty” Process, and so on. These targeted Indigenous languages and cultural

knowledge systems, and particularly, the extended family networks. Despite a continuing series of royal commissions, special task forces, “gathering strength, truth, and reconciliation commissions”, an “apology,” the Crown and corporations as much ever control the lives and territories of Aboriginal peoples, through administrative and economic dominance and corporatization.

Ultimately, the government strategy is quite clear. The Canadian governments, federal and provincial, are aware that their refusal to endorse the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, and similar recognitions, makes Canada look bad because the majority of nation states support it because it is a move away from overt colonial exploitation and cultural genocide and toward pluralistic, tolerant, just, and necessarily sustainable global relationships (contradictions between rhetoric of human rights and global pluralism and the actual practices and policies of nation states is noted). Canadian governments, and other similar states with colonial histories, are stalling to try to get to a point where policies of assimilation and programs extended from those policies will have diminished Indigenous languages and cultural knowledge systems to where extinction is imminent or has occurred. Then, Canada, after posturing falsely about not having Indigenous issues while continuing aggressive modes of subjugation and assimilation, for example, the Indian Act and Education policies, and extinguishment, “Treaty” and “Self government” prescriptions, will say as Tommy Gregoire predicted, “Yes, Canada acknowledges that Indigenous peoples have rights and title because they have distinct languages, cultures and territories. We once had Indigenous peoples in



Canada, but they are now extinct because we asked them who they were, and all they know is English or French.”

In the past (and currently), “education” was used in an attempt to destroy Indigenous cultures. Therefore, similar systems cannot be expected to repair the damage caused. The methodology must be critically examined so that we are not ourselves contributing to our colonization by assisting in the construction of new forms of colonization. Self-determination does not mean assuming the values of the dominant culture. It means affirming our values, our identities through our voices and perspectives, and not from the confines of the artificial world that Western culture has constructed for us.

Cultural conquest leads to the cultural inauthenticity of those who are invaded; they begin to respond to the values, the standards, and the goals of the invaders. In cultural invasion it is essential that those who are invaded come to see their reality with the outlook of the invaders, rather than their own; for the more they mimic the invaders, the more stable the position of the latter becomes. (Freire, 1972, pp.150-151)

The situation in the Okanagan was particularly challenging because although we are connected to surviving strands of our Okanagan ways, and many Okanagan people, me included, understood, thanks to scholars such as Freire, colonization, cultural invasion and naming the world. We did not know our own names, ways and territory through Okanagan cognitive and cultural paradigms and contexts because our conceptual understanding and frameworks of knowledge had largely been replaced with an English or Western worldview. Okanagan collective memory of who we are, where we are, how we do certain things, why and when

we do them, had diminished. Fortunately, Fox re-emerged once again, through the work and activism of Okanagan Elders.

The Okanagan language is practiced by few people in the North Okanagan, but fortunately through the NSS project, the language is growing with children for the first time in generations. There are approximately 35 fluent speakers on Okanagan Indian Band of a population of over 1700. Most of the fluent speakers, those who could converse all day in our language without using English, are elderly. The number of Okanagan people who know our *Captikwl* story system is even lower. Court cases involving rights and title have been won on the strength of Indigenous oral traditions and the knowledge and practice of Indigenous laws, customs, and resource management. Our fluent speakers and/or Elders are the key resource people whose knowledge is vital to provide evidence needed for our legal teams to put together substantive arguments on our behalf. What will happen when those Elders are no longer here? The point is that our Elders who know their language and territorial responsibilities have rights uncontested by governments whose main tactic is to delay, delay, delay, until there are few or no fluent speakers who know our language, laws and traditions. Our Elders' fluency with language and cultural knowledge will no doubt be the foundation for some victories in court. There has been a lot of energy and money committed to legal arguments, court cases and determining legal categories of Aboriginal, First Nations, Inuit and Métis in Canada. The latter has been controlled by the Canadian government, although there have been changes to the Indian Act thanks to the efforts of our leaders in previous generations, and

particularly the resurgent leadership and commitment of disenfranchised Indian women. Our Okanagan national identity as a distinct Indigenous people is recognised by international law, and the Canadian Constitution affirms our “existing” rights. Unless we know our land, history, and culture and speak our language and practice our rights, our rights are seriously threatened. We are very close to the point where only our status cards determine our identity and rights, and the Canadian government will determine what our rights are because they issue the status cards. With this legal arena of conflict in mind, if we consider that Indigenous languages could become extinct, there would only be legal arguments in English about Aboriginal citizenship. While the legal arena is important and must be contested, a more proactive and self-determining area of change is to animate our Indigenous languages, rights, responsibilities and ways of doing things. Our respective languages and knowledge systems and practices are ours to research and recover through action. In fact we are the only ones capable of taking on our own responsibilities because we are the ones who are connected genealogically, epistemologically, and ontologically to our ancestors, the *tmixw*, and *tmxwulaxw*. It is the responsibility of every Okanagan and Indigenous person to ensure that the accumulated knowledge and wisdom of our ancestors and current elders continues with the next generations of Okanagan and Indigenous peoples because “Who are you?” will certainly be asked. A tougher question, if we choose to be complacent, will be asked by our grandchildren, “Why didn’t you do something about it?”

We have a choice, to be proactive and ask ourselves, “Who are we? Who are the *Sqilxw*? Who are the Okanagan and what have we done about it? And we can continue to be *Sqilxw*, confident in the accumulated wisdom of our ancestors that flows and evolves through us. Or, we can assimilate and meekly let our identities, rights and responsibilities fade away. We have elders, fluent speakers, parents and extended families who have determined that our children deserve to know their language and cultural knowledge, to be *Sqilxw*, to be Okanagan. They decided to do something about it. I acknowledge the elders, Pauline Archachan, Madeline Gregoire, Virginia Gregoire, Leonard Gregoire, and Adam Gregoire for their work to help our kids learn at the immersion school, a special *limlimt* to Pauline Archachan who has given an incredible amount of language, love, knowledge and self-discipline to our children through her leadership and work at our school. Shirley Paul has worked hard to provide the language for kids at the daycare. The work of the late Dave Parker needs to be recognized. John "Wilky" Louie has stepped up and is working with Chad Marchand at the immersion school to give our children the language. *Limlimt* to the New Horizons Elders for your strong support for the kids. *Limlimt* to all of the people past and present who have contributed love, support and knowledge to our kids. *Limlimt* to the parents and grandparents who have been the stable and committed force behind our school’s development. I am sure that there are many others who should be acknowledged, and I will look to include them in the future.

We will honour the work that all these people have contributed by continuing to work to improve our learning and teaching relationships and

methods, and our school programs and projects. Cultural invasion, the subsequent dominance of English language, speech and thought patterns, has compromised *Sqilxw* modes of cognition and perception with a shift to a more denotative, objective and categorical view and understanding of the world (the fundamental frameworks for individual wealth, private property, commoditization of all the animals, everything that grows from the land, everything alive in the water, and everything alive in the earth). Critical theory, ecoliteracy, ontology, epistemology, axiology and pedagogy, are notions expressed in *Captikwl* stories, the *Sqilxw* cognitive and perceptual frameworks, and through every day and multigenerational practices. Our territorial ecology and our ancestors continue to know us and speak to us through the complex webs of story, kinship and evolving interrelated practice. The wishing rock, the place where Okanagan dreams and aspirations are realized, is here and has always been here. Everything we need is here. We just have to gather them up, breathe them into life, and ritualize them into practice. Knowing we can do that is what we are in need of practice. The development of *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet* would give us, Okanagan parents and families, that kind of practice.

## **5.1 What Has Gone Wrong on the Reserves?**

Okanagan knowledge and practice, the *Captikwl* story system, are fundamentally about relationships with the territorial ecology that sustains us—the *tmxwulaxw* and the *tmixw*. Those relationships, and correlating responsibilities, have changed with the imposition of the Indian Act and the dispossession of and privatization of First Nations' territories. I will focus on

reserves because for Okanagan people, reserves are mainly where Okanagan *Sqilxwlcawt* is still practiced through extended families and that is where the majority of fluent, knowledgeable elders live. Reserves are “owned” collectively by band membership, although “legally” the Federal Government owns and controls reserve lands for the “use and benefit of its wards,” the Indians. The collective ownership or rather stewardship of our tiny parcel of our traditional territory has been structured by Indian Affairs into a “haves and have nots” system that reproduces overall poverty and landless majority, with a few land “barons.” Reserves are sectioned into parcels of land with Certificates of Possession (CP), the on-reserve version of private property. Equity, access to land and resources, and shared benefits are absent when individuals control, through CPs, hundreds of hectares of land that is now valuable real estate rather than collectively maintained territorial ecology. It is common on Okanagan and other reserves for a handful of landowners to be very wealthy while the majority of membership has little or no land for residential use. CP holders of large tracts of land can make lots of money by “selling” reserve land through long-term leases of fifty to one hundred or more years. There are housing shortages on Okanagan reserves for band members, but there is definitely no shortage of housing because there are thousands of houses on reserves owned by non-Okanagan leaseholders with more going up every day. This is an example of the “haves and have nots” that Indian Act policies have generated to replace Okanagan traditional governance and relationships to land and resources. Several generations back, there was, and still is, a frenzy for individual band

members to acquire as much land as possible before it was all gone. The most ambitious and entrepreneurial band members tended to acquire the most land, and many land conflicts between families and family members continue to resonate, perpetuate anger, and mistrust in the communities.

Hurt feelings, injustices, thefts, rapes, fights and feuds, revenge and getting even are all at play either as generational undercurrents or active, continuing conflicts in daily interactions on reserves. Families have tried, and in some cases succeeded, to remove other families from band lists. Family and individual interests are constantly in conflict with collective interests and patterns of mistrust, harsh criticism and ridicule have developed as norms. That is the challenge and responsibility of *Yelmixwem* and *qwilmi?st*, to put our individual social and cultural capital to work to bring together the different and conflicting factions, to engage people in the task of transforming those colonised conditions and relationships into something better for our children.

Coming out of dysfunctional conditions is not a straightforward process because each of us is part of and connected through our families and own activities to generational abuse and injustice. Community elders and workers who have sobered up, taken counselling etc, and try to help out through leadership and activist roles are often shot down with the harsh criticisms mentioned earlier. They are either told directly, but more commonly gossiped about behind their back, comments such as, “You were worse than I ever was” or “I heard about all the things you did. Who are you to think you know something?” These dynamics are commonplace, everyday occurrences. The elder or

community worker can lose confidence and energy and a “hope and a prayer” rationalization neutralizes the activist and any positive contributions they might have made. The elder/worker in my not so hypothetical example hopes and prays that the younger generation will learn, but has lost the confidence to engage with others in language and knowledge recovery. Concerning language, an example of criticism expressed is, “You didn’t teach your own kids the language. Why should we learn it? ” Or “If it was so important, you would have taught it to us.” Fluent speakers who have been criticized and ridiculed in the past by their own people for “being Indian, talking Indian, or acting Indian,” express a related tension. They say, “Why should we help those people now. They used to call us down and try to make us feel stupid because we know our language.” Fluent and knowledgeable elders also sometimes criticize others for “Speaking slang, speaking the ‘wrong’ dialect, not pronouncing words properly” and so on. Elders often say the following about the youth. “The youth are so lazy these days. . . . They have no initiative. . . . They need to toughen up, get their act together. . . .” These are hegemonic patterns of blaming and avoiding responsibility that perpetuate and ensure continued divisiveness and conflict, and if continued will serve to make us powerless and on the fast track to assimilation and extinction.

The hegemonies and internalized notions of deficit at play in our families and communities can be very challenging for self-determining language and knowledge recovery projects. These play out in complex, intergenerational ways: harsh criticisms, hurt feelings, expectations of failure, refusal to participate,



feelings of injustice and revenge. These occur between fluent speakers, between fluent speakers and traditional minded people and those who tried to be successful in *Sama* ways by turning their backs on Okanagan or Indian ways, and between those who have tried to learn and those who already know how to speak, and between any proactive community worker and community members. The politics of distraction are even more complex because the positions of community members I have just mentioned are continually re-shuffled and exchanged. Our ancestors understood hegemonies and politics of distraction and developed cultural systems to nurture shared values and collective responsibilities tied to our territorial ecology. That “old” knowledge is relevant today and worth breathing into new understanding and application. The limited amount of *Sqilxw* knowledge acquired by the author with others was enough to mediate hegemonies, facilitate NSS development, and organically expand Okanagan language and knowledge through culturally informed teaching and learning relationships.

Language and identity issues are very contradictory in communities because many will publicly assert how important “our language and culture is” and go on about how valuable our elders are because “they hold our knowledge, language, and laws.” The platitudes about “our elders and language” have become a monotonous theme at community events and seem to be ignorant of the fact that the speakers will soon be the elders, and then what are they/we going to say? I do not need to question the sincerity of these types of comments. My role is to determine the dynamics, relationships and the actions. People,

elders, leaders, parents, youth say that our language and culture are important and the continued lament about losing our elders has become an example of the politics of distraction. The people in the community, while lamenting, also wait for somebody to do something. The youth wait for the elders to save the language, the elders wait for the youth, the chiefs wait for the election . . . . The language and knowledge, in the meantime, has steadily and rapidly declined, and the potential for revitalization is reduced, as there are fewer and fewer elders, and less and less of our children have access to our ancestors and elders' accumulated wisdom.

The standard approach has been to focus on conscientization and resistance by “finding out what really happened” and seeking justice in the courts or with governments. In my experience with community transformative work/research, advice from elders, proved useful: “If it’s too tough for everybody else, it’s just right for us” (My dad), “Everything we need is here” (Chief Barnett Allison), and “the best kind of Indian leader . . . when you stab him in the back . . . he just walks away with your knife” (Chief Gus Gottfriedsen). The approach taken in the NSS project was to not engage in defending our language to our own people (Kipp, 2000, p. 5) and emphasize that our school is about creating an Okanagan option for parents. Our children are positioned in the centre of our efforts, and our project would add to the larger project of transforming praxis through language recovery and proactive extended family rebuilding. It is true to say that thirty years of language programming has not produced one fluent speaker. The few individuals who have achieved a level of proficiency

approaching fluency have done so by immersing themselves in an extended family learning relationship by living with a fluent elder for several years in a master – apprentice relationship; while this method has been effective for individual language acquisition, and the effort and determination of the elders and individuals is incredible, our school project aimed to nurture a generation of fluent speaking, culturally knowledgeable, academically capable children. Rather than criticize past and current Okanagan language projects and courses, we would add to the larger project. It all proved useful anyway. At NSS, once children advanced to intermediate levels of fluency and were ready for literacy, the “banking” projects, stories transcribed in Okanagan orthography, recordings of stories and songs, dictionaries, and so on, all became very useful when those resources were needed to develop new curriculum and lesson plans.

## **5.2 “We Are the Ones to Fix That”: *Enowkinwixw* and *P’ax***

I facilitated an En’owkin education project in 2001 throughout the Okanagan communities. The project, *We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For*, looked at why Okanagan youth academically underachieve in school and have disproportionally high dropout rates. The project used the *enowkinwixw* process to have youth, elders, parents and community members engage in respectful dialogue. This project played a key role in my conscientization and praxis. When I coordinated this project and facilitated community dialogue through *enowkinwixw* workshops, I was at the same time learning to understand and apply the principles of the *enowkinwixw*—this relationship of learning by doing, teacher/learner, has certainly continued. This project, in its period of

activity, did not facilitate major change or transformation in terms of critical interventions and transformed conditions to address issues of academic underachievement and high dropout rates. It did spark the fire in the *P'ax* sense in communities who collaboratively engaged to understand the dynamics of Okanagan knowledge and practice relative to community and schooling contexts. It was certainly a catalyst for the NSS project, and activities throughout the Okanagan (language camps, the Okanagan Nation Schools Association, political leaders introducing themselves in the language, etc). The initial vision for *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet* emerged from workshops held with the Okanagan Indian Band youth.

The *enowkinwixw* was used traditionally to address issues of serious concern to the community. The project coordinator (me) designed an *enowkinwixw* format for the project. Responses to the project were positive and each Okanagan community approved workshops. An initial four-day *enowkinwixw* workshop was held involving Youth, Elders, Mothers, Fathers, educators, community leaders, and community members from all seven Okanagan Bands and served to orient the larger community to the *enowkinwixw* way of doing things. Each person was challenged to contribute understanding to the collective and to consider and include the viewpoints of all others, and as a group come to the best possible strategies for the entire community. The participants, through the *enowkinwixw*, generated strategies and potential solutions to many issues of the youth and education in the context of community relationships. Participants also committed to the recruiting of youth and

community members in their respective communities, and to assisting in the workshops.

*Enowkinwixw* workshops were then held throughout the Okanagan Nation. The workshops gave youth and community members the opportunity to share their knowledge, experiences, and feelings in a safe forum without fear of judgements or conflicts. Okanagan students' experiences in the school system, and what extended family and community members perceive and have experienced, in relation to underachievement and dropping out, are made clear by a sampling of comments:

- *A lot of violence in High Schools, name-calling, harassment, and then dropping out and suicide thoughts...* (Youth)
- *Some teachers are racist and sexist, and don't help when asking questions, and complaints get ignored, and if teachers put you down then other students put you down and there's racism on the reserve, family feuds, domestic violence, cousins fighting, family crises and personal problems...* (Youth)
- *We don't know about land claims, history, and so on, but we get labelled "money hungry, lazy, land-grabbers..."* (Youth)
- *Counsellors don't help you even though they know you're smart. They don't help. They just give you credits. They just pass you through.* (Youth)
- *Drugs. People too old for high school come and sell drugs to grade 8 and 9 students.* (Youth)

- *Not enough is being taught about Okanagans. It should be from grade 1 to 12. Our genealogy needs to be taught, to know who our relatives are.* (Youth)

- *Because of residential schools, parents fear institutions, buildings, Sama authority figures...lack of encouragement from parents, grandparents and teachers. Child thinks, 'You don't care' and 'It's not important.'* (Parent)

- *Teachers don't have compassion, don't love our kids. Our kids learn through caring. The school system is not doing that.* (Elder)

- *We dropped out because others did and their parents did. When I was in grade 9, all my friends were older and it was cool to skip out and I dropped out. I thought, why learn about White people's stuff. It gets too boring, same thing every day.* (Young parent)

Language and culture should be taught in school, culture and language to know who they are. Our children feel anger, don't know who they really are and are pressured. Just like any of us, we were ashamed. *Samas* had everything. We had nothing... We are survivors. How can we use that to help today? Our communities long time ago, we survived. But now survival is the Band Office and money. There's people with jobs and some with nothing—welfare. My grandchildren, great grandchildren, what are they gonna live on? We're all in this together. Some say, "Hell with it." We're trying to fix our community. We've talked about parenting. Kids don't listen because of what they learn in school. There's certain families that can't take part in activities because parents don't have the money. Some of our children get left out. Many kids don't have grandparents—orphans with big families. They have to know we care. Some kids don't have lunch. Bad habits, drinking, bingoing...the kids suffer. We are the ones to fix that. For many years, we depend on schools to educate our kids... (Lottie Lindley, personal communication, 2001)

I acknowledge Lottie, a grandmother, great-grandmother, and caring and active leader from Upper Nicola, for her insight, encouragement and vision. "We are the

ones to fix that” would become a central theme in *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet*.

The project promoted a sense of cultural affirmation by engaging youth in dialogue with other youth and elders, leaders, parents and adults, administrators, and traditional people in a venue of mutual respect, where each person’s knowledge and point of view are honoured and considered necessary to work toward effective intervention strategies. In the workshops, youth (and adults) learned about traditional roles and responsibilities. They engaged in interactive dialogue about what it means to be Okanagan. Youth and other workshop participants cooperatively and experientially explored traditional and contemporary culture and how the two could be synthesized.

To nurture self-reliance, commitment, and personal responsibility, the workshops provided participants the opportunity to critically examine their own roles and responsibilities in the community and in what ways their actions or non-actions influence and affect others in the community. Okanagan concepts associated with identity and vision have empowered youth to feel a strong sense of cultural identity and history, and facilitate the articulation of personal vision and goal setting. All workshop participants critically examined and analysed the relationships between school and the community, and collectively developed intervention strategies

To build within the Okanagan nation an emphasis on education and cultural education as being imperative to the revitalization and preservation of

Okanagan culture, the *enowkinwixw* workshops acted as a catalyst for community change. Although initially, no radical change happened in any major way during and immediately following the workshops, seeds were planted. Ideas, visions, and commitments began to form that would resonate later through communities and families. Community initiatives generated through the workshops included after school language sessions in homes with a different family hosting a supper and language night each week. Meetings were organized by youth so teachers could hear what was brought up in the workshops, a play was produced by young students to inspire other students to seek a vision and succeed in education. In all *enowkinwixw* workshops, community members asserted that they would take a more active role in the education of children from the community. Expressions of understanding and commitment are noted with the following examples.

- A major initiative from the Okanagan Band workshops was the vision of a community school with unbiased, unprejudiced teachers, and curriculum built on our own values, taught using traditional family styles. A community working committee was formed, and individuals voluntarily committed their time and expertise to the realization of the community school.
- For students who attend schools or institutions away from home, community members agreed to set up family/community support networks to support, encourage and acknowledge students' efforts.



- Elders consistently committed to help with language learning and many volunteered to be 'adopted grandparents' for any who did not have grandparents.
- Elders from Similkameen and Penticton commented, "These workshops are doing for the youth what the elders did for the youth when we were children. They are learning who they are, what their roles and responsibilities are. This is really important work."

A major recurrent theme through all of the community workshops was the understanding that the education of our children and youth is clearly the responsibility of the extended family and community. This responsibility has been taken away, first by the residential schools, and now by the public schools. This understanding, that we need to be in control of our children's education, achieved through respectful dialogue, has been and will be the critical empowering achievement of this project.

This project provided a forum for communities to identify respective educational and schooling issues and priorities within each Band community. The community driven solutions from the interactive workshops have shaped community educational and schooling projects and developments. An Okanagan nationwide knowledge and resources pool and database was a goal that seemed to flounder but has re-emerged over the past three years as a project of the regenerated Okanagan Nation Schools Association, and strengthened by the now annual Okanagan Nation Schools Conference for educators, parents, elders, extended families, and leaders. And of course, in 2010, a world class

community school on the Okanagan Band, *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet*, is completing its fourth year of development.

### **5.3 Making Space in the University for Okanagan Pedagogy and Indigenous Aspirations for Knowledge**

This section describes my role in the development of what is now the UBC Okanagan Indigenous Studies Program. My teaching and learning experiences in the university, connected to responsibilities to make space in the University for Okanagan and Indigenous knowledge and ways, became a training and testing ground for Okanagan pedagogy and transforming theory. The new program with new courses to be developed provided a meaningful context to engage with students and colleagues and try things out and see what happens.

As former Education Director of the En'owkin Centre I was part of the initial working committee with Okanagan University College and the Okanagan Nation Alliance that initiated the project, and I was the first instructor in the program. I have developed and taught courses concerning Okanagan and Indigenous history, perspectives, education and pedagogy, concepts and frameworks, research and methods, Indigenous and critical theory, and cultural revitalization. While I worked in the university, I was also involved in planning and envisioning an Okanagan process to get the cultural immersion school going. Although I taught Indigenous Studies and Education courses, and my teaching role was informed by experiences facilitating organic *enowkinwixw* projects with

Okanagan communities, I did not have experiential reflective praxis as an Okanagan organic intellectual until I engaged fully with parents, extended families, Indian Act administrative structures, colonizing hegemonies, politics of distraction, and the undercurrents and strands of Okanagan evolving epistemology, ontology and pedagogy waiting to be reconnected, through the self-determining project of collaboratively realizing our own cultural immersion school, *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet*.

### **5.3.1 Indigenous Studies: The Four Food Chiefs Go to University**

In 2000, Okanagan University College (OUC), En'owkin Centre (EC), and the Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) began planning an Indigenous Studies degree program at OUC. OUC is now UBC Okanagan. EC's role in the project was to provide the Indigenous academic guidance concerning Okanagan knowledge. Jeannette Armstrong, Executive Director of the EC and me, Education Director/Instructor (at the time) of the EC were on the committee. The ONA is the political body of the Okanagan Nation and is comprised of the Chiefs and Councils of the seven Okanagan bands in Canada (Half of the Okanagan territory and peoples are in North Central Washington USA. This summer, 2010, Colville Confederated Tribes (CCT) and the ONA member bands formally signed a declaration of unity affirming that we are all one people. The ONA's involvement was mainly to develop a MOU to ensure a cooperative relationship regarding rights and Okanagan and Indigenous knowledge. Pauline Terbasket, ONA Director, has been an active participant. From OUC in the original committee were Dr. Duane Thomson of History, Dr. Rick Garvin of Anthropology,

and Dr. Lally Grauer of English; all of these professors had been involved in research projects with the Okanagan people and had developed good relationships (all 3 are non-Indigenous as well).

At the outset it was agreed by all that the new program would be rooted in the Okanagan, and structured upon Okanagan knowledge and pedagogy, and it must be relevant and useful to the local Okanagan community and the larger Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. From a strong Okanagan base the program would be developed to extend outward to Canadian, North and South American, and global Indigenous Knowledge and Issues. From the Okanagan position, it had to be that way because this is our territory and we have a right and responsibility to be at the centre of any project with Indigenous knowledge as the focus.

As a cultural and social phenomenon, it is also essential to understand that native understanding and practice of leadership (whether it is a noun or a verb) cannot be separated from native/indigenous peoples' historical struggle against colonialism and cultural assimilation. (Ahnee-Benham, 2002, p. 139)

It was critical from the EC position that we were not “token” participants and must be careful that we not become co-opted or subsumed by OUC and that this project did protect, respect and enhance Okanagan knowledge to the benefit of Okanagan communities. Graham Smith’s assertion to develop “an Indigenous institution within an institution” resonated for me and the position I took that we were there to develop and expand Okanagan and Indigenous knowledge and relationships by accessing and synthesizing what the university had to offer without losing ourselves or disappearing in the process. Over several years, topic

areas and themes were developed into a full program proposal: pedagogy, ecological knowledge, governance, history, justice, gender roles, etc and a 4<sup>th</sup> year community research option in collaboration with an Indigenous organization or agency. All of these areas would start with the Okanagan foundation. I developed the Okanagan content courses and the others developed courses in the other areas. I taught several pilot courses at OUC (in Anthropology and Education) to promote the new program and establish interest and legitimacy of Okanagan knowledge. The latter I already took for granted of course. After going through various processes (OUC Ed. Council and Ministry of Ed.), the proposal was approved, and then we had to implement it and post the first position. I was one of two at the time with sufficient Okanagan knowledge and academic credentials qualified for the new position; the other was Jeannette Armstrong—someone far more qualified than I but her priorities were with the En'owkin Centre. So, I applied for and was selected to teach the courses I designed (bureaucratic irony apparent). Since then, on a positive trend, there are over twenty Okanagan students completing graduate degrees, several at the Ph D level.

Through this whole process, I was faced with constant reflection and consideration about where I positioned myself and what the consequences were or could be. I am an Okanagan educator, artist, and academic. I consider myself a co-learner and facilitator, one of the foxes who gather bits of coyote to breathe into life and ritualise, a metaphor for continuous evolution of knowledge and new paradigms emerging from past knowledge. The Indigenous Studies (IS) Program

was structured on the Four Food Chiefs' framework, based on balance and complementarities between innovation, action, place, and community with dialogue, creativity and respect for diversity resonant. (On a creative connection, I designed the IS logo) I find much connection in the educational goals Sam Suina identifies, and I will use them to organize and clarify my experience and challenges in the context of my role in the development the OUC-UBC-O program and the development of an Okanagan radical pedagogy.

What I have learned . . . is that any philosophy of education for indigenous people must be rooted in spirituality and in the oneness of all indigenous people. I believe that there are eight educational goals that can help us to build healthy communities and raise healthy children. The goals are as follows:

*Support networking among indigenous people across the globe.*

*Support efforts that strengthen communities by inclusiveness and validating members.*

*Support language, traditions, and values from a tribal perspective.*

*Support and validate pride among our people and to support tribal name of people.*

*Support collaborative partnerships.*

*Focus on experiential learning.*

*Develop teaching practices that follow traditional methods and develop evaluation processes that are non-judgmental.*

*Maintain self-determination as the ultimate goal. (Cited in Ahnee-Benham, 2000, p.148))*

I will use the term peoples, with the “s” securely attached. To quote Linda Tuhiwai Smith, “It is regarded as crucial by Indigenous activists because it is peoples who are recognized in international law as having the right to self-determination,” (1999, p.114). The struggle for decolonisation and more than that the struggle for self-determination is global and there is much unity and solidarity to be found in experiences of colonisation, the expressions of resistance, and in transformative praxis where it is occurring. Indigenous peoples, however, are distinct culturally, nationally, and have distinct knowledge and practice systems connected to specific territories. With that said, I will apply the goals which clearly correspond to the responsibilities of Indigenous educational leaders.

### **5.3.2 Support Networking Among Indigenous People Across the Globe**

When the Indigenous Studies Program was approved, one of the first things the committee did was to organise the World’s Indigenous Peoples’ Conference: Perspectives and Processes. We wanted the conference to feature and celebrate proactive Indigenous projects, transformative praxis rather than conscientization and resistance. I used my social capital (nothing extensive, I took a few of his courses at UBC when he was visiting scholar there) to bring Graham Hingangaroa Smith to Kelowna as the keynote speaker. “If the answers are within us, what we are doing about it,” the title and theme of his address built upon the theme of the World’s Indigenous Peoples’ Conference on Education, “The Answers Are Within Us” which was held several months earlier in Morley, Alberta. Smith’s challenge was appropriate to the event and to the reality that

much of the Indigenous practice at the time (and currently) was not doing much to generate actual change. A noted transformative educational leader, he spoke with personal knowledge and passion about the Maori experience. It also began a longer and continually developing relationships with the Maori of Aoteroa (New Zealand), and the Mohawk, Cree and Indigenous Peoples from North and South America and Africa who also attended.

### **5.3.3 Support Efforts That Strengthen Communities by Inclusiveness and Validating Members.**

The Four Food Chiefs' Model was put into practice by applying it in courses I designed and taught. The model is an ecological metaphor for societal relations and governance based on kinship sustainability, diversity, the community knowing its members, and consensus building. The Indigenous Education seminar is a good example. To very briefly summarise, I introduced education students, who were about to receive their B Ed degrees, to Indigenous education, history, pedagogy, experiences and issues. The residential school experience in Canada was something most knew little or nothing about. I asked them to critically examine what informed the residential schoolteachers' practice and consider their own. They were asked to create a personal identity model, a creative representation of what informed their positioning as teachers in terms of culture, nation, worldview, family, history, place, ideas and so on. Students did this and it was a powerful community building experience for them. They acquired insights into how diverse the education student collective really is and how interesting, unique, how valuable individuals are, the necessity to examine



worldview and hegemony, and that recognizing and validating diversity can be a powerful community building experience..

#### **5.3.4 Support Language, Traditions, and Values from a Tribal Perspective**

This bothered me somewhat at first when I decided to move to the mainstream university from an Okanagan/Indigenous institution. I wanted to avoid being co-opted by the larger institution, and disconnected from the community modes of knowledge transmission and reproduction. I am aware of some Indigenous professors and educators who are comfortable in their big university jobs but are doing little or nothing to make positive change for Indigenous peoples and communities. I am also very appreciative of the efforts of Indigenous scholars to achieve graduate degrees and make space for Indigenous knowledge and connect to community needs and aspirations, which is why I wrote the section about Indigenous Gifted Translators. (After walking my talk and finding out how tough it can be, I am slightly less critical of Indigenous ‘ivory tower’ intellectuals aaayy). After reflection, I felt that this is Okanagan territory and I have a right and a responsibility to practice Okanagan knowledge, language, traditions and values in my homeland. This was done with serious critical examination of what I was practicing and with consultation/visiting with my community. Okanagan traditions or practices are not good simply because they are Okanagan. They are good if they are appropriate and relevant to the needs and aspirations of the people today and in the future. Many practices, attitudes, beliefs, and ideas good and bad were from another era, and many of them should be learned from and left in the past. Globally, with particular reference to Western influence and history, we

tend to repeat and/or recreate the same destructive patterns and mistakes. The Okanagan people, the *Sqilxw*, have been an ecologically sustainable society with a stable social network and good international relations for thousands of years, no police force, no standing armies, no weapons of mass destruction because there was no interest or need for those things. There is much to be learned from thousands of years of accumulated wisdom that is relevant and necessary today. What is “good” or relevant depends on a balance or mediated tensions and complementarities between the quadrants suggested by the Four Chiefs: innovation, action, place, and community. My experience as a teacher in the university suggests Okanagan perspective is critical to expand the sensibilities of students and faculty, and to ground the many Okanagan and Indigenous individuals from abroad who are studying in the university.

### **5.3.5 Support and Validate Pride Among Our Young People and to Support Tribal Name of People**

The Okanagan Valley, Okanagan Lake, Kelowna, Penticton, Keremeos, Kalamalka Lake are place names or references that are anglicized versions of Okanagan language terms. Kelowna is the largest city in the interior and where (formerly OUC) UBC-Okanagan is located. It was incredible for me to teach a course in Okanagan history and find that non-Indigenous young Canadian students had lived their entire lives in Kelowna and had no knowledge at all of the Okanagan people. The extent of historical erasure in the education system and its effect on the conscientization of the public is negatively amazing. Many Okanagan students who were uncertain about who they were and who their

people are also signed up for Okanagan content courses. They developed new understanding, confidence and pride when they found out more about their people. As noted earlier, Okanagan political leaders are more consistently introducing themselves in our language at public events, something which has not happened for years. The NSS children have opened many public events, including the 2010 Olympic Torch Ceremony in Vernon BC. Our children are certainly generating awareness of who the Okanagan people are through our language, and of course are raising the profile of our school.

#### **5.3.6 Support Collaborative Partnerships.**

Development of the Indigenous Studies degree program is itself an example of a collaborative partnership between OUC, EC and the ONA. This notion is also expressed in the 4<sup>th</sup> year community project option. In place of three required senior level courses, students can choose to complete a research project in collaboration with an Indigenous community, organisation or entity. This is to make the university learning experience relevant and useful to communities, and of course for the student, without the disconnection that has occurred. In the past, Indigenous students have often gone off to university, been forced to leave their communities and identities behind, been subjected to a formal education, and return to their communities to find that no one knows what the heck they are talking about. How the collaborative partnerships will continue is uncertain. I am certain that it is vital that we maintain and expand the Okanagan positioning, and I am hopeful that this will occur without too much conflict.

### **5.3.7 Focus on Experiential Learning**

Experiential learning will occur if Indigenous organic pedagogical structures are applied. For example, applying the principle from the Four Food Chiefs, that diversity is a powerful community feature but its effectiveness depends on the members or parts of community knowing each other and themselves, is what I did with the personal identity model exercise with the education students. Through reflection, creativity, and dialogue, the students learned to appreciate each other's personal identities, histories, experiences and perspectives and to be aware of how those influence their roles as teachers and the learning experiences of their students. The students learned much about respectful dialogue, and community dynamics. The knowledge that emerged from group interaction will remain with them for the long term. I know that they would not have learned much had I lectured about theory and then tested them with a formal examination. I have found the standard textbook and test method often produces short-term knowledge that disappears shortly after the exam. Tests or Examinations are very appropriate for ensuring the mastery of specialized skill sets as in First Aid, medical treatments, machinery operation and so on, but are not very appropriate to nurture tolerance, diversity, and collaboration through organic pedagogy. The entire Education graduating class mentioned earlier, on their own initiative, organized an annual retreat to "reflect on their practice and their positioning as educators."

### **5.3.8 Develop Teaching Practices That Follow Traditional Methods and Develop Evaluation Processes That Are Non-Judgemental**

Teaching practices that follow or are structured upon critically examined traditional Okanagan methods, concepts and frameworks, I consistently work to apply, and to develop teaching and learning practices inclusive of appropriate critically examined Western or scientific methods. The previous sections are expressions of this goal. I have been developing and applying a non-judgemental evaluation process for final examinations that shifts the standard evaluation processes considerably. The standard procedure is for students to undergo a very individualized testing regimen with invigilators to make sure they do not cheat. To cheat means to copy or covet someone else's knowledge or to share it with someone else. This practice begins in pre-school and is institutionalized in greater measures as levels of school achievement increase i.e. K to 12 and then college/university. This practice is symbolic of more entrenched values of individualism and competition inherent in the standard teaching and learning methods, and is in direct conflict with Okanagan extended family and community kinship values and practices, which express and encourage sharing, showing, helping and cooperation. After facilitating courses based on nurturing respect for diversity, building cooperative learning relationships, consensus building, and collective creativity, I found final exams to be completely antithetical. So, I introduced collective open book final exams where students are expected to share knowledge and cooperate respectfully and effectively to reach consensus on answers or strategies to questions and challenges based on course content and structure. The reactions I have received from students and faculty--shock

and apprehension at first and then appreciation once they experience it--reveal how little educators and students critically examine what they do or are asked to do in the education system. It is contradictory that I still have to evaluate the exams and “judge” them. Experience has proven, however, that the group mind is much more effective in producing a sound synthesis of analyses and informed perspectives through facilitated dialogue rather than short-term memory applied to a standard examination. Rather than “crammed” information that serves to commodify knowledge and data and stream students into hierarchies of achievement, I am confident that knowledge and critical understanding from group learning will “stick” with individual students, possibly for lifetimes, and students complete the course collectively expressing transformative leadership.

Leaders who are authentic—consistent in words and actions, committed to a moral cause, and willing to take a stand—may differ widely in their goals, personality traits, or leadership styles, yet they can all be successful leaders. They are transformative, working for change whenever they find inequity. They are cross-cultural, working with people from many different cultural groups in order to enhance equity for all. And they are leaders, exercising both management and leadership skills, both doing the right thing and figuring out how to do things right. (Shields, 2003, p.30)

It has been interesting to reflect on my role as a teacher in the university and contributions to IS program development because it provides a means to look at my back trail and check that I am heading in the right direction. While I acknowledge that I have facilitated some incremental change for students at OUC/UBCO, I really have not done that much. It was a bit of struggle to balance and integrate work in the university with necessary work in my community: particularly the Okanagan cultural immersion school project. Eventually, the school project required more personal commitment, and a political role was

necessary to “exercise management and leadership skills” to proactively expand Okanagan cultural capital through a self-determining Okanagan school project so we can “figure out how to do things right.”

I left UBCO in 2007 because my doctoral dissertation was not complete. Although there were other options to continue at UBCO, I chose to concentrate on the project central to my thesis, the continued development of the Okanagan cultural immersion school. Now known as *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet*, our community school project was moving into its critical second year and needed full time administrative, pedagogical, and teaching and learning leadership to continue to develop into a truly world-class school to produce fluent, worldly, and capable students. Fluent elders with in-depth cultural knowledge were and are in short supply. When the school started there were forty-five fluent elders identified in the north Okanagan, and now, just four years later, there are about thirty. It was critical to jump in before it was too late and to help organize elders, parents, educators and administrators into a cohesive group that could develop and deliver a quality culturally informed learning experience for the children. Elders/fluent speakers also tend to be fragile, so two factors were important, to engage elders in activities that they found very rewarding, and to ensure that they were not overextended. There was much opposition to the school’s development, and I experienced firsthand the tensions between transformative action and colonizing hegemonies, and was tasked to facilitate those tensions.

The school is now in its fourth year (2009-2010). Enrolment has grown slowly but steadily, and our facility is at capacity with twenty-three students and six staff, including three elders who are on a part-time rotating schedule, and parents who volunteer time and expertise. More classroom space is planned for September, 2010. The fourth year students have extensive receptive vocabularies, are able to converse in Okanagan, an expression of their continually growing productive vocabularies. The parents and staff are able to function well without my direct involvement, and families are witnessing their children understanding, speaking and singing our language. The parents and families have also learned through struggle that they possess substantial social and cultural capital, and several parents have emerged as strong community leaders. My latest community experiences have definitely expanded my development as an Indigenous-*Sqilxw* scholar especially my understanding of organic transforming praxis in community contexts.

#### **5.4 The Indian Crab Bucket: Colonizing Hegemonies and Indigenous Transforming Praxis**

It is no accident that Indigenous languages, knowledge systems, and cultural aspirations have diminished, have become extinct, or face extinction. Those are the goals of colonization and assimilation or cultural genocide, and the tools of colonization, reserve systems, the Indian Act, residential schools, repressive and racist legislation, have generated negative and self-destructive mind-set patterns. Colonization and its partner, genocide, have in fact decimated



many Indigenous peoples already, the Beothuk of what is now Newfoundland, Indigenous peoples from the Caribbean, to name a few. The centuries of genocidal assimilation policies, legislation and practices of colonial governments have conditioned many Indigenous individuals and families to condemn and abandon their own Indigenous ways of knowing and living.

One thing that should not be ignored when looking back at this history is that this effort at cultural genocide had considerable success. For example, today, the vast majority of First Nations languages are in danger of dying out; the connection between the world and First Nations spirituality has been disrupted or even severed, and factionalism (founded upon doctrinal religious disputes originating in Medieval Europe) plays a major role in dividing First Nations communities; and First Nations governments, fashioned in the mold of the hierarchical, patriarchal, exclusionist governments of Europe, increasingly adopt a role previously played by non-Indians. (Chrisjohn, 1997, p.239)

It is too simplistic, and not productive, to label the people who favour Western ways of doing things, our own relatives, as colonized, “sell-outs” or “hang around the fort Indians” (Agents of Repression) or brown versions of “Uncle Toms” as in the Black civil rights movement. Our communities are comprised of interconnected webs of kinship, which have been re-fashioned in the mold that Chrisjohn describes, and few if any Indigenous people can claim to be completely “decolonised.” This section is not about again stating “what really happened” in the naive hope that social justice will occur through courts or other sites of colonial power and arbitration. This section is about the hegemonic forces at play in Okanagan communities that prevent, cause lack of confidence, and shut down pride and sense of legitimacy in being Okanagan or *Sqilxw*, the forces that make people uncomfortable to speak their own language, or feel stupid for talking about and advocating for Okanagan and Indigenous knowledge

and ways of doing things. The patterns of negative thought and conditioned behaviours can suck the life out of Indigenous aspirations for knowledge and are counterproductive to positive energy, commitment and responsibility to being *Sqilxw* and living lives and raising children informed by Okanagan ways, knowledge, customs and laws sustainably through responsible interdependency with our territory. Connected to these destructive patterns is a tendency in our communities to beat ourselves down some more because we have been so helpless in many ways. The futility of “self-flagellation” (Smith, 2000, p. 213) is expressed in the following joke that circulates through First Nations. A fisherman noticed that another fisherman had his crab buckets full of live crabs but there were no lids on the buckets. The first fisherman said, “Aren’t you worried that your crabs are going to climb out and escape?” The second fisherman replied, “Nah, those are Indian crabs. If any try to climb out of the bucket, the other ones will drag them back down.” The intent here is to note the hegemonic forces in a *P’ax* sense, to light the fire and shed light on these “people destroying monsters,” and go beyond the linear notions of conscientization and then resistance and rather than waiting and wondering when transformative practice will occur, to theorise and articulate through practice, an organic Indigenous transforming praxis informed by Okanagan concepts and frameworks through the expression of those concepts as new “tools” for emancipatory webs dynamically balancing survival and creativity.

A pattern of thinking and reflecting without acting or engaging has emerged in community discourse. A sense of inevitable doom and failure

expressed as, “I knew that was going to happen” or, “I didn’t think that was going to work”, and “I was waiting for someone to ask me.” This conscientization without resistance or transforming praxis is similar to Tolstoy’s often-noted maxim that I will paraphrase, “I watched a man struggle and fight for his life and I felt so much empathy, but it did not occur to me to get off his back.” In the Indigenous context, we are often on our own backs, keeping ourselves down. The need to gather old patterns of behaviours, knowledge and insights and breathe into them a new understanding for application in our social and cultural institutions, especially our schooling projects, is clear. If we maintain a sense of inferiority, and lack confidence in our ancestors’ knowledge and wisdom, then that is what we will pass on to our children. This shift in mind-set does not happen across families and communities in any magical way, it takes leadership, self-determination, and commitment by a few, until the children demonstrate positive outcomes. It is the children’s confidence, pride and proficiency in our language, and capability to achieve academic success in the larger schooling institutions that resonates, shifts community patterns, and generates counter-hegemonies.

In addition to biological and interpersonal needs, children and adults strive for mastery of their environments. Robert White referred to this need as competence motivation. Related concepts of achievement motivation and self-actualization are prominent in psychological literature. When the child’s need to be competent is satisfied, motivation for further achievement is enhanced; deprived of opportunities for success, young people express their frustration through troubled behaviour or by retreating in helplessness and inferiority. (Brendtro et al, 2002, p. 49)

In the Okanagan example, language learning not only manifests a sense of identity, mastery, and place because our language and knowledge emerged

from the territorial ecology, but also, engages children in constant mental and physical activity that nurtures children who are very alert to body language, verbal and physical cues, and adept at noting and interpreting patterns of speech. This has very positive implications for access to, and mastery of, provincial learning outcomes and world knowledge.

Darrell Kipp, cofounder of the Blackfeet immersion school project in Montana, provided advice that saved me a lot of grief and frustration (but not all of it):

You do not ask permission to use your language, to work with it, to revitalize it. You do not ask permission. You don't go to the school board [or Band Council] and ask for fifteen minutes to plead your case. You don't change the entire community. You save your strength; you find the ones who want it. You look for the young couples; you work with the people who want you to work with them. You hone your skills, talent and time. And these are precious. Take care of yourselves. (2000, p. 6)

Graham Smith had additional insights to offer in his notion of “politics of distraction,” (2008, p.13) getting caught up in the negative tensions, emotions, and harsh criticisms expressed by community members and becoming so enmeshed in internal politics and tensions that at the end of the day no positive change has occurred.

There are also various ‘distractions’ (that must also be confronted) that are perpetuated by Maori against ‘ourselves’. This ‘self-abuse’ is aptly described in what Antonio Gramsci (1971) labeled as ‘hegemony.’ . . . Hegemony in one of its meanings is a way of thinking—it occurs when oppressed groups take on dominant group thinking and ideas uncritically and as ‘common sense,’ even though those ideas may in fact be contributing to forming their own oppression. It is the ultimate way to colonize a people; you have the colonized colonizing themselves! The counter strategy to hegemony is that Indigenous peoples need to critically ‘conscientize themselves about their needs, aspirations, and preferences. This calls for a freeing up of the Indigenous imagination and thinking given that

one of the important elements of colonization is the diminishment of the Indigenous ability to actually imagine freedom or a utopian vision free of the oppressor. Thus a critical element in the ‘revolution’ has to be the struggle for our minds—the freeing of the Indigenous mind. (2008, p. 14)

After learning the hard way about “politics of distraction” and “hegemony” and almost burning out at some points, two key factors emerged from my experiential time in the “Indian crab bucket.” The first, understanding hegemony and how it works to “saturate the commonsense understanding” (Apple, 1990, p.5) of many Indigenous peoples into beliefs and attitudes that are contrary to positively transforming negative conditions into positive relationships, is critical to avoid burn out. I have witnessed many Indigenous leaders step back from band and community leadership roles because colonizing hegemonies, “dirty politics” and negative criticisms have sapped their energies. Second, it is very helpful to understand that hegemonies are contradictory and serve to maintain and reproduce positions of Indigenous subordination by having us become our own colonizers. It is useful to remember *arsikw*, turtle, and how his dream told him how to free the animal people. He remained committed and worked for the people even though those who were prisoners of hegemony scorned and ridiculed him for thinking that the animal people could be free. Leadership, through Turtle’s example, is not only about vision and courage; it is also about facilitating confidence and vision in others and not becoming discouraged. Turtle’s ability to be alert, disciplined, and committed is maintained, in part, by, the ritual of daily cleansing in cold water.

For generations, since about 1900, Okanagan parents have had little or no say in what their children learn. The Canadian government used education to assimilate Indians by replacing Indigenous knowledge and language with packages of *Sama* knowledge in English. Okanagan children have very low graduation rates compared to the *Sama* rates. The Okanagan kids who do well in public schools and the ones who do not do well have something in common; they do not know their language and cultural knowledge. Historically, in schools and communities, Okanagan children were ridiculed for speaking their own language, and Okanagan kids would criticize and tattle on other Okanagan kids for speaking Okanagan, and that continues today by Okanagan people nitpicking and complaining about our little school even when they are not connected to the school at all and have no interest in Okanagan language or rights. This is a good example of a colonial strategy mentioned, that the best way to colonize and take power away from First Nations is to get them to colonize and disempower themselves. In our communities, we have learned to be very critical of each other and many of us are better at finding reasons not to do anything than to actually get some work done. The provincial schools are still out there, parents can enrol their kids wherever they want.

Our school provides an Okanagan option. *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet* emerged out of a time when Okanagan language and knowledge are very threatened. Its development has been driven by parents and families who decided to do something positive and proactive. There is still a lot of fear and criticism in the Okanagan communities, and in our staff and family groups that

support the school. From a small group of parents and elders, negative energy and criticism is steadily turning into positive energy, strength and determination which is resonating incrementally through the more complex webs of community and world relationships. The metaphor of Turtle's vision and determination and the 'freeing' of the animal people from subjugating social patterns and colonizing hegemonies, that occurred when the animal people collectively saw the potential of freedom and imagination, has certainly been re-storied through NSS development. The real test of whether reviving our language and knowledge is worthwhile will be with the children. We are only completing our fourth year, and the knowledge, developing fluency, confidence, academic capability and pride that our kids demonstrate makes it clear that the efforts are very worthwhile, and more and more we, through our children, are realizing that this is our homeland and we have a right to be Okanagan, to speak Okanagan, and it feels right.

### **5.5 Academic Politics of Distraction: A Personal Engagement, and the Re-emergence of Fox**

I went off track a bit in the development of my first big research project as part of this thesis. My initial theoretical approach and planning proved counterproductive when I fully engaged in the *Nkmaplqs* project, and I began formally contacting other Indigenous educators about their peoples' projects with requests to participate in my "big project." This section is meant to be of assistance to other Indigenous researchers by showing how easy it is to fall back into the "standard" expectations of reproducing conventional Western discourse through research relationships which attempt to artificially place the Indigenous

researcher into an objective and impartial role. I was not way off track or lost, but was moving away from Indigenous modes of relational knowledge, sharing and reciprocity. My positioning and the contexts I was engaged in were and are complex, and the reality of being an organic intellectual enmeshed and entangled in genealogical, political, ecological, ontological, and epistemological cross-cultural contexts complicated by colonization, means that there is no way that I can be an impartial observer gleaning data from other Indigenous peoples. Relationships have already been established, gifts have been exchanged. We are not strangers (shift in tense is intentional). My intent was to come up with a project that combined “academic rigour” with functional utility for Okanagan and other Indigenous communities involved in or with aspirations for language and cultural knowledge recovery through community based schooling interventions. Initially, I came up with a very important sounding project, Indigenous Knowledge, Practice and Pedagogy in Indigenous Language Immersion Schooling Projects: Are They Necessary Elements to Cultural Aspirations, World Knowledge, and Self-Determination? My project involved interviewing Indigenous educational leaders from three countries, Canada, United States, and New Zealand, to determine characteristics of successful Indigenous schooling projects. The methodology I built the project around was the Four Food Chiefs-*enowkinwixw* and the web of learning framework. Unfortunately, this project was more about alignment with my assumptions about conventional expectations of graduate research, analyzing and categorizing diverse Indigenous communities’ schooling projects, and getting it over and done with. My conceptualization of this



project occurred as I was completing Ed D course work. My outlook would change once I was engaged in my community in the realization of our own cultural immersion school. Now that I can look at the “back trail,” if a motivated Indigenous researcher came to me with a similar project to the one described in this section, I would be reluctant to participate not only because of the distraction element noted above, but because it would seem to potentially place our project in a hierarchy of achievement rather than a network of collaborative relationships. Indigenous schooling projects are about growing and networking organically as expressions of self-determination and cooperative diversity rather than categorizations and hierarchies.

What I realized in practice, as I was involved in organizing and facilitating the development of *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet*, was that I did not have time for my own academic project because it pulled me away from the real work of animating Okanagan language, knowledge and world knowledge with Okanagan people, as well as Maori, *Secwepemc* and other Indigenous peoples for application in a more respectful schooling process (transforming praxis) in my community. Although I did develop a good project in terms of expressing Okanagan methodology that would have produced a sound written report, and it made it through the ethics review. “This externally imposed code of ethics did not fit within the axiology of an Indigenous research paradigm. My role as a researcher and storyteller necessitated that my own values, beliefs and views be inherent in all aspects of the research.” (Wilson, 2008, p. 130) My reality was that I was engaged in the weaving and synthesis of Okanagan *Captikwl* stories and

eco-cultural relationships, Okanagan elders' experiential stories and insights, Western schooling practices, conflicting learning and teaching contexts, my interconnected life and learning experiences, and at the same time applying my weaving to the collaborative creation of new webs of learning and teaching relationships. The multigenerational peoples, practices and places who inform my learning do not fit into a conventional selection of participants who can "pass" the "externally imposed code of ethics," nor do they fit into a conventional bibliography of sources, and the notion of a normative group hardly fits into Indigenous understanding of continuously evolving bio-cultural diversity as a way of life. Although there are many research theories and methodologies in the university, I was finding that these "tools" were not suited to the task at hand and I had to reconnect to *Sqilxw* knowledge, values and ways, through the role of Fox, in order to acquire the tools. The frameworks to gather knowledge, intuitions and insights that our ancestors practiced through evolving knowledge relationships within their territorial ecologies have been there for millennia. My research role as Fox was to get on with organically animating the old into a new understanding with current relevance, application and sustainable "relational accountability"<sup>11</sup>

The people and projects from countries I had chosen were selected in the first place because they demonstrated that they were nurturing culturally knowledgeable, confident, fluent speakers of their respective languages, and

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<sup>11</sup> The shared aspect of an Indigenous ontology and epistemology is relationality (relationships do not merely shape reality, they are reality). The shared aspect of an Indigenous axiology and methodology is accountability to relationships. (Wilson, 2008, p. 7)

their students were achieving success in mainstream academic programs and in world knowledge. I had already been hosted and mentored by Maori educators and communities, and the staff and community at Chief Atahm School, and through their sharing and guidance had answered my questions as well as developed encouraging and supportive relationships. Darrell Kipp from the Piegan Institute published a paper, *Encouragement, Guidance, Insights, and Lessons Learned for Native Language Activists Developing Their Own Tribal Language Programs* (2000) that substantially addressed the questions I posed. I realized that I already knew the answers to my questions and I was in fact projecting my understanding on to other Indigenous peoples' projects! I could hardly expect other Indigenous educators to set their projects and responsibilities aside to help me get a credential: and their kind but lukewarm responses to my emails and phone calls reflected that.

So it has to be more of an intuitive logic, rather than a linear logic, because you can't just break everything down into small parts and use linear logic to bring them back together as a whole. You have to use an intuitive logic, where you are looking at the whole thing at once and coming up with your answers through analysis that way . . . You know, many problems or topics require a lifetime of practice and training to analyze and understand properly. I suspect that this type of logic is responsible for the "Eureka!" moments, where leaps in progress are made that seem to go beyond what would be possible from a linear progression of ideas. . . Many Indigenous lessons are known for the different levels of insight that may be gained from them, depending on the thinking and readiness of the student. (Wilson, 2008, p. 121)

My *P'ax* moment or revelation about my big project was that my research question was really the work that had to occur in an organic way in my own community for the *Nkmaplqs* project to be realized. They did prove very useful

once the purposes were realigned as transforming Okanagan praxis in Okanagan community contexts.

Because of the political role required for NSS to be realized, I had to become a politician; I now have more experience in the workings of band and tribal councils and provincial and federal politics as a council member. Indigenous organizations in BC, in my experience, often acquire information or data by hiring consultants or staff members with specialist knowledge to understand the issues, do feasibility studies, identify risks, and determine numbers or trends of something and so on. The data is analysed by the specialist and then a report is presented to the respective council or board to make decisions. In the university, in my experience, research funds are applied for and academic experts in the appropriate disciplines carry out research in their fields, this often includes student research projects, in both cases the projects must be approved by an ethics review committee, and a professor usually supervises the research projects. Indigenous research has been, and continues to be, a contentious and conflicting area for Indigenous scholars. The examples provided, Band council related research, university research, and my initial “big research project,” have several things in common: they are not expressions of organic Indigenous transforming praxis. They are reifications of research relationships that attempt to place the researcher in a disconnected objective mode from communities by applying methodologies and frameworks from academic disciplines, usually science or social science. In practice, the leadership usually has little time to read these grand reports anyway, and the non-organic

connection between leadership and decision-making and the modes and presentation of data, continue to generate little change in communities. I am aware that there are growing exceptions to this practice as Indigenous organic knowledge more often informs research, leadership relationships, and community projects. After learning the hard way, also known as experiential wisdom, my project is now organic in its theory and methods and is an expression of Okanagan Indigenous transforming theory. “Research is less an **activity** than it is an **attitude**, a frame of mind adopted by the people doing research that shows they’re serious and that they’re willing to try things out and see what happens.” (Chrisjohn, 1997, p. 173, emphasis is with the citation) It is essential for Okanagan and Indigenous scholars to theorize, try things out, and get the tools out there in the Fox sense so new webs of knowledge that tie us securely to our territories and express our evolving knowledge systems and responsibilities can inform research and nation building.

## **5.6 *Yelmixwem*, Gathering the Strands, and Fox, Gathering the Bits**

Coyote, symbolic of the vast creative mind power of humans, often gets into trouble when he gets preoccupied or self-absorbed with doing something and forgets who he is and destroys himself or is destroyed by someone or something else. His brother Fox always comes along and carefully gathers the

pieces of Coyote, and breathes Coyote back to life. “Am I Fox or am I Coyote?” I often think of this question in my work and in community dynamics. The complex, contradictory reality is that I, we, humans are both Fox and Coyote. *Yelmixwem*, the Okanagan term for chief means to bring together or gather strands and suggests facilitation rather than authority. It also suggests that everyone has the potential to be chief or leader, and that leadership means knowing the community, as the Four Food Chiefs knew each other and their communities, so that the right people or strands can be brought together when needed. In that sense I consider myself *Yelmixwem*, as connected to my role as educator to build community through cooperative and organizational frameworks amongst difference and within diversity. In critical theory terms I utilize personal social and cultural capital and positioning to expand community cultural and social capital. In Okanagan terms,

**qwilmi?st**, which translated, means, ‘put your most confident self-power outward.’ Collectively, this refers to the physical skills, analytical skills, total spiritual awareness and emotional intuitive sensitivity that should be engaged to face an unknown of any nature. An individual in a deliberative meditative process pulled all capacities together and oneself to act without hesitation or question. Okanagans use this word to advise in all matters of serious consequence. In such an event, to attempt to act without the total self involved, is considered foolish and dangerous. The process of opening oneself in this way allows for a totally new approach to emerge. (Armstrong, 1991, p. 35)

It will require more learning experiences for me to master *qwilmi?st* but it is a concept I have worked to apply and nurture in others. The En’owkin Centre independent school project which I had the lead role in developing and coordinating was named the *qwilmi?st* program. Key features were project-based

curricula (for example a ranch and rodeo history publication) that linked students, elders and families in real world projects that benefitted the community.

Because colonization and cultural invasion happened across the board through all aspects of our lives over many generations, to transform these complex and pervasive conditions, multiple sites of struggle in key areas are necessary: education, governance, economy, diplomacy, identity, and cultural imperatives and aspirations. Education, and the concentrated children's version, schooling, has become a central mode of knowledge transmission that encompasses those key areas and can either reproduce existing hegemonies or change existing patterns. Schooling is a fundamental site of struggle with vast transformative potential for Indigenous and all students' futures especially concerning their relationships with each other, their knowledge, their values and responsibilities, their creativity and confidence, and the connections to their ancestors and their homelands, the *tmxwulaxw* that takes care of us and from whom our knowledge comes, and *kwulencuten*, all of creation recreating oneself continuously.

The Okanagan people, the diverse Canadian and global societies are enmeshed in all sorts of relationships good and bad that have their origins in colonisation and conquest and underlying ideologies and hegemonies; this makes preoccupation in personal or community level "politics of distraction" something that I have to be aware of in my life and in the relationships around me. Politics of distraction creates anomie, keeps individuals and communities hopelessly entangled in resistance and survival mode, and prevents transforming

praxis from occurring. Hegemonies and politics of distraction occur repeatedly, and tend to be personal, so repeatedly recalling Gus Gottfriedsen's expression about the politics of distraction and leadership provided critical insight, an encouraging voice from the past, and humour—which is why this quote is repeated in this thesis, “You know what the best kind of Indian leader is? . . . When you stab him in the back . . . he just walks away with your knife.”

The Four Food Chiefs were asked, “What can you do for the people to be?” This is what I have to continuously reflect upon, am I doing the right things for the people to be, the babies, my kids, the future generations? Much of the time I rely on intuition as much as intellectual reflection to guide me—so hopefully if my heart's in the right place, I will make good decisions and do good work. Okanagan leadership requires commitment and the responsibility to manifest leadership in others. It is a challenge and a responsibility to adhere to Graham Smith's challenge, “If the goal is self-determination, then it is necessary to be self-determining to get there.”(a recurring theme at public talks) As stated earlier, I am not a fluent speaker or elder. Before too long (hopefully) I will be an elder. My approach to community work has been to “know my *Captikwł*” and synthesize understanding of Okanagan principles of leadership and community engagement with knowledge from other Indigenous peoples and the world, and then try it out and see what happens.



## CHAPTER 6. FOX MAKES A NEW SCHOOL: OKANAGAN TRANSFORMING PEDAGOGY

This Chapter reports on and emphasizes the application of *Sqilxwlcawt* pedagogy in the development of *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet* as an intervention strategy in the contexts of colonizing hegemonies and practices that serve to maintain or reproduce colonial relationships of domination and factionalism. It modestly answers the question, “How will the people be free?” with culturally informed relationship building. The main theme of this Chapter is transformation by putting children back into the centre of extended family learning relationships through culturally informed teaching and learning practices: Okanagan pedagogy. It is the story of how a community school realizes its *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet* vision statement:

### ***Enowkinwixw* Vision Becomes A Reality**

The Okanagan Cultural Immersion School, *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet* (NSS), began as an idea that emerged from *enowkinwixw* workshops I facilitated at *Nkmaplqs* at Head of the Lake Hall with a group comprised mainly of youth, with extended family and a few elders. The project took place in 2001 and was called *We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For* and looked to clarify the issues and strategize interventions to address the high dropout rates and academic underachievement of Okanagan students in the public and band school systems and included all seven Okanagan Band communities north of the

Canada US border. This project was about understanding what was happening to our kids in the school system and taking proactive measures to change and improve things for them. Several parents of children currently in NSS were youth in high school at the time, and they said, "We should have our own Okanagan School!" (cited in Cohen, 2001) Since then, the idea became a vision that emerged from *enowkinwixw* informed community meetings with parents and extended families in 2005. The *enowkinwixw* in a sentence is a process of clarification and only clarification (people contribute what they know or understand), then strategic planning, and finally collective commitment. This is what occurred through the *enowkinwixw* with the parents' group to 'acquire the ability to intervene' in our reality.

Reflection upon situationality is reflection about the very condition of existence: critical thinking by means of which people discover each other to be "in a situation." Only as this situation ceases to present itself as a dense, enveloping reality or a tormenting blind alley, and they can come to perceive it as an objective-problematic situation—only then can commitment exist. Humankind *emerge* from their *submersion* and acquire the ability to *intervene* in reality as it is unveiled. *Intervention* in reality—historical awareness itself—thus represents a step forward from *emergence*, and results from the *conscientizacao* of the situation (Freire, 1970, p. 108).

I facilitated the meetings by inviting parents and extended families to come to determine whether there was interest and support for our own cultural immersion school, determine what knowledge our kids should have access to, and engage critically with our vision to find the means to realize it. The families, after a series of *enowkinwixw* informed sessions, determined that our school should be a place for our kids to learn to be confident, strong in their Okanagan identities, speak our language fluently, and have access to and success in

provincial curriculum and world knowledge, university, our community, and be future leaders of the Okanagan. The Four Food Chiefs and the Web of Learning workshops facilitated a group mind process to clarify issues with the current schooling system and what parents and extended families really wanted for their children. The school vision that emerged from the *enowkinwixw* workshops matched almost completely, the vision of Maori parents (Smith, 2008, p. 16) and echoed many of Robert Sterling's ideas for Indian education( which are included in this section). This was no coincidence. The shared experiences of colonization by the British Empire, residential schools, and repressive legislation created the contexts from which aspirations for knowledge and identity of Okanagan parents correlated directly to the aspirations of Maori families. How to provide that kind of education for our kids was the next challenge. It became clear when we looked at our collective vision, that if it was to happen it would require the cooperation and determination of parents, extended families, Elders/fluent speakers, educators, teachers, administrators, and political leadership. Our vision statement is as follows:

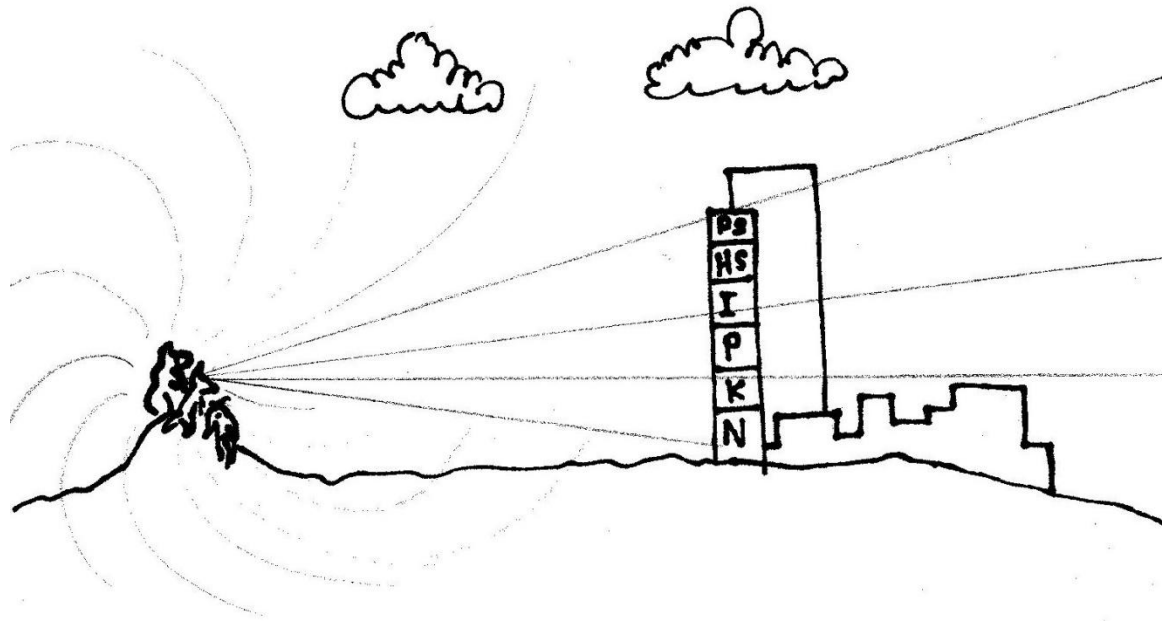
- Our children to have access and excellent learning outcomes with respect to Okanagan language, knowledge and culture
- Our children to have access and excellent learning outcomes related to provincial school curriculum, and to world knowledge
- Our children to learn in a safe, comfortable and supportive environment
- An education that reinforces our cultural background and identity, ties us to our territory, and restores confidence in the accumulated knowledge and wisdom of our ancestors
- Our school, our teachers, and total learning environment to reinforce, appreciate and provide a range of learning opportunities
- Our children to be confident, fluent, culturally knowledgeable and academically capable

Now in the fourth year, we (extended families and staff) have continued to develop our programs based upon the vision agreed to by parents and families whose children participate in the school. In accord with the school vision, staff educators work as a team to meet the responsibilities of the vision statement. “All institutions have mission statements but few truly bring the heart, the spirit, the pride and the commitment to their Goal to the degree that was witnessed by the external assessor team during their visit.” (Ashdown & Mitzner, 2010, p. 39) Our school is unique in its complementary roles of professional educators, elders, support staff, parents and extended families. Professional staff and lead elders are responsible for the learning experiences of children in the school, ongoing assessment, maintaining communication with families, evaluation, and report cards. At first, our school was known as the “Okanagan Indian Band (OKIB) cultural immersion school.” In the second year of operation, our elders gave the school its *Sqilxw* name, *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet*. Naming the project in our own language and the active vision implicit in its meaning (the North Okanagan-Head of the Lake, learning place/centre of, for/toward our *Sqilxw* ways) organically adds to and supports the school vision, ties it to our territory, and expresses *Sqilxw* pedagogy, epistemology and ontology. We take much pride in our little school. It started with nothing, just an idea. We do not yet have much in the way of material things such as a fancy new building. We are however developing a very promising program for our children.

## 6.1 Fox: Gathering and Breathing the Bits into Life

“How will our children learn Okanagan language and cultural knowledge with no fluent teachers? How will our children learn provincial curriculum and world knowledge? What is the curriculum? Are the prescribed hours for each subject being followed? Pronunciation is the most important thing! What about safety? Maybe our language was important fifty years ago! You have to take it back to the whole community! You need to have a new building first! It has to be “high” Okanagan! You are not doing it properly! What about this? What about that?” There were many questions and many challenges when faced with how to make our vision a reality. We had no money, no building, no teachers who were fluent or even semi-fluent in Okanagan language, no fluent speakers with teaching degrees, no curriculum, no other Okanagan immersion school existed, wavering political support, just a vision. I could go on and on about what we did not have and about what we still do not have. Whining and complaining about what we do not have has been going on for years with nothing to show for it, a loud example of the politics of distraction that prevents self-determination from happening. It was much more productive to look at what we do have. What did our elders have to say? “Everything we need is here.” What did the *tmixw* say? “Your dreams will tell you what you need to do. Gather the knowledge, resources, and all the bits you can and figure it out!” The re-emergence of Coyote, Fox and the Food Chiefs, through the *Captikwl* story work of Okanagan elders, both informed and resonated through the work to make the vision a reality. Fox’s transforming praxis, or gathering of the bits of Coyote and then

Coyote coming back to life metaphorically describes re-emergent *Sqilxw* creativity, imagination, and innovation: as well as the ability to transform people-destroying monsters i.e. schooling. Coyote's vision and mind power have not yet been fully restored. Coyote, symbolic of human (from an Okanagan cultural perspective) imagination and creative power, has not fully transformed schooling yet, but Fox, symbolic of collective research and new understanding, with the re-emerging leadership of the Okanagan Food Chiefs, the youth, mothers, fathers, and elders, is gathering, trying out, and activating the knowledge "tools" to restore Coyote's creative, transforming potential. The process is dynamic with aspects of utopian vision and a paradigm of evolving relational knowledge combined. The threads of the *Sqilxwlcawt* web of learning are reconnecting to nurturing families, elders, the *Captikwl* story system, and the eco-cultural Okanagan territory. *Sqilxw* vision, "the dream in a spiral" which was narrowed by cultural invasion and focussed on "school" as the only structure for knowledge transmission, is currently expanding and so too is the notion of responsibility for the knowledge our children have access to, and the webs of relationships that they will inherit. The parents, elders and staff of *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet*, with renewed *Sqilxw* imagination, realistically envision the highest learning aspirations for our children. That renewed vision is transforming "school" into something useful, beneficial, and culturally sustaining.



**Figure 11 Fox's Work and Coyote's Vision**

The illustration above shows Coyote, with assistance from Bear and Bitterroot (stable leadership, vision, commitment, and nurturing place), looking and imagining beyond the conventional linear school model situated on an artificial learning environment (N = Nursery, K= Kindergarten, P = Primary grades, I = Intermediate grades, HS = High School, PS = Post Secondary). “Official Knowledge” (Apple, 2000) or conventional curricula is determined and prescribed by the larger block, representing mainstream government and the BC Ministry of Education, towering behind the linear school. From the mountain, *Sqilxw* vision and aspirations are beginning to reconnect, become the dream in a spiral, to the *tmxwulaxw*, the eco-cultural system and relational source of Okanagan knowledge, language and practice, while including the “school” and world. Low *Sqilxw* expectations focussed on conventional “school” to

accommodate our children's educational needs are expanding to the highest *Sqilxw* knowledge aspirations for our children which converge with the highest mainstream aspirations (the top of the education system (post secondary) and include from Kindergarten to Post Secondary. With high aspirations and expectations for our children in NSS, advanced fluency in our language, the proficiency to "get jokes", tell stories, know the *Captikwl* story system etc, as well as mastery of provincial curriculum and world knowledge, the "destination" was clear. The "journey" to the destination, our own *Sqilxw* knowledge and ways of learning and teaching, however, would require collaborative work and leadership from a variety of community people to create our own cultural immersion school.

This requires renewed attention to important curricular questions. Whose knowledge is taught? Why is it taught in this particular way to this particular group? How do we enable the histories and cultures of the majority of working people, of women, of people of colour (again, these groups are not mutually exclusive) to be taught in responsible and responsive ways in schools? Given the fact that the collective memory that *now* is preserved in our educational institutions is more heavily influenced by dominant groups in society, the continuing efforts to provide more democratic curricula and teaching are more important now than ever. . . The widespread recognition that there were, are, and can be more equal, modes of economic, political and cultural life can only be accomplished by organized efforts to teach and expand this sense of difference. Clearly, there is educational work to be done. (Apple, 2000, p. 40)

So now that *Sqilxw* dreams, aspirations and responsibilities had taken a proactive and self-determining shift, how would the teaching and learning relationships be structured? How could *Sqilxwlcawt* inform a pedagogical approach to achieve the *Nkmaplqs I Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet* vision of parents and extended families? We would start with the key mode of Okanagan relational knowledge transmission, which has proven to be effective for thousands of years, the extended family.



## 6.1 *Sqilxw/cawt* Extended Family Learning/Teaching Relationships

Whose knowledge is this? This is a *Sqilxw/Okanagan* school. Okanagan knowledge, language and culture are privileged. Although this may seem like a straightforward notion, it is a radical idea in terms of pedagogy and curriculum in current schooling projects both on reserve and in public schools. I was tasked to organize the people involved, structure learning activities, and come up with a schedule to meet the goals of the vision statement: culturally knowledgeable, fluent in Okanagan language, confident, academically capable kids. The practical challenge of providing an education to meet the vision and at the same time build capacity required transforming praxis. A popular Indigenous maxim will serve as an introduction to the extended family sphere of the *Sqilxw/cawt* model, "It takes a whole community to raise a child." In the North Okanagan there were no certified teachers who could speak the Okanagan language. At best several knew a few simple greetings, or could say, "yes, no, come here, hurry," and knew a few terms for deer or bear and things such as cigarettes. Of our two fluent speakers meaningfully involved and committed to the project (Pauline Archachan and Madeline Gregoire) when the school started, neither had teaching backgrounds or training in language acquisition through immersion methods. One elder had taken courses at En'owkin Centre and could read and write the language. None of the parents of kids in the school could understand or speak the language when the project began. It was clear that if our children were to acquire our language to the extent that they could converse, think and dream in the language, then people, knowledge and resources would have to be pooled,

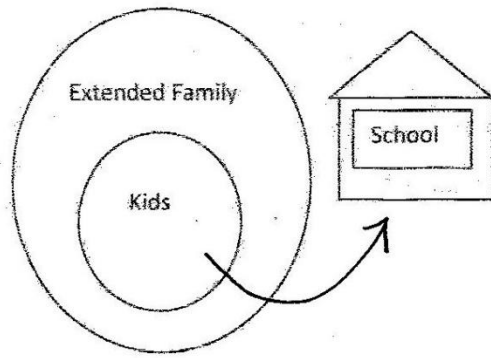
coordinated, and the journey planned. English language and provincial learning outcomes were placed at the periphery of work to establish learning and teaching relationships informed by Okanagan pedagogy. If the pedagogy and, by extension, effectively sustainable relationships were put in place to ensure and nurture the acquisition of Okanagan knowledge and language, then the provincial curricula, outcomes and standards would be met or exceeded as a by-product of Okanagan pedagogy. That was my position. It was a bit more complicated to actualize, but it is working. I was in a situation where I knew quite a bit about *Sama* education and schooling, a little bit about Okanagan pedagogy and epistemology, some Okanagan language, and had to coordinate parents, elders, teachers, and administrators into an effective team. This had to occur collaboratively with few resources and with politics of distraction and colonizing hegemonies described in earlier chapters very much at play.

In the Okanagan context, because extended families and kinship relationships were traditionally the mode of knowledge transmission and cultural evolution, it is through that relationship that our children's education must occur. Through learning and teaching relationships that are caring, nurturing, and long-term, the extended family system ties us securely to each other and to the knowledge of the territorial ecology and *tmixw*. The Maori extended family system or *whanau*, has been the fundamental cultural relationship underpinning the Maori "revolution." Extended family relationships (clans, houses, crests, hereditary systems and so on), eco-cultural kinship networks, are the webs that

support each Indigenous peoples' survival and identity and connect Indigenous peoples to the world around the world.

. . . reinforcing the point that there is an inextricable relationship between the social, cultural and economic emancipation of Maori on the one hand, and the revitalization and maintenance of whanau structures on the other. In these terms, the long term survival of Maori language, knowledge and culture are dialectically bound to the survival of whanau social structure. The whanau provides a culturally appropriate and nurturing context for Maori language, knowledge and culture. It is these aspects which couch the intervention potential in regard to Maori social disorientation. (Graham H Smith, 1997, pp. 444-445)

Traditionally, the *sqilxwlcawt* revolved around the most important group in Okanagan society, the children. A characteristic of Indigenous worldview that is both organic and holistic is its inclination to personify. The Mother Earth metaphor, for example, is common to many Indigenous peoples. Communities, and subsequently nations, are also personified in the principle that the community is responsible for the care, education, and well-being of the children. In the Okanagan kinship system, parents are as responsible for their nieces and nephews as they are for their own children. Traditionally, communities were positioned in a parenting role as organic extensions of the extended family, which is why assimilation policies and practices, particularly those of the residential schools, were targeted at Indigenous extended family pedagogical structures (Figure 12).



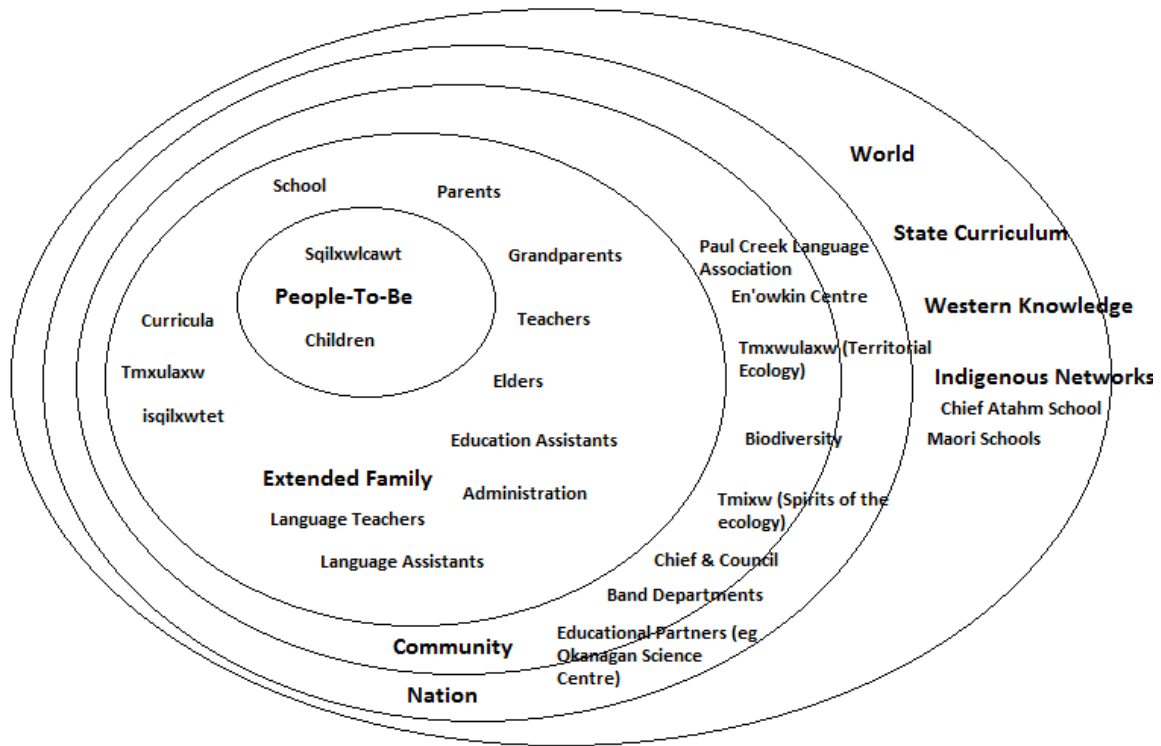
**Figure 12 Removing Children From the Centre of *Sqilxw* Extended Family Pedagogy**

If assimilation and cultural genocide were to work, the children would have to be removed from the love, care and knowledge transmission of their families and communities. For generations through residential schools, social services child apprehensions also known as “the sixties scoop”, and through public schools where a provincial government determines what and how students should know and learn, communal parents were denied the joy and responsibility of childcare; and, similarly, children were denied the experiential day-to-day love, influence, and knowledge of parents and extended family. All of which would have been inter-generationally transmitted through Okanagan language in everyday interactions through extended family relationships. “Paradoxically, schools and bilingual education programmes have become prime areas for language reclamation, particularly where those schools are under at least a modicum of Indigenous community control” (McCarty, 2003, p. 148). This issue is central to language revitalization theory and practice and to all aspects of Indigenous educational transformation. For several generations, particularly since the National Indian Brotherhood’s position paper *Indian Control of Indian*

*Education* in 1974, First Nations, including the Okanagan Nation, focussed on changing the public school system to include First Nations. In the *Nkmaplqs* project, putting the children back in the centre of the *Sqilxwlcawt* web and reconnecting and restoring extended family teaching and learning relationships meant that we are asserting responsibility for, “an education that will deliver excellence in the cultural needs of the child and also excellence in world knowledge. (Smith, 2008, p. 16)

We concur with these sentiments, but recognize that parents and families need support if their efforts are to have the desired effects. Writing about her native Hopi language, Sheilah Nicholas (2005: 36) describes this challenge as reinvigorating ‘the community ethic of “putting our hearts together for a common purpose”’. This involves recognition ‘that the major upheaval of the Hopi way of life has left them with little alternative but to . . . re-imagine a way of life that accommodates changes from within the community’ (Nicholas, 2005: 36). Hualapai educator Lucille Watahomigie (1995: 191) speaks of the need for ‘reverse brainwashing’: educating community members ‘on the importance and priority of the values and knowledge embodied in our culture’. (McCarty, Romero-Little, Zepeda, 2006, p.673)

Parents, elders, teachers, youth, administrators, Everyone is responsible for the children because they are all positioned in the extended family sphere in relation to the children who are placed in the centre of the *Sqilxwlcawt* Web of Learning (Figure 13). The web is a symbol of the structures we create for survival. We are all related, connected, our actions and the decisions we make, affect everyone and everything in our world, and our children inherit the webs we create. We are responsible for the knowledge transmission and reproduction of knowledge that occurs with and through our children.



**Figure 13 *Sqilxwlcawt* Web of Learning**

Parents, Elders, Teachers, and their "tools" (*Captikwl*, language acquisition, theories, methods, curriculum, activities) in the extended family sphere are in a collectively responsible and nurturing relationship to the children at the centre of the web, which is connected, with many strands to place, ecology and biodiversity. That is *Sqilxwlcawt* pedagogy. Everyone has potential for leadership. Everyone is a teacher and everyone is a learner. Everyone is asked, "What will you do for the People-To-Be?" (*Skmxist/Bear*, 2004, pp. 15-19) All of us involved with *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet* through connections to children, community and world, are engaged in a continuous process of individual and collective transformation of destructive patterns into collectively responsible teaching and learning relationships. "Such an approach challenges

the focus of power and control over the research issues of initiation, benefits, representation, legitimization, and accountability, with the latter being located in another cultural frame of reference/world-view (Bishop, 1998, p.201). Lead elder with NSS, Pauline Archachan, has stated the following many times in personal talks and at public events in the past couple of years, “I learned so much from those kids. I have changed. I used to be very critical of language learners, but now I know we have to encourage them. I love those kids as if they are my grandchildren.” That is what *kl Sqilxwtet* is all about, moving toward our *Sqilxw* ways by being *Sqilxw* and moving in *Sqilxw* ways, envisioning our children laughing, learning, engaging respectfully as *Sqilxw*, with others in a healthy diversity of cultures and knowledge systems, in relationships of cooperation and shared responsibilities rather than conflict, conquest, exploitation, and homogenization.

*Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet* extends from and expresses Okanagan pedagogy, epistemology, and ontology from our ancestors, and includes and expands more recent critical work by First Nations educators. In 1984, the late Robert Sterling Sr. posed the following questions:

The first question [the education system] has to answer on behalf of every child is “Who am I?” For the longest time the public school system has been a place where a Native Indian student could not answer that question.

The second question the public education system has to address on behalf of every child is “Where do I come from?” In 1969 a committee was appointed to examine textbooks used in British Columbia for any biases that may appear in storylines. Many such biases were found and most of these have been removed. The idea that an Indian child would feel less of a person when he came out of a classroom than when he went in should not be acceptable to anyone.

The third question that must be addressed on behalf of every child is “Where am I going?” Research has shown that most of our Indian children are poorly motivated in the classroom. One of the main reasons for this low motivation is that often students cannot relate what they are doing today to what they will be doing five or ten years down the line

Finally, a last question we may ask ourselves is “What are the tools needed to meet the task at hand?” I am discovering today that we still have to learn to choose and use the tools. (Cited in S. Sterling, 1997, p.28)

Since 1984, there have been many changes in the public school system concerning First Nations and Aboriginal Peoples. At public school events in the Okanagan (and likewise in other First Nations’ respective territories) it is now common to hear acknowledgements by speakers to “the Okanagan people on whose traditional territory we are on.” Many schools have Aboriginal dance and culture programs. Some have Okanagan language programs where students can learn Okanagan language for up to one and half hours per week. These types of programs did not exist in the early eighties. These programs are a result of both First Nations’ activism and a more inclusive and pluralistic public school system. Concerning Robert’s questions, the first three are directed at the accountability of public schools because they are failing our children. Public schools have marginally improved First Nations graduation rates with bridging, self-esteem and assistance programs, so more First Nations kids can achieve prescribed and imposed learning outcomes, but *Sqilxw*/ Okanagan cultural aspirations for knowledge are clearly at the margins. Public school approaches can only be considered “successful” if *Sqilxw* cultural aspirations are replaced by mainstream aspirations—if cultural invasion is successful (Freire, 1970, p. 153). The last question corresponds to the development and need for *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn*

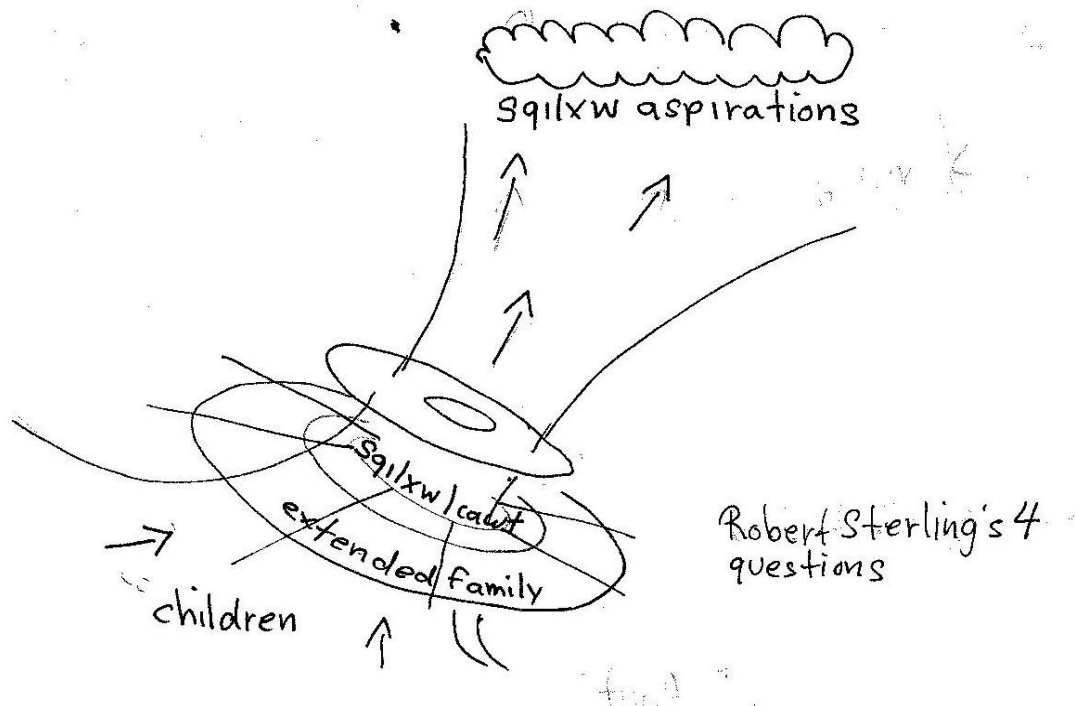


*kl Sqilxwtet*. “I am discovering today that we still have to learn to choose and use the tools.” By asking ourselves questions, taking responsibility and putting together our own school with extended family relationships and *Sqilxwlcawt* pedagogy, we are learning to choose and use the tools, and are answering all of Robert’s questions. The children in NSS can and do answer the first three questions in our language. Parents, Elders, teachers, and support staff are learning to facilitate language acquisition, access to Okanagan cultural knowledge, provincial curriculum and world knowledge. We are doing it with theoretical tools from *Sqilxw* knowledge and praxis: especially language and cultural resources from Paul Creek Language Association and En’owkin Centre, Indigenous knowledge and praxis, Western discourse, organic transforming praxis from the Maori, Immersion programming from CAS, and teachers’ experience and training.

It is not easy to reconcile extended family pedagogy with conventional linear grade progressions with separate age groups, but so far the *Sqilxwlcawt* approach is very promising and accommodates the varied levels of language proficiencies that students come into the school with. For our school to be effective, for example, a grade five student who comes into the school with no language ability is put into a group of students who are younger, the same age and older, who are in different grades and have much higher Okanagan language proficiencies. That student has the benefit of being immersed in a pool of Okanagan language speakers, actively “doing things” with them, so language acquisition occurs at a much faster pace. Teachers have to develop skills and

become expert at actively involving multi age children with different levels of knowledge, ability and maturity in learning activities that are engaging and challenging for all—what has been happening in Okanagan extended family learning for thousands of years. There is a need to separate age groups and genders for certain activities, particularly when it involves a phase of life change i.e. puberty, or for advanced conversation practice etc., and that is done. The afternoon sessions in English require separation of age groups into primary and intermediate groups for focus on prescribed learning outcomes for particular grade levels, but there is still much room for multi age learning activities. Robert Sterling's four questions are answered where our children's growth and *Sqilxw* knowledge aspirations converge and emerge from the extended family pedagogical web. (Figure 14) The focus is on language and knowledge acquisition in an extended family context rather than a linear grade progression and hierarchies of achievement. *Sqilxw/cawt* extended family pedagogy includes the Okanagan language program and the program delivered in English to provide and meet the BC prescribed learning outcomes, and achieve the vision statement of *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet*.

Figure 14 *Sqilxw/cawt* Extended Family Pedagogy.



The *Sqilxw/cawt* web was and is metaphorically pragmatic--the Okanagan are the people of the stories--to engage parents, elders, teachers, administrators and community members to organize and implement a community owned Okanagan language immersion based school. This included designing the structure and programs, developing the curriculum, staff and elder training, proposal writing, finding money, facilities and resources . . . Language resources, and curricula in the Okanagan were gathered and examined: the Paul Creek Language Association, En'owkin Centre, compact disc recordings produced by Andrew McGinnis, and language projects in the various communities. Indigenous schooling projects were researched to determine the ones that were producing fluent confident kids who were also succeeding in

secondary, postsecondary, Indigenous and world communities. I had been to Aotearoa/New Zealand several times and visited numerous *Kohanga Reo* Language Nests, *Kura Kaupapa Maori* immersion schools, and postsecondary programs. Several Maori educational leaders, including Graham Smith, had also visited the Okanagan to learn from us and assist with our projects, and I had the good fortune to tag along with Graham to several educational conferences in Aotearoa/NZ. The Maori example was very inspiring, and our neighbours at the Chief Atahm School in *Secwepemc* territory were very helpful, encouraging and really helped get us going with training, resources and practical advice. The *Piegan* institute was checked out because it had the characteristics the parents were looking for, and the Blackfeet/Blackfoot peoples, like the Okanagan, have their homeland split by the Canada- US border.

There were struggles and challenges, no facility, no budget, just a vision, but the vision turned out to be very strong. Several Council members, Margaret Joe, Emery Robins, Tim Alexis, and Allan Louis, whose children or grandchildren attended, played critical roles through initial and ongoing support of the school with votes at the council table, volunteering, and donations of money and equipment. As human and material resources were gathered, determination grew. How to gather, organize and train the people and resources needed to get our school started required a pooling of skills and knowledge from administration, elders, educators, parents and extended families. Many things happened at once. Through administration, the OKIB Education Department, we were able to find a building, a portable that met school safety standards. Then base funding

was acquired through proposals and applications to the First Peoples Heritage, Language, and Culture Foundation (FPHLCC), Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), and First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC). I knew most of the fluent elders in the North Okanagan, so I visited them and told them about our school project. An intensive two-week Language Teaching training seminar by PCLA was arranged. A call for fluent speakers interested in working in the new school to participate in the seminar was circulated throughout the community. I continued to visit elders. We talked about the immersion school and parents' goals for their children to speak Okanagan. I let elders know they were needed, and asked them to come to the language-teaching seminar. PCLA members, Sarah Petersen, Chris Parkin, and Larae Wiley came to *Nkmaplqs* and facilitated the seminar. The first teaching position was posted. Fourteen children were enrolled. Inspections of the building took place. Everyone involved got criminal record checks done. Bus routes etc had to be planned, and so on. The daily schedule and activities planned and charted. There was a lot of work to be done and it was done in the two years prior to the school opening. There was much uncertainty through the whole process because we did not know if people were going to show up or come through. As it turns out, the people we needed showed up: parents with their children, elders, teachers, resource people, all with the interest to contribute. Some lasted a few months, some a few years, some left and came back, and some have been involved from the start. Limlimt to the parents and grandparents from the Parker, Marchand, Wilson, Gregoire, Joe,

Oppenheimer, Louis, Alexis, Robins, Belanger, Bonneau, Louie, Vedan, Richter, Jack, and Cohen families.

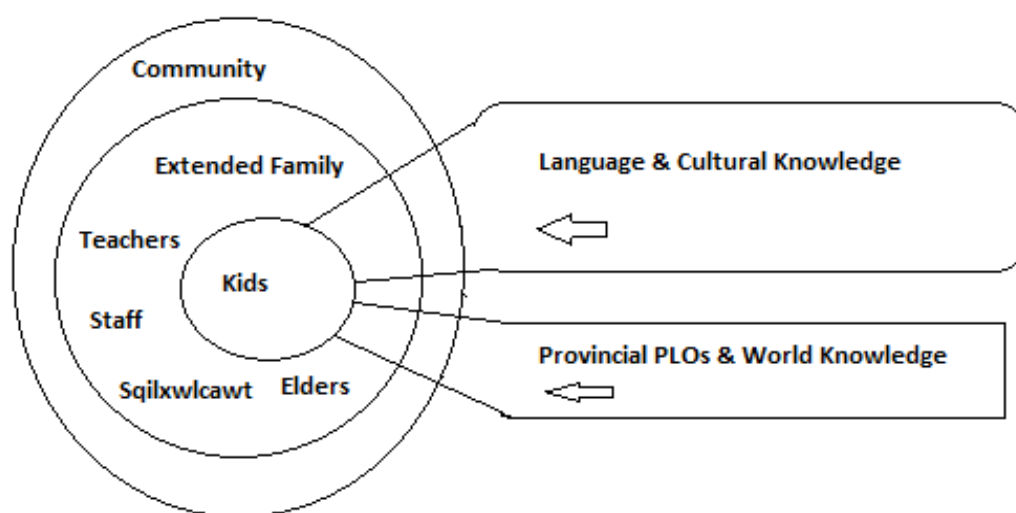
It was made very clear from the outset that our new school would be an Okanagan option for parents who felt that Okanagan language and cultural knowledge were essential to their children's education. Very strong resistance to the school from within the Okanagan community arose expressing the hegemonies: "It's going to make them stupid, fall behind . . . They are going to have to do grades over again when they go to public school" etc.

Yet, ultimately, those initial critics, those people who did nothing to help us, invite our kids to their events . . . They have begun to ask if our kids would lead the prayers. Our kids are asked to do the ceremonies at the diabetes conference. . . Of course they don't chase these requests with grants to this program but that is a different thing. . . We don't want our kids to become dancing bears. These people have to have a stake in your commitment. We don't want them to relegate our language to become a nice addition to their self-centered activities. Often they are using us and are not validating what we are doing. They are still snitching. But they are beginning to see, beginning to understand. (Kipp, 2000, p.38)

Through the struggle of self-determination, families and elders began to realize how capable we really can be, and how much potential there is for our kids when we start taking responsibility for our children's education. The extended family sphere around the children began to strengthen and take on a protective role as well to filter, mediate, and protect the children from hegemonies and "politics" from the community. The children's language acquisition and confidence in speaking and being Okanagan grew and began to resonate through the community, and more people "are beginning to see, beginning to understand." The more we worked, the more things fell into place, by planning and good fortune, more opportunities emerged.

## 6.2 A *Sqilxwlcawt* Learning Structure and Schedule

A program schedule was developed with three hours of total immersion every morning and two hours of teaching in English in the afternoons with an emphasis on language arts, mathematics and science. Other subject areas, art, music, dance, physical education, science, and social studies were integrated into the morning and afternoon sessions. The time was intentionally weighted to privilege Okanagan language and knowledge (see Figure 15).



**Figure 15 Privileging *Sqilxw* Language and Knowledge**

Through personal networks, I informally asked parents who were homeschooling how much time they spent “schooling.” They consistently said that instruction time for provincially prescribed learning outcomes took less than two hours per day. I also asked all the elders I knew who were fluent in multiple First Nations languages how they learned, and they responded with, “My grandmother was *Ntlakapmx*, I logged in the Shuswap for years, I used to spend lots of time with

my in-laws’,” and so on. What was important was consistent active immersion in the language “doing things” with others. With the three hour per day Okanagan language immersion, an extended family team approach to teaching, and the high staff to student ratio I felt we could develop a strong immersion program, and project and place-based learning would thematically connect the morning and afternoon sessions. It was emphasized that we had to treat the children in a loving way and make their learning experiences enjoyable and challenging. The fluent elders, Pauline Archachan and Madeline Gregoire, assisted with developing a morning routine for when the children arrived. The elders quickly developed a loving, albeit strict, teaching and learning relationship with the kids. Every morning when the elders arrived, the kids would all run and give them hugs and the same would occur when they left at lunch time.

The school opened with fourteen kids enrolled, one inexperienced teacher and two elders. Table 1 charts school growth over four years, learning and teaching goals in the morning language program, the program that distinguishes our school and that we had to develop by doing it. There is no shortage of curricula in English or teachers with the skills to deliver PLOs. Extended family pedagogy and the language program was the focus. The staff worked very hard. The work, struggle and commitment of our first teacher, April Alexis, are especially noted. In her first teaching position, in a new *Sqilxw* school, she carried an enormous load in all areas of school development: curricula, scheduling, working with elders, student records . . . TPR theme units from PCLA were used extensively in the language program. Because the school was very



short on staff, parents organized shifts to supervise recess, lunch and bus drop-off of students. Two months into operations, there was a push at the OKIB Council table to close our school down. Parents and extended families wrote letters of support, filled the council chambers, and collectively voiced their strong support for the school and that no one was going to close our school down. Parents also organized a field trip to Vancouver Aquarium and Science World. NSS administratively is under the umbrella of the OKIB band operated school, *Sn'c'c'amala?tn*. OKIB Education Department Manager Kevin Ned, assistant Glenda Louis, and our Principal, Lorraine Ladan, have taken on extra administrative responsibilities and have responded with extra commitment, and have been instrumental to ongoing school development.

After the first year, there were many positive outcomes. Our kids were confidently introducing themselves, speaking and singing in front of large audiences. They had extensive receptive vocabularies as evidenced by their responses when elders would speak to them at length in the language and they could respond with one word answers or short phrases or easily physically respond to an imperative or request. For example at community concert, Pauline would say, "Introduce yourself to the people and then go and give your grandmother a hug." The phrase and the "grandmother" are more complex because Okanagan terms for parents and grandparents are different for boys and girls, paternally and maternally. In the fourth year, the advanced children can converse with an elder by explaining, questioning, and describing with complex vocabularies, and are clearly on their way to fluency-- as long as we continue to

develop and expand the program. Parents were organized and very actively participating in and planning concerts, field trips, track meets, as well as scheduling and volunteering playground and bus pickup supervision, fundraising for playground equipment and whatever was needed--all of which impacted the community in powerful ways. Elders/grandparents had tears in their eyes when the kids were singing and talking Okanagan. Several Elders remarked that they had not heard some of the songs since they were children.

In the second year, there were eighteen students enrolled. Staff expanded to two teachers (one full and one part time), two elders, two education assistants, and a Director of Curriculum and Instruction (me) was employed to coordinate staff, guide and develop programs, secure funding, and ensure continued progress toward the school vision. A Language Nest was started at *Sn'c'c'amala?tn*. Field trips included a collaborative concert with all Okanagan Nation schools in Penticton, and site visits to major Okanagan sacred sites. A school garden project began, as well as a lunch program involving local farms. A relationship with the Okanagan Science Centre was established to give our kids a sound, hands-on understanding of science.

In the third year, there were major challenges when health issues occurred during the school year with our elders. Another fluent elder was recruited to help fill in. Major field trips included visits to the En'owkin Centre ECommunity Place, Osoyoos Desert Cultural Centre and Spirit Ridge Resort. Band Council politics and micromanaging threatened the stability of the school. For example, extended delays for supporting Band Council Resolutions for

funding proposals, demanding to “see the curriculum” even though none of the politicians demanding to see the curriculum had ever been to the school, knew what curriculum was or really wanted to see it anyway, and on and on. So, I became a politician once again and ran for Council to protect the school, improve OKIB governance, and re-establish a new school building as a priority capital project.

In the fourth year, twenty-three children enrolled. Our little school was at maximum capacity, and plans have been approved by Band Council to expand classroom space for 2010-2011 with renovations to a building (a former day-care) adjacent to the current school site. All previous projects and relationships (school garden, OSC interactive science sessions etc) continued or expanded. Our elders’ health improved and a pilot Okanagan Language program began with School District 22, (one in elementary, and one in a high school). NSS hosted the Okanagan Traditional Games and annual Okanagan nationwide concert which included our *Secwepemc* relatives from CAS. NSS underwent and passed a comprehensive year-long external assessment by the First Nations Schools Association. Our school is now certified to meet BC Ministry of Education standards, which is a positive--by the way--outcome of privileging Okanagan knowledge and language in our homeland.

|         | No. Of Children | Elders | Teachers | Education Assistants | Language Goals for morning immersion program  |
|---------|-----------------|--------|----------|----------------------|---|
| Year 1  | 14              | 2      | 1        | 1                    | Master TPR<br>Develop Receptive Vocabulary<br>100% immersion—no English                     |
| Year 2  | 18              | 2      | 1 1/2    | 2                    | Master TPR & TPRS<br>Develop Receptive & Productive Vocabulary<br>100% immersion—no English |
| Year 3  | 20              | 3      | 1 1/2    | 2                    | Expand Receptive & Productive Vocabularies<br>Introduce Writing                             |
| Year 4` | 23              | 3      | 2        | 2                    | Expand Receptive & Productive Vocabularies<br>Expand Writing                                |

**Table 1 Four Year Growth**

There were many challenges to overcome during the first four years. It was very hard to find teachers to apply for positions. This was more troublesome because the teachers needed for this project would have to be very creative, able to work well with elders, parents and extended families, teach multiple grades and ages, engage with community partners, deliver access to provincial learning outcomes and support the language program with expertise and commitment (in their job descriptions) to become fluent speakers of Okanagan language. Our teachers stepped up and delivered, even though our teacher and education

assistant positions had relatively high turnovers. One teacher demonstrated her commitment by commuting daily from (a 240 km roundtrip) Kamloops for two years. Currently we have very capable and committed teachers who are motivated to achieve the school vision. Our elders have demonstrated consistent commitment to the children, through illnesses and good health, to provide what no one else could, our language and cultural knowledge. Our support staff continuity has stabilized over the past couple of years, and our Language Assistant, Chad Marchand, has rightfully earned a growing reputation as a very gifted language learner and teacher. Adult language programs have been offered so parents, extended families and community members can learn the language and try to keep up with the children. The NSS children through immersion are way ahead of their parents, and many parents report that they are now learning the language from their children. Parents and extended families of children in our school have continuously supported, shaped and directed the cultural revitalisation of our language and knowledge through the ongoing development of our own cultural immersion school. The extended family has been the essential feature of all successes and achievements by our children thus far.

### **6.3 Elders' Wisdom and *Captikwl* Stories in School**

When the *Captikwl* stories, which Okanagan elders selected for use and circulation, are examined, it is clear that our elders in previous generations were studying and anticipating the intellectual leadership, cultural and relational needs of coming generations. They were gathering the stories that would assist in community and nation rebuilding, that would reconnect us to each other in terms

of extended families and communities, and to the *tmxwulaxw*, the territorial ecology that provides for us. The *Captikwl* stories provide a proven system of Place-based education.

Place-based education challenges the meaning of education by asking seemingly simple questions: Where am I? What is the nature of this place? What sustains this community? It often employs a process of re-storying, whereby students are asked to respond creatively to stories of their home ground so that in time, they are able to position themselves imaginatively and actually, within the continuum of nature and culture in that place. They become part of the community, rather than a passive observer of it. (Sobel, 2004, p. iii)

The *Captikwl* stories, with interconnected themes of visionary leadership, emancipation from hegemony, creative and intellectual power to move mountains and overcome people destroying monsters, shared responsibilities and leadership, and collective commitment, form an interconnected web of relational knowledge and collective responsibility, a guiding *Sqilxw/Okanagan* axiology rather than a linear sequence of steps. Retelling *Captikwl* stories, referring to them in day-to-day activities, adapting them to plays with the children, have all acted as a cumulative praxis, an expression of *Sqilxw/cawt* pedagogy. Figure 16 shows examples of the interconnected and recurring themes from *Captikwl* stories that have contributed to and supported the theory, research methodology, and practice of *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet*.

| <b><i>Captikwl</i> story</b>    | <b>Interconnected Themes</b>   |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Coyote and Fox                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research, Evolving Understanding.</li> <li>• Consequences of forgetting “who you are” and that your “ways” come from creation.</li> </ul>   |
| How Turtle Set the Animals Free | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vision/dreams—Indigenous imagination.</li> <li>• Emancipation from hegemony.</li> <li>• Leadership, roles and responsibilities.</li> <li>• Transforming Praxis.</li> </ul>        |
| How Food Was Given              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enowkinwixw community strategy/decision making, diversity and dynamic balance.</li> <li>• The-people-to-be at the centre of sustainable leadership and responsibility.</li> </ul> |
| How Names Were Given            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identity, roles and responsibilities in the world</li> </ul>  |
| Coyote Challenges God           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mind power and the ability to “put things back.”—experiential eco-wisdom</li> </ul>   |
| Coyote Rock                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect, trust and nurture of children, and the consequences if appetite and self gratification replace responsibility</li> </ul>   |

**Figure 16 *Captikwl* Story Themes of Self-Awareness, Vision, and Shared Responsibility**

## **6.4 *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet*: Okanagan Language Immersion**

The staff and elders of *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet* and parent volunteers had to learn immersion teaching in a hurry. Language acquisition methods were studied to determine which ones would work to meet the vision statement of advanced fluency. Total immersion was chosen as the most suitable program. My role was to contribute my skills and experience to research language acquisition methods and design a program and lessons that could be effectively applied by elders, language assistants, and teachers. Paul Creek Language Association (PCLA)<sup>12</sup> and Chief Atahm School (CAS)<sup>13</sup> resources and methods, primarily Total Physical Response (TPR) and Direct Acquisition, were used extensively for the first two years. TPR was the foundational method for CAS and Piegan Schools. Sarah Petersen of the PCLA was one of the first Okanagan teachers to practice TPR, over twenty years ago, and she and one of her apprentices, Tish Elkink had translated several CAS curriculum packages into Okanagan. Prior to opening the school in September, 2006, staff and elders took language teaching training from PCLA, and several staff attended CAS annual conferences as well as the CAS summer sessions which included advanced versions of TPR, and TPR Storytelling. From CAS we learned principles of language acquisition rather than language learning, comprehensible input and the “Natural Approach” based on first language acquisition (Krashen and Terrell, 1983), lesson and yearly planning, and much advice and tips. Sarah

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<sup>12</sup> PCLA website is [www.interiorsalish.com](http://www.interiorsalish.com). Go here to find more information about programs, training and resources available.

<sup>13</sup> CAS website is [www.chiefatahm.com](http://www.chiefatahm.com). Go here to find more information about programs, conferences, training, and resources available.



Petersen had a selection of TPR based Okanagan songs that were used for the music program. The use of songs and instruments in Maori immersion schools was noted and at NSS songs are fun and effective language learning tools that help get language “flowing” out of the children as well as providing pronunciation practice. All available Okanagan language curriculum resources from PCLA, and much of what is available from CAS, were acquired. I secured a variety of resources from TPR resource websites, [www.tpr.source.com](http://www.tpr.source.com) and [www.tpr-world.com](http://www.tpr-world.com), including *Instructor’s Notebook: How to Apply TPR For Best Results* (Garcia, 2001), *A Second Language Classroom That Works!* (Christopherson, 2003), *TPR Storytelling: A Teacher’s Guidebook* (McKay, 2004), *Total Physical Fun: Strategies and activities for teaching and learning language through cooperative play* (Olliphant, 1997,) as well as resource materials from the En’owkin Centre and language projects from other Okanagan elders and bands.

Pronunciation has been a problematic issue in Okanagan language programming. Elders fear that the language will become slang and distorted if students do not learn to “say it right” from the beginning. Natural language acquisition, however, is based upon the way infants naturally acquire their first language and occurs in four stages 1) Receptive vocabulary 2) Productive vocabulary 3) Reading 4) Writing. (Michel, 2006; Krashen and Terrell, 1983) While the receptive vocabulary is building through immersion activities, limited speech production occurs, initially through one or two word responses. This initial speech production is generally poorly pronounced. When a baby for example says, “gama” for grama or “weewee” for Willy, the family is elated and

encourages the infant to say more and plenty of modelling is provided with no worries about the English language being corrupted. That is the kind of nurturing relationship we worked to develop with the language program at the school.

Because natural language acquisition of *Nsyilxcen*, the Okanagan language, had not occurred for several generations, and we (*Sqilxw*-Okanagan) have to relearn how to raise our kids as fluent speakers of our language, it was necessary to mediate these issues with elders/fluent speakers and discuss how children naturally acquire their first language, and how fluent speakers, the elders themselves, became fluent. It was explained that the kids who acquired *Nsyilxcen* through immersion before they reached adolescence would likely speak accent free, properly pronounced *Nsyilxcen*. Those who learned their language after adolescence would likely have an accent for the rest of their lives. (Asher, 2003) Examples of immigrants who learned English after their teens and were known to the elders were used as examples of language learners who could speak English fluently but nevertheless had noticeable accents from speech patterns of their homeland or first languages. We would have to live with accents and pronunciation issues and focus on language immersion for the preadolescent children if elders wanted “proper pronunciation” and fluent speakers.

There were a few assumptions about language teaching methods (one word at a time, repeat after me, say it slowly, “helpful” translations and so on) that we worked through. For example, TPR flashcards were being used for “repeat after me” type memory/pronunciation drills. The TPR flashcards

disappeared and the elders had to learn to use active contexts and real items in immersion activities. The elders were upset at first because I hid their cards, but after a while they refused to use flashcards anymore once they got into actively using real environments and real items such as the playground, the garden, clothing, tools, dirt, trees, leaves, plates, spoons, and so on. The children's language proficiencies increased significantly through a more active and contextual approach. I would not have removed the flashcards if I was not confident in a mutually respectful and productive learning relationship with the elders. We had agreed at the start that I would put the program and resources together, and that we would try things out, and continue to get better.

Creating teaching and learning relationships informed by traditional extended family relationships is the approach taken to immerse our children in the central flow and transmission of the *Sqilxwlcawt* and Okanagan language. Knowledge transmission, language acquisition, and cultural aspirations must converge in a dynamic flow of active immersion. This approach helps to avoid some problems I have noticed in “teaching” methods. For fluent speakers, for example, if their daily cognitive and communicative thought and speech patterns are mainly or wholly occurring in English and they are attempting to “teach” the Okanagan language through rote, drills, translation, memorized scripts or other artificial constructs disconnected from *Sqilxw* ways and active comprehensible input, there is a tendency for their expression in Okanagan to be compromised—the same way some people think English is more comprehensible to a non-English speaking person if pronounced very slowly and loudly. Assumptions are

often made about what learners should already know or understand. Fluent speakers of English and Okanagan can linguistically shift from one language to another much faster and in large chunks of understanding and they wonder why learners are forgetting or not “getting it” when they recited a phrase perfectly in last week’s one hour session. A final common assumption is that “they (language learners) will learn the language if they really want to,” which places the responsibility of language learning and recovery on the children. At NSS it was emphasized that the school is responsible for children’s acquisition of the language. We are *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet*, and we have to make the language acquisition process active, enjoyable, challenging, and do it in a respectful and loving way. If something is not working, if children are not learning, we have to figure out a better way, and it has to work for all the kids, no excuses.

The externals were very moved by the self confidence, commitment to learning, and joy displayed by the students during the language class. The instruction was brain friendly. Students spent time sitting and walking about the classroom. After 40 minutes of direct instruction the full class attention level INCREASED!!! A testament to the ability of the teachers, the caring and vulnerable relationship between all learners, the accuracy of the research findings, and the mission statement of NSS. (Ashdown and Mitzner, 2010, p. 20)

In the examples of problems mentioned above, the learning-teaching relationships will be distorted and ineffective and are indicative that we are out of practice in providing “natural” first language acquisition, through comprehensible input, for our children, and that we need to “re-learn” how to raise our children to be fluent speakers of our own language. If re-learning how to raise our kids to be fluent speakers seems repetitive, it has to be until our language and cultural

knowledge systems are stable and trans-generationally maintained. The focus on the children and our responsibilities to do our best for them has been a guiding theme that helped to work through issues, assumptions, and tensions about language acquisition. The children have been regularly asked “Who are the most important people in this school? The elders? The teachers?” The kids resoundingly respond, “We are!!”

The following simple guide (Table 2. This sample is minimized and connects to weekly, monthly and yearly charts) was developed for planning daily activities in the language program to guide elders, for staff to document activities and progress, and provides a chart of typical mornings at the school. All of which take place through full immersion in the Okanagan language. Some activities occur in separate advanced and beginner groups or with older and younger groups.

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| Date:  | Teachers: |
| 9AM Greetings, line up, put away shoes, coats etc  |           |
| 9:00-9:15 Attendance and Morning Chat: Did you brush your teeth? have breakfast? come on the bus? Eat for supper last night? etc.<br>Weather and Temperature: Is it windy today? Snowing? What's the temperature? etc. |           |
| 9:15-9:30 Learning With Movement Unit:   |           |
| 9:30 Singing/Dance TPR Math  |           |
| 10- 10:15 Language Learning Games: (Flyswatter, Bingo, Cards, Hide n Seek, Who's in the house? Etc)<br>10:15 <i>Sqwakulst</i> (fitness routine)  |           |
| 10:30 Snack and Play Time (what are you eating? That looks good. Did your Mom make that? Did you drink some water? Tidy up. Put things away etc  |           |
| 11:00 -11:30 TPR Storytelling, Music: Drums, Flute, Guitar/ Ukulele<br>11:30-12 Theme units: Household, Family, Playground, Garden, Clothing, etc  |           |
| Actions: _____<br>Objects: _____<br>Other: _____   |           |

**Table 2 Daily Language Guide**

Action based learning activities were applied from prepared curriculum packages (CAS TPR 1 and 2 translated by PCLA, PCLA songs, games) and training from CAS and PCLA. Once these were mastered we began developing our own learning activities, co-composing new songs with advanced kids, plays, skits, games, and TPR storytelling units. Once the staff was proficient with basic immersion methods, it was straightforward to apply them to projects such as the school garden, yard cleanup, nature walks, tea parties, driving in a car and so on. A combination of TPR and TPR Storytelling (TPRS), direct acquisition, drama, exercise, use of songs, and experiential application with elders and staff resulted in our own way of language acquisition which I tagged "Active Patterned Repetition" (APR). The children need to be actively learning with mind, body, and as many senses involved as possible. Phrases must be patterned so words as parts of speech patterns (plurals, possessives, questions, imperatives, kinship

terms etc—all the communicative interconnected “chunks” of language) are internalized by learners. Words and speech patterns must be repeated in innovative ways by combining old vocabulary with new in ongoing lessons. If the activities in the language featured APR, then they tended to be effective.

I did the language lesson planning and coordination of elders and staff at first. I gathered resources, evaluated theories, methods, games, and materials based on what could potentially work for our team, drew up lesson plans, talked the plans over with the team, incorporated ideas and suggestions from the elders, language assistant, and teachers, then we tried them out, and modified as necessary. We learned to use among other things, a big open classroom space, a big doll house, a trunk of oversized clothes, maps, plastic animals and people, puppets, a large whiteboard for drawing and storytelling, and the yard, trees, creek etc outside. Practice and application of APR to topics, activities, imperatives and questions in full immersion sessions was emphasized. Knowledge of effective methods expanded and skills were developed through informed--trying it out and see what happens--sessions. Before long, Chad Marchand, our language teaching assistant, who is a rare individual blessed with natural teaching abilities and a knack for language acquisition, was going beyond my language lessons. Chad is now the lead language teacher in the program and the fluent elders play a supportive and guiding role to his teaching and lesson planning.

The external assessors were privileged and honoured to have had the opportunity to observe Okanagan Language instruction during a morning class. . . The energy, high expectations for learning, and lesson planning provided by Chad Marchand,

the young adult teacher was exemplary. The presence of a guiding Elder, the strong support provided by the 2 non-native teachers, the determination and pure joy demonstrated by 20 students during an intense 90 minutes of instruction was outstanding. The parents, children, teaching staff, Band leadership, and community Elders of Okanagan Indian Band, have provided a model for other First Nations Schools interested in preserving and enhancing their First Languages. A huge, heartfelt, Well Done! (Ashdown and Mitzner, 2010, p. 40)

Chad's story is remarkable. He is a successful rancher, raises rodeo bulls, and is one of the parents of children in the school. His wife Rachel, who emerged as a strong community leader, advocate for the school and Parent Advisory Committee President, dragged him to one of the adult language classes that was developed for parents and families to learn Okanagan language through the school year. He really enjoyed himself and now he is at an advanced intermediate fluency level. A young man with linguistic and teaching talents, commitment and work ethic, his value to the language program is substantial, one of the unexpected and very positive turn ups in school development. Financial support for the learning relationship between Chad and the elders has been provided by the First Peoples (FPHLCC) Master Apprentice Program funding.

## **6.1 A Sampling of Collaborative Multi-Age Activities Across Subject Areas**

Students have participated as a group in the following learning activities. Immersion activities are emphasized but I have included multi-age activities in the Science program which is delivered in English. Thematic connections between the Okanagan language program and the English program combine to achieve the school vision. In the language program, advanced students (in terms



of Okanagan language proficiency) are engaged in more advanced conversation and activities with higher expectations. Less advanced students are included and spoken to and directed with appropriate speech for their level. Older students also take leadership roles to help and assist the younger students. The younger students look up to their older mentors, and the older students develop a sense of nurturing, kinship responsibility. This system has worked for thousands of years.

#### **6.4.1 Science**

Students engaged in daily immersion activities to discuss seasons, weather, temperature, and seasonal activities and resources. Some work was done with elders to determine whether we could facilitate more science activities in the language. Because we currently do not have terms for many scientific items (acids, bases, iodine, beaker, etc), immersion science sessions are on the future plan when our staff is more advanced in terms of fluency. The En'owkin Centre has a combined program of Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Ecological Science that takes place on a pristine riparian habitat. Our students and elders have engaged in interactive, on the land sessions with Richard Armstrong a fluent knowledge keeper, and this year a full immersion session with Richard at the En'owkin habitat is planned.

Students have engaged in sessions (these are conducted in English language) with the Okanagan Science Centre (OSC), generally every two weeks of the school year. The goal of the OSC is "To inspire scientific inquiry through

dynamic and interactive educational programs and exhibits; and to encourage children and adults to appreciate the relevance and universality of science, and its application in the Okanagan" ([www.okscience.ca](http://www.okscience.ca)). Our kids have certainly been inspired by, and learned from, OSC programs and interactive exhibits and workshops. The children really enjoy fun, hands-on activities about chemistry, physics, agriculture and geology in many workshops at the OSC and sessions on site at the school. Activities included participation in insect, space, food, agriculture, and mechanics programs developed by OSC, dissecting plants, examining compost and bugs, experimenting with acids and bases, making a simple rocket and so on.

#### **6.4.2 Fine Arts and Creativity**

Students participated in immersion activities that included drawing, painting, acting, role-playing, and use of props and clothing. Students also acted out mini skits through TPR story telling. In music, students participated in drumming, singing, guitar, ukulele, and flute lessons, dancing, and perform in several public concerts through the year. These activities develop confidence, creativity as well as a sense of rhythm and cooperation. Advanced students produced and performed skits and a short play in the language featured at the annual NSS showcase.

#### **6.4.3 Social Studies and Behaviour, Attitudes and Social Responsibility**

In immersion lessons, students learned about the complex Okanagan family systems, geography (mountains, lakes, creeks, roads etc), Okanagan

place names, resource areas, terms and uses for animals and plants, and traditional ways of respecting animals and plants that are harvested.

Older students have been expected, and encouraged, to look out for and help the younger students. Students also dress modestly (for example: no swear words on shirts or revealing clothes) and are expected to bring healthy lunches to school. In daily immersion conversations, students are asked what they had for breakfast, did they brush their teeth, comb their hair, wake up early, make their bed and so on. They receive positive encouragement for their answers. Through daily learning interactions, the students learn to respect Elders and themselves.

#### **6.4.4 Mathematics**

In immersion activities students have learned about the calendar and time (month, date, year, past, present and future); ones, tens, hundreds, thousands; addition and subtraction; role-playing with money, buying (and haggling) at the store.

#### **6.4.5 Physical Education**

Children do daily sets of exercises conducted in Okanagan language that include, running on the spot, push-ups, sit-ups, jumping jacks, toe touches, various stretches, balance and coordination exercises, sprints, and long distance running. They have also learned lacrosse, archery, capture the flag, kick ball, dodge ball, spear throwing, and many physically active games in the language.

## 6.5 Play Notes

In order to provide more time on-task, recess is being eliminated at many schools. And even when recess is allowed, it commonly occurs on sterile, asphalt-covered schoolyards filled with manufactured play equipment, rather than in naturalized environments. . . And, if we're not off in outer space, we're studying Egypt or Columbus rather than the Vietnamese community two blocks down the street from the school. (Sobel, 2004, p. 21)

Play times at NSS are intentionally longer than most schools. Half hour recess that combines snack and play time. Lunch is fifty minutes. There has been much concern about our playground, a large area with plenty of trees, rocks, and brush. Parents have fundraised and purchased new playground equipment, a jungle gym and swings, and have put in grass and pea gravel. Some have criticized our school because at first we had no playground equipment. The reality is that playground equipment was developed in urban schools/areas as an alternative to natural play environments. Now, because of parents' efforts, our children have both a natural environment and conventional playground equipment. The children certainly used their imaginations and muscles with the trees, rocks and sticks, making housing complexes, villages, roads, etc. Okanagan language is used by staff and children during play activities. Through playing, and field trips with elders and OKIB Territorial Stewardship staff to resource areas (traditional use areas, fishing, hunting, plants, forestry), the children are growing up connected to the *tmxwulaxw*.

## **6.6 Project Based Learning: The School Garden and Farm to School Salad Bar**

Perhaps the one true change of substance I have seen is the growing number of non-Indian people who are coming to value the land, the air, the water, and the light as we do. It is no coincidence that at a time when Indian people are looking to our old ways for strength and guidance, others are also learning that if we too long abuse the medicines of nature, they will no longer work for us. (Manuel, 1974, p. 4)

The school garden and Farm to School Salad Bar program have provided students opportunities, in addition to harvesting and learning about traditional Okanagan foods, to eat foods they have grown, and from local farms. Okanagan language immersion and provincial curricula are incorporated into all garden and salad bar activities. Health promotion, ecological literacy and nutrition are integral to the vision of our school. This innovative environmental education program demonstrates how we can live more sustainably. Many children have very little knowledge of where our food comes from other than the grocery store and out of a can or box. Reconnecting to traditional foods and the knowledge to gather them, experiencing gardening and learning about local farming seems essential to resolving some of the big health concerns for First Nations populations i.e. diabetes, childhood obesity, and other health issues.

Our hope is that these kinds of projects will inspire local citizens to take a more active role in the schools and community and that students come to think of community service the way they think about going to the movies—it's a normal thing you do every week or so. (Sobel, 2004, p. 39)

Through real world hands-on learning activities, students recall the material easier, apply experiential knowledge, and feel a sense of accomplishment and belonging because they are part of a community learning process. We plan to

spend even more time on the land with the children so that they can expand their knowledge of *Sqilxw* place names, resource areas, terrain, animals and cultural foods. Working with the community, and specialists in science, forestry, fishing, and agriculture, has been a significant part of our children's learning.

The extended family approach, place and project-based learning, and thematically connected Okanagan language immersion program and the afternoon English program, are nurturing fluent, culturally knowledgeable, speakers, who are also academically capable in Provincial subject areas and world knowledge. If the school is going to be effective in the long term, then use of our language outside the school, in everyday community contexts, must increase. Many parents in their childhoods have experienced their parents and elders talking Okanagan to other older people but not to the children, especially when they did not want the kids to know what they were discussing. The parents of several adolescent girls in *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet* have noted a humorous and historically ironic activity occurring. "The girls talk Okanagan on the phone, and leave messages on the answering machine for each other in Okanagan--when they don't want us to know what they are talking about" (Floyd Oppenheimer, personal communication, 2010).

## **CHAPTER 7. RECREATING OURSELVES CONTINUOUSLY: WHAT HAVE WE DONE FOR THE PEOPLE TO BE?**

This Chapter concludes the story—so far-- of *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet*, the North Okanagan, place or centre of teaching and learning, for and in the direction of *Sqilxw* ways, a story of *why*, and how Okanagan and Indigenous knowledge, language, and culture can be maintained and revitalized through a specialized educational and schooling approach. Included is a “Bill’s notes” or condensed guide of experiential bits of wisdom that informed the development of *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet*, which may be useful for other First Nations and Indigenous peoples with aspirations for cultural knowledge and language recovery. I make some recommendations for Aboriginal teacher training programs to enable First Nations teachers to be transforming educators in terms of Indigenous pedagogies, languages, and cultural aspirations for knowledge. Finally, a reflective commentary about the overall challenges, successes and personal, family, and community experiences is provided.

### **7.1 A Concise Guide to Developing an Indigenous Cultural Immersion Project or School**

In the short history, so far, of *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet*, two purposes in relation to the development of an Okanagan cultural immersion school with language and cultural knowledge recovery as key elements have been achieved: first, dynamic, transformative and evolving Okanagan concepts

and frameworks, that have sustained the Okanagan people for thousands of years have been theorized; and second, a new and current understanding, through a *Sqilxw* - Okanagan, children centred, extended family pedagogical approach and curriculum structure for current application in schooling projects and communities has been developed and applied. We have learned from and have been supported by the knowledge sharing of others within the Okanagan, from other Indigenous peoples' projects, and Western and world institutions. It is important to share knowledge and insights acquired through our cultural immersion school development because our experiences may be of practical use to other Indigenous peoples or communities' aspirations for knowledge and language recovery. This overall thesis intended to do that, but here is a "Bill's notes" condensed version of experiential knowledge and advice from Okanagan elders, Coyote and Fox, the Four Food Chiefs, Turtle, and our Okanagan, Maori, *Secwepemc*, and Indigenous friends and mentors who were particularly helpful to *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet*.

- Determine what you want for your kids and determine to make that happen. A collection vision is a powerful dynamic. Don't attempt to replicate—Make it your own community's culturally informed project and privilege your Indigenous knowledge in form and content.
- Your children are always the most important people. Extended family structures and relationships are the means to transforming educational and cultural crises. Put the kids in the centre of extended family pedagogy and good things will happen.



- Be alert to hegemonies and the politics of distraction, the self-colonizing thoughts and social patterns that prevent positive changes from happening. Don't criticize other language or cultural projects. Add to the larger project and build positive relationships. Be alert but don't be afraid to make mistakes doing or speaking. If you do make a mistake and something doesn't work or you offend someone, say sorry and get on with it.
- What is your community's cultural capital? Who are the elders? Where are the resource people? Where are the families and children? Who are the teachers? What knowledge, language resources, stories do you have that can be shared or grown?
- Find other Indigenous peoples with transforming projects and learn from them. Take their training courses. Go to conferences. Establish resource and support networks with Indigenous projects who are achieving the kinds of outcomes that your parents and families want, and don't limit your aspirations for knowledge for your children. Don't be satisfied with marginal programs added on to the mainstream curriculum.
- Research all the language resources you can, language acquisition methods, theories, curriculum frameworks. Try to find methods that are based on, as closely as possible, natural first language acquisition, the way babies learn; after all they are the best at acquiring a language. Master the basics by trying out the methods and resources you have

gathered, then develop your own learning and teaching methods and evaluate your project continuously.

- What are the challenges? More importantly, what have you done about it? Everyone is potentially a chief and a leader. What will you do for the people to be? *Lut aks papasilxw* – don't worry about what you don't know. Speakers, teachers, many people are needed. Do what you can.
- Be proactive, be humble, give thanks, and the people and things you need will emerge.

## **7.2 Transforming Aboriginal Teachers in BC: Some Recommendations**

The key success indicator of language and cultural revitalization projects will be the emergence of new speakers, the growth of Indigenous languages informed by Indigenous cultural knowledge, and I have some Aboriginal teacher program recommendations related to that aspect. Currently, in public schools and most band schools, the knowledge, including language, that is reproduced over generations, maintains past and current Western economic, cultural, and epistemological dominance, while Indigenous knowledge and cultural aspirations continue to decrease, become critically endangered and face potential extinction. The current system has failed First Nation students. This is a historical fact. The first educational project based on mainstream assumptions and concerned with shaping Aboriginal individuals from many culturally diverse nations into something else was the Indian residential schooling system. The residential

schools were meant to eliminate Indigenous knowledge systems, values, practices, languages and identities. Native communities are still feeling the generational impacts of those schools.

Like the current goal to increase the number of Aboriginal high school graduates, an Aboriginal teacher recruitment strategy is in place to increase the numbers of Aboriginal teachers, but culturally informed ways of knowing and learning, Indigenous languages, and cultural aspirations are once again not addressed because Indigenous theory and pedagogy are on the margins. Bridging programs, academic counselling and support are provided to help get Aboriginal students into teacher education programs. This is clearly a deficit approach meant to mould students to better fit and thus succeed in an education structure defined and controlled by non-Aboriginal interests, a structure very often in conflict with First Nations aspirations and values. Paulo Freire's notion of prescription "where the oppressed assume the aspirations and mindset of the oppressors" (1970) is apparent. In language recovery, the focus has mostly been on banking approaches (recording stories, dictionaries, orthographies etc) and teacher training and credentials for fluent speakers through the Developmental Standard Teaching Certificate (DSTC). Neither approach has "turned around" or has potential to reverse the rapid decline of Indigenous languages and knowledge in BC because the journey is not embodying the destination. If we envision children and families laughing, telling jokes and stories, playing, thinking and dreaming in our respective Indigenous languages, then we must create the extended family learning and teaching relationships that are nurturing,

supportive, and children laugh , play, and are actively engaged in the language with elders, teachers and staff, parents and families.

In my experience, conventionally trained teachers do not have the skills and training necessary to engage productively in Indigenous transforming schooling projects. They struggle to work with elders, and do not know how to engage in community-partnered project based learning, and ecological projects because they have been trained/indoctrinated to teach students prescribed learning outcomes in classrooms with pre-packaged curricula. The exceptions are the especially creative, innovative and critically reflective teachers, who do not automatically want to put the desks in rows (Kipp, 2000), and do not need to be deprogrammed (Billy, 2006, personal communication).

In the Okanagan, and throughout BC, language acquisition through immersion is a necessary and central component to language programs because fluent speakers are generally elderly and new speakers are needed. There are very few fluent speakers with the skills in language acquisition methods to produce fluent speakers, or the administrative skills to develop and maintain a successful language/cultural immersion-schooling project. Given the prevalence of English and decline of Okanagan (and Indigenous languages) usage in our communities, a successful language recovery program will necessarily involve credentialed teachers and staff (who are also language learners), fluent speakers, parents and extended families, and administrators.

I recommend that courses in community engagement and mobilisation be developed and applied as fundamental themes in Aboriginal Teacher Programs,

especially the DSTC Program. My experience is that skills in assessing and activating cultural and social capital, and understanding Indigenous transforming theory and practice are necessary to facilitate cooperative efforts involving elders, language learners, educators, children, families, research, curriculum development, and administration. After many years of assimilation policy and cultural erosion, there are widespread tensions and conflicts in First Nation communities about the importance or value of Indigenous languages and knowledge, I suggest it is critical to provide teachers with some skills to mediate those tensions and establish networks of support locally, regionally and internationally.

My recommendations are based on a pragmatic vision of new speakers and the stabilization and growth of Indigenous languages. All who are engaged in Indigenous language and knowledge revitalisation, face many challenges internally and externally. It is also apparent that Aboriginal Teacher programs should contribute to language and knowledge revitalization rather than continue, in effect, assimilation policy. After all, whose knowledge should be taught to First Nations in their respective territories and schools? The En'owkin DSTC students who visited our school, through their demonstrated commitment to children, language and cultural vitality, have convinced me that the DSTC Program is a fundamental and practical project with huge potential for language and knowledge revitalisation and practice in our communities and nation—if they acquire the skills to transform current knowledge reproduction. I have taught, learned from, and worked with teachers and aspiring teachers, their commitment

to children's learning and determination to be the best teachers they can be are apparent. Conscientization and transforming tools must be provided for the revitalization of Indigenous knowledge systems and languages to occur in meaningful and sustainable patterns.

### **7.3 A Cumulative Reflection on the Spider's Web**

After gathering the bits, theorizing, engaging parents and families, and collaboratively getting *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet* going, I have to say that it was not easy, and it continues to be a struggle, but it has certainly been worthwhile. Over the past ten years, from an idea to the completion of our *Sqilxw* cultural immersion school's fourth year of existence, there was much uncertainty, and there still is. There were many tense moments when our little school could have been closed down because of opposition from Okanagan people, if funding did not come through, if a staff issue or conflict could not be resolved, if parents decided (and some did) the school was not such a good idea after all, and there is still no guarantee of continued operation. For parents and families involved in building the first Okanagan cultural immersion school, the work has required commitment, sacrifice and determination. Our children are demonstrating through proficiency in our language, self-confidence and academic capability that the work has great rewards. Their parents and extended families have also learned through struggle that they possess substantial social and cultural capital, and several parents have emerged as strong community leaders, Parents and

grandparents share extended family responsibilities with teaching staff for the knowledge our children have access to and how it is delivered.

Between the administrative structural work, the labor-intensive curriculum development, and the ever-demanding teaching pressures, we are always busy. These pressures are stressful and antithetical to the deeper, important goal of community building: We have to remind ourselves to stop and have fun with each other.

I believe for the parents this work has great rewards, but great demands as well (Hermes, 2004). Pila Wilson warned us that for the first parents of the first immersion students, the work is "gut-wrenching" (Hermes, 2004). Many parents in our community are not sure what to think of immersion. (Can you imagine not understanding the homework your children bring home?) Every year we struggle with finding teachers, funding, and facilities. The school's future is never guaranteed. I believe this is what Pila meant by "gut-wrenching." We are at the same time trying to do something good for our children, as well as for the community and the language. We are always trusting that it is not at the expense of our children's education. This is the challenge of being an immersion parent. (Hermes, 2007, p. 60)

Parents worked hard for their children in *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet*, and the journey was certainly "gut-wrenching" at times for all the reasons noted by Hermes, but particularly because of the combination of colonising criticisms and fears from family and community members and the reality that for several years we did not know how our project was going to turn out, whether it was going to work out as we envisioned. After four years of uncertainty and struggle, parents "gut-feelings" that we are doing good work for our kids is becoming certainty that our children deserve to speak and be *Sqilxw*-Okanagan. The survival of *Sqilxw*-Okanagan language, knowledge, and people is not assured, but *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet* is contributing incrementally to our sustainability as an Indigenous people in our homeland. Our ancestors certainly contributed to our school's realization. I have been credited for "getting the school going" and "having the vision" and so on, but I have only been part of it,

contributing my knowledge (which comes from many others), along with elders, parents, educators, and leaders, for the kids, the people to be. There were times when I was worn down, and uncertain about how we would continue, and other parents stepped up and kept the project moving. At times, I did not have everything figured out, and relied on intuition and stubborn determination to continue “figuring things out” with others. Everyone involved, whether for a short period or continuously from the start was and is necessary to continuing *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet*.

There was much opposition internally to the school’s development, and I experienced firsthand the tensions between transformative action and colonizing hegemonies, and with others was able to mediate and resolve many of those tensions. The opposition has not often made sense, because it does not make sense that Okanagan people with little or no interest in the school would busy themselves to deny Okanagan children the opportunity to learn their own language. However, as stated earlier, the relationships are complex and contradictory, and hegemonies have certainly “saturated the consciousness” of many of us. We have all been colonized and are all interconnected by kinship. I expected opposition to this project and knew it would not be easy. I did not expect some of the strongest opposition to come from my own daughter who, in addition to being at least as stubborn as I am, was very concerned that she “would have to do all of her grades over again . . . that when she went to high school she wouldn’t know anything. . .” and so on. Those tensions are working themselves out now that she too is one of the students from our school



consistently on the honour roll and Principal's list in public school. And that is why it is important to reserve critical commentary to patterns of behaviours rather than about individuals. We are all connected to these patterns of hegemony and continued formations of colonization. Corporatization of First Nations is one such "new formation" that we are faced with, because a corporation is also a "person" who can be asked the questions that Tommy Gregoire said were coming, "Who are you? Where are you from? Who are your people?"

This project is about changing patterns of colonizing hegemonies and internalized deficit. In an inclusive web of transforming praxis, *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet*, is built on the premise that the children will demonstrate that knowing our language and cultural knowledge, being *Sqilxw*-Okanagan, is worthwhile. We are connected to new expressions of *Sqilxw* thought, experience and knowledge in our language. After four years, attitudes are slowly shifting because of our children. Enrolment has grown slowly but steadily. Fourth year students have extensive receptive vocabularies, are able to converse in Okanagan language, and their productive vocabularies are beginning to expand considerably. The children of *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet* can certainly stand up and assert who they are in our language.

A successful Okanagan language and cultural knowledge revitalization school has been established. *Nkmaplqs i Snmamayatn kl Sqilxwtet* is "successful" because fluent speakers are emerging, cultural aspirations through the vision statement are being achieved, students are experiencing improved academic success after leaving the school and entering public schools.

Okanagan self-determination is organically resonating in community, inter-tribal, provincial and world contexts. Confidence in the accumulated knowledge of our ancestors is re-emerging/restored. Okanagan knowledge, language, practice and pedagogy, are necessary, and indeed are the means to Okanagan cultural aspirations, access to world knowledge and institutions, and self-determination in a successful Indigenous language and culture revitalization schooling project.

For Indigenous peoples, and certainly for the *Sqilxw*-Okanagan people, schooling has been and is an agent of assimilation, an agent of linguistic, historical and cultural knowledge erasure, a “people destroying monster.” The role of Fox, through a *Sqilxw* research paradigm to gather the bits of past and current knowledge, attitudes, theories and methods, has and is creating new understanding, and new knowledge through dialogue with others for current application and ritualization. The Four Food Chiefs, guided by collective responsibility for all the children and future generations, when asked, “What will you do for the people to be?” they did not say, “I will do this for my cub, my seed, or my fry.” They responded with life commitment to the well-being of all people to be and inclusion of viewpoints from communities of difference with a methodology which tends to balance tensions and nurture collective commitment to continuous cycles of sustainable relationships. That is what we can learn from our ancestors, *Kwulencuten* and the *Tmixw*, practice with others, and pass on to our children. . .

To use a canoe metaphor for the school, with the shared responsibility and cooperation of parents and families, we put the canoe together and put our

children, teachers, and elders into the canoe, and we jumped in as well to find our way and help paddle. There are many ongoing challenges and struggles. Our children, however, feel loved and cared for, and they will remember and learn from what we worked for, what we made happen for them. We have lots to learn, and have to be alert to avoid bad habits, politics of distraction, and cooptation. It was not easy to develop an immersion pool of emerging speakers of our language through extended family learning and teaching relationships, and those relationships continue to develop. Those sometimes scarce but powerful strands of knowledge and practice emanating from our families, genealogies and territorial ecology are both informing and animating the journey. We did not wait for someone else to do it for us and that is what real self-determination is. The *Sqilxw* pedagogical framework, the *Captikwl* story system with Coyote, Fox, Turtle, the Food Chiefs . . . , the extended family learning and teaching relationships, and the ongoing developmental process are all dialectical expressions of *Sqilxw*-Okanagan kinship relationships.

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