RECONCILIATION WITH AN INDIGENOUS ELDER AND A EURO-WESTERN SETTLER THROUGH CO-CREATED ART AND CONVERSATION

by

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We accept the Thesis as conforming to the required standard.

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Abstract

Many Indigenous peoples, cultures and communities across the globe have experienced some form of colonization or genocide that caused adverse effects. Often the relationship among colonizer and Indigenous people have been tarnished and plagued with pain. As a non-Indigenous middle school teacher who teaches Indigenous students and who has taught First Nations Studies, it was necessary to build my knowledge of Indigenous ways of knowing. A third of the students at the school I teach are identified as Indigenous, therefore I had to change my implicit ignorance. In this study, I, a Euro-western settler teacher artist, collaborated with, Qwaya Sam, an Indigenous Elder artist and cultural leader, to co-create art and share conversation. During our time together, we discussed many topics surrounding Indigenous ways of knowing and Euro-western ways of knowing. Most of the time we met in my art studio, sharing openly and honestly with each other. We developed a relationship while advancing our understanding of reconciliation through co-creating art and conversation. This project led to an Indigenous-settler approach of cultural reconciliation through the (1) co-creation of artwork, (2) sharing of recorded conversations, and (3) co-analysis of the artwork together through analytical memos. This approach may be used for those who seek to develop rich and meaningful relationships across different cultures. Ultimately, both members benefited in unique ways through the process of reciprocal learning.
Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge Qwaya Sam for collaborating with me. His open mind was truly refreshing as we created a novel way to achieve reconciliation. Our friendship has grown tremendously throughout this process and for this, I am grateful. I would also like to thank my wife for her encouragement and prodigious approach to life which has helped me to conquer my masters. I would also like to thank Amada Wager, my supervisor, for her kind and supreme knowledgeable approach with my thesis. She has helped me to stay focused, and guided my ship in the rough seas of process. I would like to thank my family for their support in my educational career, which I have always felt during my time in school and as a school teacher.
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<td>Arts-Based Research</td>
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<td>CPR</td>
<td>Culturally Responsive Pedagogy</td>
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<td>CRSD</td>
<td>Campbell River School District</td>
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<td>EWWK</td>
<td>Euro-western Way of Knowing</td>
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<tr>
<td>IWWK</td>
<td>Indigenous Way of Knowing</td>
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<td>TRCC</td>
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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

In September 2017, the Aboriginal Education Department Head—a fellow-teacher at the middle school I work at—mentioned to me how an Indigenous Elder was willing to work in our school and with teachers. The Elder was Qwaya Sam from the Ahousaht First Nations, 1 of 14 tribes of the Nuu-chah-nulth Nation. For this paper, he has chosen to be identified as Qwaya instead of Mr. Sam. He is an artist, community cultural leader, practitioner of traditional teachings and is a positive role model for students. I was fortunate to meet Qwaya during a school-based field trip at the Campbell River Museum. From that point on, I invited Qwaya back to numerous field trips and classroom visits throughout the school year. As I am also an artist, Qwaya and I developed a friendship and began co-creating art together, which we continue to do today. This study was built around our relationship with the intention to explore reconciliation through co-created artwork and conversation.

Definition of Terms

Below are explanations of the terms I use throughout this study:

Settler: Someone who settles in a new region or territory. At times in this paper I refer to myself as a settler when referencing elements that have historical significance. My ancestors came from Europe to Canada and settled in Indigenous territories in Canada. I do not identify myself as a settler in everyday situations, however I do acknowledge my ancestral background.

Euro-western: People who have come or whose ancestors have come to North America from Europe. Sometimes identified as settlers or colonizers, Euro-western people brought new ways of knowing and traditions to Indigenous peoples in Canada that contrasted Indigenous ways of knowing and traditions. I use this term because it yields inherent traditions based in European
ways of thinking that are embedded in western culture. Within this thesis I use the term Euro-western to describe a way of thinking and at times use the term to describe my ancestral background.

**Euro-Western Ways of Knowing (EWWK):** The term will be used primarily in the context of education and industry in North America. The term is synonymous with the efficiency movement where industry and schools were designed to be socially efficient and based on a series of standardized assessments at the turn of the 20th century. The objective was to maximize best practice and reduce wasted time. Bell schedules, rote memorization, and core subjects are creations that epitomize the efficiency of EWWK.

**Indigenous Ways of Knowing (IWK):** Indigenous ways of knowing involves storytelling, reciprocity, experiential learning, and learning from Elders and ancestors. Furthermore, Indigenous ways of knowing involves a balance among physical, mental, emotional and spiritual elements of being. While there are similarities among Indigenous Nations, there are many nations in Canada that have different traditions, cultural practices and teachings.

**Indigenous:** I have chosen to use the term Indigenous which represents the people of a cultural group who were living in Canada pre-colonial/settler contact. In Canadian politics and education there are a variety of terms used to identify Indigenous people. In this study, the relevant synonymous terms for Indigenous are Aboriginal and First Nations. To maintain consistency with my school district I will use the term First Nations when I reference the First Nations Studies program. Aboriginal is used when referencing the Aboriginal Education program or department. Lastly, Aboriginal and First Nations is used on occasion from scholars and from Qwaya.
**Arts-based research (ABR):** Arts-based research is a method used to inform research. The term is synonymous with arts informed research and artistic enquiry as research. Arts-based research presents artworks as research data.

**Interwoven:** Two strands of knowledge or understanding that come together. Often through reciprocity, an interwoven framework, approach or occurrence is manifested.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study has been to explore practices of reconciliation through co-creating artworks and conversation between an Indigenous Elder artist and cultural leader, Qwaya, and a Euro-western settler artist teacher, me. Together, we have furthered our awareness of reconciliation through reflection and knowledge sharing. Throughout the past year, we discussed various perspectives within IWK, EWWK, and ABR practices. In the television series the *8th Fire*, Wab Kinew (2012) ends the show explaining,

> It's a long rough road ahead and there are many potholes. Both sides will have to learn from each other, respect each other, and let’s face it, make the odd compromise. We don’t really have a choice. We are all here and none of us are leaving. We need to paddle together. Natives and non-Natives each in their own canoes all moving forward in the same direction (41:40).

Guided by this prophecy, Qwaya and I explored reciprocal processes of reconciliation through arts-based ways of making-meaning and through conversation. It takes a willingness to paddle together to work through reconciliation. This study is important for Qwaya and myself because we believe that art is a vehicle for change. We also believe that honest conversation allows people to further their acceptance of each other, which breaks down fear of the other. Therefore, we took it upon ourselves to explore what would happen if an Indigenous Elder and a Euro-western settler co-created art together and shared conversation.
Justification of the Study

The sad truth is that many Indigenous peoples across the globe have experienced some form of colonization or genocide that has caused a negative impact to Indigenous culture and community. Specific to Indigenous relations in Canada with emphasis in BC, I found it necessary that new approaches and relationship building strategies among Indigenous and non-Indigenous people be explored. My local school district, Campbell River School District (CRSD), where I teach is located on the pacific northwest coast of Canada. The CRSD has worked hard in partnership with local Indigenous communities to create an Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement. The 4th enactment of the agreement “is intended to guide and support daily education of Aboriginal students and to emphasize the commitment of all professionals in recognizing the importance of Aboriginal history and culture in their regular practice“ (Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement, 2014, p. 1). This study blossomed from my role as a First Nations Studies educator with the intention to honor our local Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement.

I am a middle school teacher, that teaches First Nations Studies from the perspective of a Euro-western settler. I was hired in this position in 2015, because of the demand and necessity to educate all students in Indigenous ways of knowing. I was qualified for this position because I opted to take four additional university courses in a program titled “Indigenous Studies” during my Bachelor of Education degree. These courses connected me to local Indigenous Elders, Indigenous community leaders and Indigenous academics that used Indigenous frameworks to teach Indigenous Studies to young people. I hold the position and responsibility of a non-Indigenous person teaching First Nations Studies to young people with many other teachers across BC and more broadly in Canada. As someone who has limited Indigenous knowledge, I
find it challenging to teach about a culture in which I am not a member. This research is born out of necessity for me and other non-Indigenous teachers to gain insight and knowledge about Indigenous peoples through a reciprocal exchange of co-creating artwork and conversation. I chose arts-based research and conversation because it is a novel and effective way to build off past knowledge and weave new knowledge. This project is advancing research through this unique approach to reconciliation between an Indigenous Elder and settler teacher.

**Research Questions and Hypothesis**

With the growing attention towards reconciliation in Canada and specifically with Indigenous peoples, communities, government and public schools, I sought to learn how co-creating art and conversation with an Indigenous Elder can further practices of reconciliation. I hypothesize that, through arts-based methods and conversation, reconciliation between Qwaya and myself will benefit not only each other, but will provide an approach for anyone to use. I suspect that mutual sensitivity of each other’s cultural backgrounds and personal identity will be monumental for the success of the desired outcome: reconciliation, reciprocity, relationship and cultural understanding.

The research questions that guide this study are: What themes within reconciliation arise and become clear through a relationship between an Indigenous Elder and a settler teacher? How do collaborative art-processes and conversations influence the themes that emerge? What knowledge is gained in regards to self and culture through these collaborative art-processes and conversations between the settler teacher and Indigenous Elder? How may the knowledge gained impact teaching within a middle school First Nations Studies program by a settler teacher? And how can this research benefit other educators in a similar position?
**Brief Overview of Study**

The study has been developed to establish a new approach towards reconciliation that engages in co-creating artworks and sharing conversation with an Indigenous Elder and a Euro-western settler. Through collaboration of co-creating artwork and sharing conversation, Qwaya and myself learned about each other’s culture, traditions and personal narratives. Through data collection, reflection and analysis, I gained new insights which helped me as a public middle school teacher who teaches First Nations Studies and art.

**Research Study Plan**

The steps in the research study are as follows. First and foremost, I built a relationship with Qwaya prior to considering this study. Over a year, we met various times and became friends. Realizing the importance of our relationship, I explored the creation of this collaborative study and discussed it with Qwaya. He was intellectually curious and willing to pursue this academic journey with me. I then wrote and provided Qwaya with a recruitment script (APPENDIX A). The research script outlines the intentions of the project including his role and how the information collected would be used. At our next meeting, I gave him a consent form (APPENDIX B) which outlined the study, his involvement and what could be expected of it. After consenting to the study in May 2018, we met approximately 20 times and recorded five conversations, spent numerous sessions co-creating artwork and sharing conversations, and co-analyzed the artwork. I transcribed the five conversations and member-checked the transcriptions with Qwaya. The recorded conversations, co-created artwork, and co-analysis ended up creating a pool of data that I could draw upon to answer the research questions in this study.
Thesis Overview

In the first chapter I introduce the study followed by the definition of terms. I then explain the purpose of the study, justification of study, and lay out my research questions and hypothesis. Afterwards there is a brief overview of study, research study plan and I finish with the thesis overview. Chapter two encompasses the literature review beginning with the heading Euro-western and Indigenous ways of knowing. I was curious to understand the polarities between the two ways of knowing. Also, I was interested to learn more about IWK, therefore I investigated various types of Indigenous frameworks. I finish the chapter by looking into arts-based research and the merits of art education. Chapter three highlights the research design of the thesis. I outline Indigenous and participatory methodologies. Then the qualitative analysis is reviewed in detail. In addition to this, I delve into co-created artwork and conversation methods that I used during the study. Towards the end of the chapter I explain the procedures followed, reliability and validity, and provide a conclusion. Chapter four was where it all came together. After the introduction, the themes that emerged are distilled into three main headings. (1) The importance of culture and tradition, (2) connection to land and the environment, and (3) community and self. In this chapter the richness of the artwork is on display and Qwaya’s voice is brought to light. The results and findings in this chapter are profound. Lastly, chapter five contributes the summary, discussion and limitations. I suggest the implications and recommendations from this research. Furthermore, I answer the research questions of the study and deliver a final conclusion.
Chapter 2- Literature Review

Introduction

In this literature review I first explore the method utilized. I begin by discussing Euro-western and Indigenous ways of knowing. Indigenous peoples have been living on the land, now known as Canada, for over 10,000 years. It is only in recent times that Indigenous ways of knowing are being woven into mainstream BC curriculum. I begin the literature review journey with the idea of the “other”. I then outline Euro-western ways of knowing, and follow up with Indigenous ways of knowing. I incorporate my educational story, as a student in middle school, which illustrates how I was miseducated when I was enrolled in the Roman Catholic school board. I examine how Indigenous history has been taught in public schools in Canada and why it needs to change. Next, I explore the impact of residential schools, indoctrination, the impact on culture and tradition, and the socio-economic reality of Indigenous peoples. I propose the positive and necessary benefit of having an Indigenous Elder in the classroom. Afterwards, I explore Indigenous people’s connection to the land. I touch upon the many variations in Indigenous Nations and I finish with the colonial legacy.

I then review Indigenous frameworks in education where I explore documents and approaches that the BC ministry of education has recommended in recent years. I proceed with an examination of the idea of decolonizing education through Indigenizing education. I propose that the Medicine Wheel is an effective overarching Indigenous framework that can be utilized in education. I also explore co-created frameworks and culturally responsive pedagogy (CPR) in education.

The final area of research in this chapter surrounds arts-based research (ABR). I discuss ABR in academia, and touch upon art education and arts-integrated education. Subsequently,
teaching Indigenous art and culture as a non-Indigenous person is reviewed. Next, I connect experience and art, and look into the challenges of ABR. I unpack how art can be transformative, and explanation is given to the importance of co-created art, and ending with healing through art and the connection to place. Lastly, I weave it all together with a conclusion.

Literature Review Method

Due to the brevity of my topic, I reviewed the works of scholars that position their work as applied to IWK, EWWK and ABR. My procedure of choosing these scholars began with a sizable and particular search through library databases, Google Scholar, Education Index Full Text, ERIC (EBSCO Interface), articles, books, documentaries, and relevant websites. My goal is to present an array of scholars, educators and professionals from diverse cultures and backgrounds to gain multiple perspectives. With emphasis placed on IWK, I have chosen to read and review Indigenous scholars that write about and practice IWK.

The search created a plethora and formidable list of articles, books and websites orchestrated and written by scholars I consider “experts” in the field; people who have written extensively about their research and whose work is based within a strong theoretical framework that links to their methodology. I have selected works that include narratives, collaborative practices, analysis, arts, frameworks, and suggestions that include IWK, EWWK and ABR in education. These scholars have made significant contributions to the field.

Euro-western and Indigenous Ways of Knowing

The other. Indigenous peoples in Canada underwent a process of forced assimilation in an attempt to destroy the traditions and culture of Indigenous peoples. According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRCC), “Residential schools were a systematic, government-sponsored attempt to destroy Aboriginal cultures and languages and to assimilate
Aboriginal peoples so that they no longer existed as distinct peoples” (2015, p. 6). The injustice that occurred to Indigenous peoples in Canada caused the recent creation of the TRCC, which is committed to reconciliation through restoring the traditions, culture and language of Indigenous peoples in Canada. In a document written by Battiste (2000), she mentions “Colonialist have a better claim to subjugate Indigenous peoples to Eurocentric thought if they define them as “other” (p. 97). The term “other” is language intended to reduce people to a simplistic and non-rendered definition. It is based on a colonial concept that ignores the intricacies of life ways and maintains control of the “other” from gaining social status.

Some progress has been made with Indigenous peoples and government, and through fellowship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, nevertheless there is still much work to do. The “other” can be strange and create fear in another person. The way to abolish the colonial concept of the “other” is through relationship that engages in mutual understanding, honesty and reciprocity. I present that co-creating art and conversation with the “other” can offer reconciliation. Both people involved are active participants, working together, moving towards a common goal. Specific with co-creating art, a collaborative approach involves sharing, influencing, discussing and negotiating. In a broad view, if teachers can nurture students to reconcile their differences through collaboration, the fear of the “other” will be reduced. By educating students in the merits of both Euro-western and Indigenous ways of knowing an interwoven educational experience will create equitable representation. “We must face the disturbing fact that factions of society have systematically internalized the colonial mind-set and have overtly and covertly benefited from the oppression and subjugation of other groups of people” (Battiste, 2002, p. 132). As societies evolve with thoughtful reflection to community and individual needs, it is important to keep in mind that certain communities and people have
benefited from systemic colonialism while many have suffered. A necessary step towards reconciliation is to listen to the recommendations made from Indigenous communities to lift the narrative of the “other” and to weave IWK into mainstream society and education.

**Euro-western ways of knowing.**

![Image](image.png)

*Figure 1. Bipolar demise. Oil painting on canvas created by Darren Larose (2012).*

Figure 1 was created during my Bachelors of Visual Arts degree at the University of Victoria. The symbolic imagery in the painting came from my conscious ideas and reflections that were encapsulated in Euro-western culture. The crucifix placed on the chest is a Christian symbol that I grew up with and embodied as a young man. The bold and strong linear elements
of the artwork reflect the Euro-western ideology of strength, progress and religion. The black and white monotone formal elements depict EWWK which places emphasis on rote memorization, linear frameworks for success, repetition, dominance and standardization. The final judgement is settled as the sword pierces into the metaphorical heart of the challenged student.

Euro-western ways of knowing is embedded in the structural framework of education in Canada. As a teacher in BC, public education places emphasis on math, science, English, physical education and social studies. These subjects remain to be the educational core for students, designed to establish a standard level of educational competency. This model works well for students who are driven by competition and excel at these disciplines. Yet, the current model fails for many students and does not credit the strengths of IWK. Most schools have a bell system that mimics industrial factory operations based on efficiency and consistency. According to Seedat, Suffla & Christine (2017),

Scientific, evidenced-based, factual, objective and empirical knowing is granted the highest value and authority by influential institutions and publishers. At the other end of the spectrum, “soft knowledge” such as rituals and spiritual practices, memories, indigenous oral accounts, dreamtime and stories are less recognized; these sources of knowledge are frequently marginalized, excluded and judged as subjective, situated, relative and “less evidenced-based” in nature. (p. 61)

The description above offers a telling contrast of how Euro-western paradigms occupy and influence educational hierarchy. As noted above, emphasis on scientific, evidenced-based, factual, objective and empirical knowing is granted the highest accolades in schools. There is merit to traditional Euro-western paradigms in contemporary education as they serve valuable functions in competitive fields of study like engineering, medicine, science and fields that require empirical knowledge. These competitive fields drive innovation and serve some students, but do not encompass the whole of learners. It is but one part, and when the majority of the education system places priority on this one part and negates the other, soft knowledge, then
many students will be left on the sideline. What is referred to as soft knowledge, as mentioned above, are less evidence-based ways of knowing and often align with IWK, such as storytelling and spiritual practices. These soft knowledge competencies are kept in the shadow. Beyond elementary school, soft knowledge is rarely quantified in education or academically assessed. Euro-western educational frameworks remain to be the overarching standard, yet there are currently advances toward an interwoven framework that includes IWK.

**Indigenous ways of knowing.** Many schools have made an adjustment to facilitate IWK into teaching practices, professional development and school culture. Numerous BC school districts have an Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement, which are designed to improve Indigenous student success and to weave IWK into education. The agreements have been orchestrated through collaborative efforts among school districts, Indigenous community members, and Elders.

The Campbell River School District is committed to ensuring that Indigenous students receive a quality education; one that prepares them to lead successful, productive and healthy lives while enhancing their Indigenous identity through language and culture programs (Campbell River School District, 2018, para. 2).

The commitment from the CRSD is one example of many districts working in partnership with local Indigenous communities to ensure that language and culture programs are present in schools. The education system in BC is welcoming IWK while honoring and respecting Indigenous culture. By including Indigenous voice and perspectives in the core vision of school districts, Indigenous students will be better represented and prepared to lead successful, productive and healthy lives (CRSD, 2018, para. 2). Through the enhancement of culture and language programs, the collective goal is to ensure Indigenous students receive a quality education. This goal is best achieved when Indigenous community leaders are active in schools.
Indigenous ways of knowing involves consultation with Elders, community members, and family. Learning this way does not always mesh well with western timelines. Reflection is often not built into academic protocol, and the knowledge gained from a ceremony or potlatch is also outside EWWK. Longboat (2008) is an Indigenous academic scholar who is both Ojibwa and Ohngwehonweh First Nations. She illustrates the juxtaposition between her traditional teachings and EWWK, “As an Indigenous academic, I am tested in the colonial world to submit written responses in pyramid fashion: building arguments, with the English dialect of words that assume understanding of specific vocabulary, references and structures” (p. 74). The difficulties that pyramid like structures presents to Longboat is that it contrasts to her traditional Indigenous epistemology which places emphasis on the idea of interconnection. What a culture values has a very profound impact on the way individuals perceive, think and acquire knowledge. Indigenous students in the education system are constantly forced to demonstrate how they can prove EWWK. Conversely, settlers are rarely asked, if never, to demonstrate how they can be Indigenous or demonstrate IWK. Longboat further explains that, “There is no line in academic rubrics for transformation of knowledge between Indigenous and colonial mindsets” (p. 75). Indigenous students who are taught to value their culture, ceremonies, and traditional teachings engage in education with an epistemological mindset that differs from western epistemology. Longboat vividly presents how she and many Indigenous people process and experience the world:

In seminar presentations I sought to demonstrate and lead with Indigenous ways that flow and bend to accommodate, relate and acknowledge the seen and unseen relational and universal dimension of the spiritual, intellectual, emotional and physical of a natural world order that is obvious to me and concerns the seen, felt, and heard. This order concerns relational aspects that vibrate outward from myself, with cautious sensitivity to understand who I am and my effect on family, community, my nation, and others in the universe that include: other cultures; other relations; other living being of land, air, water, and sky. (p. 74)
This passage summarizes the depth of interconnectedness in Indigenous culture and Indigenous ways of knowing. She describes how she relates to the world that is specific to her upbringing and teachings from her family and community. She also mentions that she is sensitive to the knowledge of other cultures. She describes how she is connected through ‘relational aspects’ to all living things, beyond people, which helps explain the interconnected mindset of Indigenous people. The reciprocal exchange of knowledge between family, community, nation, and others in the universe rests in a universal order. Her perspective is deep rooted in IWK and expresses how achieving harmony among IWK and EWWK is very complex.

Over the past few hundred years of post-contact, an exchange of knowledge between Euro-western and Indigenous peoples has been occurring. While the dominance of western knowledge has prevailed, the need to weave IWK into mainstream education is ever more necessary. The transmission of knowledge in education is not singular, yet pluralistic. Longboat’s (2008) experience as a learner from both Euro-western and Indigenous education provides a glimpse into an area where academia can move towards reconciliation:

The paths leading to ethical space in which to examine the truths held by each culture needs to be thoughtfully nurtured and supported with knowledgeable scholarship, teachings, research, writing, community service, and methodologies shaped by Indigenous epistemic realities so that new knowledge is created without subsuming the Other. (pp. 81-82)

Leading towards an integrated and ethical space for Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners involve cultivating school districts and help from Indigenous Elders, family, and community members. In order to facilitate Indigenous methods and methodologies in schools’ teachers will have to be supported and nurtured as they weave IWK into their practice. Teachers will also have to take responsibility to examine their own truths and understanding about IWK. Through relationship building in ethical spaces transformation is able to take root and change occurs. It is
unfortunate that many past generations did not receive authentic and adequate education about IWK. I share below my experience in the Roman Catholic school board.

**Roman Catholic school board.** I remember being in middle school and learning little about Indigenous peoples, history, and culture. Through personal anecdotal evidence, I can remember when Indigenous people were called Indians. Indigenous history involved a few pages in a Canadian history book that recounted hunting practices, gathering methods and important battles between settlers and Indigenous peoples. As well, I was taught about the ongoing battles between Indigenous tribes. I did not learn about residential schools, the history prior to European contact, or any IWK. It was not until my 5th year of university, at the age of 31, that I learned the term residential school. I was enrolled in my teacher education program taking an Indigenous Studies program when I first heard the term. Needless to say, I felt robbed of something that seemed so vital to learn. Why was I not educated about this in school? “Non-Aboriginal Canadians have also been disadvantaged by educational systems that taught them that Aboriginal people were ‘heathens’ or ‘savages.’” (TRCC, 2015, p. 69). Many Canadians did not learn about residential schools, nor was there any semblance of Indigenous pedagogy in the curriculum. I can testify, through my own experience as a non-Indigenous student, of being misinformed which resulted in a false narrative about Indigenous people. As well, as a settler in a land that has been inhabited by Indigenous people for over 10,000 years, myself and my ancestors have been privileged and fortunate. The same cannot be said in Canadian colonial history for Indigenous peoples and communities. They have endured residential schools, the Indian Act, and many other forms of abuse from the government and from colonial settlers. To move towards reconciliation, the way Canadian history and Indigenous history is taught must acknowledge the truth of these atrocities, as well as the life ways of Indigenous peoples and their communities.
Indigenous history in the classroom. Public education has provided a miseducation to generations of students, as explained by Reynolds (2000), “Currently, no widely accepted and effective strategies for teaching First Nations history and culture within the Canadian social studies curriculum exist” (p. 1). Canadian Indigenous history was traditionally taught from a Canadian history book where a small percentage of pages cover Indigenous history. While Reynold’s article may seem outdated, it provides a glance at the systemic ignorance that generations of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students were exposed to as truth. More important, the victims of this miseducation, Indigenous peoples, have been marginalized through an institutional narrative that portrayed Indigenous peoples with adverse inaccuracies. Furthermore, the information provided about Indigenous peoples was very broad and did not mention the intricacies of their lifeways. The picture below is an example of how educational resources mis portrayed Indigenous history affecting generations of students.

![Image](image.png)

*Figure 2.* Photograph of a page from a Canadian elementary school textbook, created in 2007, providing a distorted depiction of First Nations treatment by colonizers (Palma, 2017).
A perfect example of inaccurate information provided to students is illustrated in Figure 2. Indigenous peoples did not move out by will or convenience, they were forced off their land. Indigenous communities formed treaties and promises with the government that were not upheld. The publisher, Popular Book Company Canada (2014), has issue a statement on their website stating,

We again reiterate our apologies to all First Peoples for playing a role in perpetuating ideas that harm the integrity and harmony of all nations co-existing here. We want to continue with an open-ended dialogue to foster a positive and informed environment for the creation of educational texts dealing with Indigenous issues. (para. 4)

This occurrence exasperated the systemic misinformation of Indigenous peoples in schools. As well, the inaccuracy of historical truth has been a problem in Canada for countless years.

It is only recently that Indigenous history and IWK has been elevated into mainstream education in Canada with efficacy and accuracy. Reynolds (2002) provides the following suggestion to teach a more authentic historical account of Indigenous history:

Perhaps the most obvious feature of a more inclusive and integrated history of Canada would involve reaching back farther than a mere 500 years, perhaps to 10,000 years or more. Clearly, this broader perspective would provide a more balanced and penetrating view of our history than does our current, narrow, euro-centric view. (p. 2)

By providing an inclusive and balanced Canadian historical perspective acknowledging the ancestral history of Indigenous peoples, a broader perspective can be achieved. Canadian history does not begin 150 years ago, but over 10,000 years ago because the land that Canadians occupy has a long history of Indigenous habitation. Authenticity of Indigenous history would also improve if an Indigenous Elder were present in schools to share local history and knowledge of the territory in which the school resides. As the truth of Indigenous people in Canada surfaces,
all students and citizens gain from genuine Canadian history, which includes the reality of residential schools.

**Impact of residential school.** The segregation of Indigenous children into residential schools is a part of Canadian history. With this came poor educational standards, abuse and neglect, and assimilation. With the relatively recent creation of the TRCC in 2015, Indigenous survivors of residential schools recount their stories of trauma, abuse and the truth they endured, “Poorly trained teachers working on an irrelevant curriculum left students feeling branded as failures” (TRCC, 2015, p. 10). The effects of this inferior education created generations of educational failures. Many residential school survivors struggled in their academic performance, which resulted in challenges to pursue further education. With low academic competency, it was hard to gain employment in mainstream society, racism aside. The following are some statistics on the academic achievement level of residential school survivors who suffered sexual, or severe physical abuse. The report findings come from the Independent Assessment Process and were used for the TRCC (2015):

- Twenty-three per cent of the claimants in the sample did not identify any specific level of school completion, suggesting a low level of achievement. Of those reporting a level of educational attainment, 13% said they attained less than a Grade-Seven education, 28% attained Grade Seven to Nine, 28% completed Grade Ten to Twelve, and 11% received a GED. (p. 67)

The report is clear in the findings that residential school survivors suffered in academics, on top of the abuse endured. Educating Indigenous students was not the main priority in residential schools. Rather, the priority was to, “kill the Indian in the child”, famously spoken by former Prime Minister Stephen Harper on June 11th, 2008 during his public apology. The apology to Indigenous Canadians revealed the government and churches responsibility in cultural assimilation and indoctrination.
Indoctrination. The process of indoctrination was initiated at the government level, where churches were utilized to assimilate Indigenous students after taking them from their families. Western and Christian beliefs were taught to a generation of Indigenous children. Students were not encouraged to engage in high levels of thinking and punishment was enforced on students who practiced their traditions, culture, language or beliefs, “Staff members were told that the best preparation we can give them is to teach them the Christian way of life” (TRCC, 2105, p. 63). The goal was to provide substandard education while indoctrinating students with western Christian ideology. The TRCC highlights how teachers were chosen by the church:

Indian Affairs schools branch maintained that the principals and the staff were appointed by the church authorities, subject to the approval of the Department as to qualifications. In reality, the churches hired staff and the government then automatically approved their selections. The churches placed a greater priority on religious commitment than on teaching ability. (p. 64)

Many teachers had no teaching qualifications and were only qualified to teach because of church approval, which was based on the applicant’s religious competency. This caused substandard education for Indigenous students in residential school that ultimately contributed to the cultural genocide of Indigenous people. The TRCC explains that “In 1969, Indian Affairs reported it was still paying its teachers less than they could make in provincial schools” (p. 64), which furthered poor teacher recruitment. Indigenous students were valued less than non-Indigenous students which resulted in marginalization and systemic oppression initiated at the state level. It impacted Indigenous culture and traditions, while at the same time providing lower levels of education to keep Indigenous people in the lower fringes of society.

Impact on culture and traditions. The impact on Indigenous culture and traditional teachings created a hard felt disconnect among children. Indigenous students were punished if they spoke their native language and were mandated to learn English and taught domestic chores.
This created shame among Indigenous children as they returned to their families. The children learned a language that their parents did not know, which caused cultural disconnection. Many children lost their traditional language as recounted by Agnes Mills from Inuvik Northwest Territories:

One of the things that residential school did for me, I really regret, is it made me ashamed of who I was...And I wanted to be white so bad, and the worst thing I ever did was I was ashamed of my mother, that honorable woman, because she couldn’t speak English. (TRCC, 2015, p. 108)

The experience that Agnes endured is common among residential school survivors. There are plenty similar examples of shame, neglect and guilt in the TRCC. Traditional ways of life, like fishing or hunting, were barred resulting in even more cultural distance for children within their communities. The toxicity of residential schools damaged Indigenous peoples for many generations and the effects are still felt in communities, families and schools today. It has resulted in poor socio-economic standards of living and higher rates of substance abuse and suicide.

**Socio-economic impact.** Research shows that children and grandchildren who had parents in residential school face socio-economic disadvantages:

Former residential school students are less likely to have incomes in the highest 20%, and are more likely to report experiencing food insecurity. All three of these factors - parental residential school experience, household income level, and food security - combine to impede success in school for their children (TRCC, 2015, p. 69).

This report illustrates the intergenerational damage that Indigenous students, whose parents or grandparents were in residential school, encounter in their daily lives. The socio-economic impact on Indigenous people who attended residential school has left families and communities in a broken state. As a teacher, with a third of my school population being Indigenous, I can see the anecdotal evidence of these three factors.
How do we improve the current conditions for Indigenous peoples in Canada? The TRCC (2015) has proposed that, “Hundreds of Survivors have told the Commission that the incorporation of Aboriginal culture and language into the life of First Nations schools and communities is essential to overcoming the impact of the residential schools” (p. 82). School districts must partner with Indigenous communities to incorporate culture and language programs into schools. By weaving IWK, language and culture into the curriculum, Indigenous revitalization can grow and a more inclusive educational experience will take shape.

**Elders in the classroom.** Having an Elder in the classroom can be a powerful learning experience for all students. Elder’s speak from the heart and share experiences which are layered with insight. The knowledge that an Elder brings to a classroom travels beyond the textbook. The sharing through story and conversation often have principles of love, courage, connection to others and self, and much more. Certain stories are passed down from ancestors and have been spoken for over thousands of years. Chartrand, a proud Anishinaabe Métis, explains her experience with Elder Dan Thomas, “What Dan Thomas brought to the class that day did not come from a textbook. It came from a story that had been passed down, from generation to generation.” (2012, p. 148). Experiencing IWK through stories from an Indigenous Elder is a specific way Elders can share knowledge and influence students in the schools. Indigenous and non-Indigenous students benefit from the wealth of knowledge brought by Elders. I have seen Indigenous students gain a sense of connection and pride when an Elder is in the school. Through representation, the Elder, supports Indigenous students to feel like the school is a place that belongs to them. It is a step towards demystifying the “other”. Reciprocity is often the gift that the Elder leaves the students. I have witnessed it when Qwaya shared his stories in my classroom:
I think in a lot of ways our teachings and our culture is going to help. It’s to help us to be okay. That has always been a big part of teachings, culture and medicine, is making that connection to be in tune with everything around you. (Q. Sam, personal communication, June 15, 2018)

It is culture that will keep the Indigenous communities strong. In order for culture to come to life it has to be practiced. Qwaya’s stories are extensions of traditional teachings that he learnt from his Father, Uncles and Ancestors. Qwaya speaks about being in tune with nature and that the teachings from his Elders lay a clear path to connecting with the environment.

**Connection to land.** Connecting to the environment (land, water, birds, animals, air, all things around us) is a way to heal. Qwaya mentions the following during a conversation, “one of the most important ways to connect to culture is through medicine. Traditional medicine is all things from the land. It's from the environment” (Q. Sam, personal communication, June 15, 2018). It is important to connect to culture. It is the land, air, and water that gives us what we need to survive. Indigenous and non-Indigenous students gain to learn about their interactions with the environment. For Qwaya and many of his people, all things that sustain life come from the environment, “It is the land that will take care of us and not the other way around. Everyone lives in accordance with their environment. When you abuse the environment, it will struggle to sustain you, your family, or your community” (Q. Sam, personal communication, May 23, 2018).

Indigenous ways of knowing are founded on a naturalist framework that protects the environment. Indigenous peoples have traditionally lived in a way that respects and minimizes their impact on the environment. With global warming and the current state of our environment, IWK is necessary for the future of all people in Canada. Reynolds (2000) points out that:

> The connection between human beings and their environment, especially the influence of geography and climate on culture, provides one of the most valuable lessons that the history of the last 10,000 years has to teach. It demonstrates how the experience of place and climate creates an inseparable bond linking the earliest generations with all future generations of a region. (p. 3)
The powerful connection between humans and environment is an IWK that dates back thousands of years. Indigenous ways of knowing are valuable for all people because respecting nature and having a clean environment for the future is critical for all human survival. Among Indigenous Nations there are many teachings that Elders can share in schools and it is important to explore the nuances in Indigenous cultures.

**Variations in Indigenous Nations.*** Indigenous culture differs among Indigenous Nations in Canada. The environment, history, place, ceremony and various traditions all play a role in the unique variations among Indigenous Nations. The nuances of Indigenous culture expand the complexity teachers face with providing students with authentic IWK. “Without clarity, our Aboriginal education initiatives can become a mishmash of information that continues to misinform our average Canadian learner” (Chartrand, 2012, p. 146). To use one Indigenous story to encapsulate all Indigenous stories is not only inaccurate but also neglects the diversity of the 634 First Nations in Canada. As a settler teacher of First Nations Studies in middle school, I am often lost and confused when explaining the origins of an Indigenous story or artifact. It can be hard as an outsider to really know which cross-cultural truths exist, as Croisy (2014) explains, “Both the romantic and tragic portrayals of Indigenous people’s variations of essentialist ‘otherings’ by outsiders [that] fail to recognize Indigenous cultures internal diversity” (p. 238).

Being an outsider to Indigenous culture, I romanticize aspects of Indigenous culture and find myself explaining to students the great stoic qualities of the hunter, protector of the tribe or the simplicity of living off the land. These romantic portrayals from a Euro-western point of view, can be misleading and non-rendered. As a teacher I do not want to perpetuate the inaccurate portrayals established by colonialism.
Colonial legacy. Colonization has proven to be beneficial to the people it employs, while at the same time, creates a wake of destruction to the communities it affects. Indigenous scholars Maria Battiste, of the Potlotek First Nation, and James Youngblood Henderson, of the Chickasaw Nation, bring to focus that, “Few Eurocentric knowledge-dominated educational systems in Canada are attempting such a reconciliation or creating a trans-systemic synthesis of the two distinct but complementary knowledge systems. This transformation is long overdue, urgent, and necessary” (2009, pp. 16-17). Now, ten years later since the publication of the article, colonial practices are still dominant in educational systems but improvements have been made. In Campbell River BC, the Euro-western dominated educational system is working on reconciliation through local Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements, the Aboriginal Education Advisory Council and the TRCC.

The immense struggle that Indigenous people face are a product of colonialism. Longboat (2008), explains:

I found my greatest challenge were personal inner battles to find the middle ground between my own knowledge, the expectations of Aboriginal peoples among whom I live, and those of my academic guides who follow guidelines developed with the needs of colonial dreams and aspirations. (p. 73)

The struggles Indigenous people face to satisfy Euro-western/colonial aspirations are a challenging reality that Indigenous people endure. Indigenous students are expected to learn from a Euro-western model that historically contradicts IWK. Longboat relies on advice from Elders and Indigenous teachings to guide her, yet she remains conflicted with Euro-western individuality that does not tell the full story in the manner in which she has been raised. The juxtaposition of colonial education and IWK stifle those who are Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike. She expresses that consulting Indigenous Elders, mentors and friends can lead to a route that is unfavorable or disagreeable to the current education system which is dominated by the
Euro-western ideology. Is there a solution for Indigenous learners to express what they know in a way that includes their culture?

**Indigenous Frameworks**

*Figure 3. Transformation drum. Indigenous drum created by Qwaya (2017).*

The drum was hand made with materials that were harvested from the land. While this is a work of art, it is also a cultural artifact that powerfully connects him to his ancestors. It tells a story of transformation from the spirit world to the human world. Transformation from person to
thunderbird through ceremony. Indigenous frameworks and IWK are being woven into the fabric of education in both public schools and post-secondary institutions. By weaving Indigenous frameworks into the curriculum, we move towards authentic reconciliation.

**BC ministry of education.** The BC ministry of education (2018) seeks the following three broad goals to develop Indigenous education in BC, “Improve the success of all students. Support all students learning about Aboriginal education. Help teachers in their efforts to bring Aboriginal knowledge into their teaching practice” (para. 1). These three goals propose that Indigenous pedagogy is being woven into the fabric of the public school system in BC. This continual step forward acknowledges the value of Indigenous success among students. Equity in education for Indigenous students is a way to combat the legacy of residential schools. By supporting all students to learn about Indigenous education, students will benefit from the history and truth of Indigenous peoples. Furthermore, reconciliation is better suited when students’ cultural backgrounds are encouraged and acknowledged. Lastly, teachers need help to bring IWK into the classrooms and weave it into their practice. This takes time, resources, and a sound collaboration between educators, Elders and Indigenous communities. Battiste and Henderson (2009) explain that, “We know that when Indigenous knowledge is naturalized in educational programs, the learning spirit is nurtured and animated” (p. 13). The learning spirit of students comes to life through story and experience, as taught through IWK. Educational programs are instilled at a district level therefore it may require advocacy for Indigenous education programs to come to fruition, when those programs are not yet available.

Another case to illustrate that education in BC is attempting to interweave IWK into the curriculum is with the document Aboriginal Worldviews and Perspectives in the Classroom on the BC ministry of education website where it says, “We’ll know when we are achieving success
when teachers see the relevance of Aboriginal knowledge in their curriculum, instruction, and assessment” (Aboriginal Worldviews and Perspectives in the Classroom, 2015, p. 65). This is one of many recommendations outlined in the document, that provides a maker for teacher success in the classroom. The Aboriginal Worldviews and Perspectives in the Classroom document is filled with IWK, and documents like this indicate that BC is a progress province when it comes to reconciliation through education with Indigenous communities.

Many school districts in BC have an AEEA. 47 of 60 school districts have an Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement (BC ministry of education, 2018). While EWWK is embedded in the structural framework of education in BC, progress has been made in multiple districts across BC to further IWK and Indigenous frameworks in public schools. Indigenizing education is gaining traction.

**Indigenizing education.** Is it all about Indigenizing education? Battiste (2000) makes the salient point that “By harmonizing Indigenous knowledge with Eurocentric knowledge, [Indigenous people] are attempting to heal their people, restore their inherent dignity, and apply fundamental human rights to their communities. They are ready to imagine and unfold postcolonial orders and society” (p. xvi). The goal is not to adopt one educational system over the other, but to create an interwoven educational system. It is a fair objective to desire dignity for all students and to imagine a brighter future were harmony among both ways of knowing is reciprocated. Each knowledge system benefits from vast and unique epistemologies, as Battiste conceptualizes “Modern Western society has much to gain by learning about and from Indigenous peoples, but without a structural framework to achieve these ends the goals of decolonization will fall short of being actualized” (p. xxix). As a non-Indigenous educator teaching First Nations Studies, I found it to be critical to use Indigenous frameworks to deliver
the program. With limited knowledge and understanding of IWK this proved challenging at times and I often turned to Qwaya for guidance. His insights provided clarification and instilled confidence in my role as a non-Indigenous teacher. Without an Indigenous framework woven into the fabric of public education, decolonization or Indigenization of education will fall short.

**Medicine Wheel.** With many Indigenous frameworks available, I gravitated towards the Medicine Wheel. It is not from the pacific northwest coast, but has roots with Plains Nations from the southern provincial regions of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. This framework offers an alternative way for students to understand and perceive their approach to education and life, which aligns with IWK. It is used as a metaphorical way to achieve balance. Through collaboration Chartrand (2012) provides an example of how Myra Laramee of the Anishinaabe First Nation uses the Medicine Wheel in the classroom:

She shared teachings about the Medicine Wheel with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students alike. The Medicine Wheel is an ancient symbol that originates with First Nations peoples. Today, many First Nations peoples use the Medicine Wheel as an educational tool for various teaching and learning purposes. (p. 149)

The story Laramee shared was from her Anishinaabe teachings. Having an Indigenous community member in the classroom to share their teachings enhances the experiences of students. Laramee’s teachings provide a strong narrative about IWK and how balance in life is not singular yet interconnected among many strands of being. While the Medicine Wheel is not specific to the local Indigenous Nations, I do find it an effective framework to explore the concept of interconnected relations because as Battiste (200) explains, “The Medicine Wheel illustrates symbolically that all things are interconnected and related, spiritual, complex, and powerful” (p. xxii). Through symbolic, circular representation of the Medicine Wheel, students are taught from an Indigenous framework and they are able to visualize interconnection. Living
in the pacific northwest coast, it is important to explore Indigenous communities across Canada to further students understanding of the diversity among the 634 First Nations in Canada.

During my K-12 educational experience I did not learn about Indigenous knowledge or Indigenous frameworks. It was not until later in life that I learnt about the idea of interconnectedness while at the University of Victoria. During my Indigenous Studies program I was brought to the Medicine Wheel from a faculty member. I learned about the circular nature of the wheel, and how the number four is important in many Indigenous cultures. The recurring number four was apparent in the four seasons, the four directions, the four parts of being, the four stages of life. The Medicine Wheel framework has rich layers that incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing and opens a window that allows educators to weave IWK into their pedagogy. It is but one Indigenous framework that illustrates the deep and rich connection Indigenous teachings offer. The most successful application of Indigenous frameworks is in collaboration with Indigenous community members and Elders who have an ancestral connection to the Medicine Wheel.

Co-created frameworks. Another approach of incorporating Indigenous frameworks that can move educators towards IWK has been achieved through a co-created framework developed by Richardson, Carriere and Bolbo. All three authors are of mixed Métis background and they have developed a “5-day explorative program that moves through colonial history and examines the current state of Indigenous affairs” (2017, p. 190). The program is co-created with the facilitator and participants in which individuals can share, be witnesses in their experiences, and offer support and care to others. The idea of a co-created program is specific to the individuals involved and is intended to create a culture of safety; a place where participants spiritual, emotional, mental and even physical beings can manifest. Utilizing this approach in a
classroom may be challenging, but beneficial and dependent upon the willing participation of the members involved. Richardson, Carrier, and Bolbo (2017) explain that a co-created framework forms “a culture of practice [is formed] through ongoing participation where participants learn to hold each other up, refrain from judgement and offer unconditional positive regard and confidentiality. Within that structure, various approaches to cultural safety are included” (p. 190). The program was designed for child and youth mental health practitioners in BC, but could be adopted in a school setting. To include similar cultural safety approaches into schools, teachers and students would have to come from a place of mutual respect and would require maturity among members.

**Culturally responsive pedagogy.** The impact that a culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) course offers is both valuable for teachers and advantageous for students. This particular course is offered during first year University and is officially titled Introduction to Academic Pedagogy: An Aboriginal Perspective. The course is co-created with the local Indigenous Nations, Aboriginal access studies, and the faculty of Education at University of British-Columbia’s Okanagan campus. The approach of cross-cultural collaboration among institution and Indigenous community is a step towards authentic IWK and reconciliation and through a CRP framework the course attempts to “address the cultural discontinuities between contemporary education and the emergent diversity in school populations at postsecondary institutions” (Ragoonaden, 2017, p. 26). This type of course that focuses on cultural efficacy is a model in education that is gaining strength. The course is an example of a potential framework that can be used to address the cultural bias that exist in education at all grade levels. As I have mentioned, the integration of Elders and community leaders in the public school system as a profound way to shift educational practices towards an accurate representation of diverse
knowledge among cultures. Ragoonaden (2017) further explains, “Culturally responsive pedagogy is situated in a framework that recognizes the rich and varied cultural wealth, knowledge, and skills of diverse learners” (p. 23). The CRP course is an innovative solution that acknowledges diversity amongst cultures and responds to the individuals that identify within distinct cultural backgrounds. The program provides Indigenous, and arguably all students, a chance to lay out a road map for success. Ragoonaden (2017) summarizes various scholars (Armstrong, 2005; Claypool & Preston, 2011; Preston & Claypool, 2013) definitions of CRP as:

It is a pedagogy that recognizes students’ differences, validates students’ cultures, and asserts that cultural congruence of classroom practices increases student’s success in schools. In conventional Western school structure, Eurocentric practices focusing on individual disciplines where students are required to learn in a linear fashion abound, to the detriment of those hidden, othered voices. (p. 25)

By validating individual cultural backgrounds in a safe space, as Ragoonaden outlines above, students are able to learn about the multiculturalism that surrounds them. Growth occurs when individual students’ cultures are validated and supported in academic settings. Learning is not always linear from point A to B. Knowledge acquisition involves a certain amount of cognitive application but also involves a social dynamic that supports spiritual, emotional, mental and physical areas of the self. Ragoonaden (2017) suggests that “The best predictors of success in education are life experiences, attitudes, disposition toward difference, and a commitment at individual and institutional levels to embody democratic and inclusive pedagogical practice such as CRP” (p. 26). It is clear that success in all students increases when cultural diversity is celebrated and represented. The unfortunate problem in some circumstances is when Indigenous peoples are silenced. Thus, by incorporating IWK into education, a progressive transformative educational framework surfaces and becomes real.
Arts-Based Research

Creation is defiance of ordinary verbal communication. Its origins lie in the ineffable part of one’s own being and are much closer to the silence of the universe than to its noises and verbalizations. Art is always just beyond language.

-Tawney, Art as Research, 2012

*Figure 4. What if?. Co-created digital image by Qwaya and myself (2018).*

The digital artwork above is a manifestation of a catch line that Qwaya and I developed over the course of our friendship. The image has a European city and an Indigenous reserve placed around the face. Its’ two worlds intersecting with the phrase “what if?” The saying “what if?” symbolizes the idea of an interwoven society not predicated on colonialism, but formed through mutual respect and understanding. What if Indigenous teachings were not oppressed from the government, where Indigenous and settlers lived together in harmony? What if Indigenous teachings were the dominant knowledge base in Canada? What if reserves, the Indian act and residential schools were never sanctioned?
**Arts-based research in academia.** Within the scope of this thesis ABR shares the methodology spotlight with academic writing. Where does art fit into academic research?

McNiff (2013) mentions the need to conform to academic conditions:

> Researchers striving to justify the use of arts and provide evidence of efficacy feel that methods of inquiry must conform to recognized values in order to influence policy and change. However, the insistence on categorical criteria for all research restricts originality and needless to say artistic freedom. (p. xiv)

As an artist and First Nations Studies educator, art presents a unique way of knowing for myself. The transcendence of art to make meaning provides insight beyond the written word. Art is experienced differently than other forms of communication. It involves infinite forms of expression and has the potential to engage with various senses. The merit of ABR specific to visual art is well reported as Tyler and Likova (2012) explain, “Visual art learning is reliant on a complex system of perceptual, higher cognitive, and motor functions, thus suggesting a shared neural substrate and strong potential for cross-cognitive transfer in learning and creativity” (p. 1).

The complex systems that visual art offers are congruent with academic standards. It is mentioned that cross-cognitive transfer in learning and creativity are outcomes of learning visual art which is why ABR is a valuable area of focus in academic research.

In academia there can come a time when the best form of representing research or addressing an issue is through art. McNiff (2013) provides a glimpse into arts validity in research, explaining “It simply needs to be accepted when it may be the most appropriate mode of addressing a problem or a need, especially within professions based on art as a way of knowing” (p. xv). Art, simply put, is a complex way of knowing. Indigenous cultures have used art as a way of knowing for thousands of years. Totem poles depicting rich history, story, and ancestry. Masks were used during ceremony as a visual manifestation of the spirit. My inquiry into collaborative art making with an Indigenous Elder through formal academic study has
benefitted Qwaya and myself. We are learning from each other through co-created art. This process is leading us towards reconciliation. What ways can art be taught to students?

**Art education and arts-integrated education.** As a teacher who uses art-based practices to provide content to students, I have to be aware of the processes I employ. Integrated art curriculum thus blends or combines art instruction with another subject area (Brewer, 2002, p. 31). Integrated art differs from art education. Brewer (2002) affirms that it is important for teachers to be aware of the nuances of integrated art curriculum as a vehicle to bolster curriculum using art, opposed to art education which is designated for the unique merits of the discipline of art:

> If the arts are not studied for their own content and ways of knowing, if they are always studied as humanities disciplines or as supports to other disciplines, the specific knowledge and skills associated with artistic modes of thought will not be presenting a student’s education. (p. 33)

As an art teacher, I use art practices to best serve the students in my classroom for them to gain competency in art, which is the potential to gain motor function, perceptual understanding, critical and creative thinking. Teachers have to be aware of their application of art in the classroom and ask whether or not they are integrating art into an activity or applying principles of art education. Eisner (2002) reinforces the idea that art has specific resources/materials that are devoted for students learning art, explaining that “Each class, devoted as it is to a subject matter whose aims and materials differ from those of others, defines the resources within which students must think and resolve some problem or complete some project” (p. 72). The unique resources necessary in art is reflected when Qwaya and myself use specific materials to make our masks: wood, carving blades, and measuring tools. Teachers must be aware of relevant art resources/materials when developing art activities. Also, if art integrated curricular approaches
are being performed in the classroom, the teacher must ask: why am I using art to achieve the desired learning outcome and is art the best approach?

As schools change and evolve there are many curricular oversights that administration is challenged to instill in teachers. Brewer (2002) points to the conflicts occurring in schools when arts are utilized in instruction, “There appears to be ever-growing political and administrative emphasis on integrated curricular approaches in public schools. Some of these may be good, but often others are used instrumentally and tend to diminish or devalue art instruction” (p. 32). The instrumental use of art often neglects the richness of arts unique qualities, such as the elements and principles of design or the use of imagination versus instruction. Art has suffered surface level application when integrated in other subjects’ areas. The same can be said for the integration of IWK in classrooms. The rich wealth and knowledge that Indigenous culture has to offer it is often presented in a generic fashion. Art and IWK face similar problems as they are recommended at the district level to be integrated throughout most curricular subject areas. A strong argument can be made for teaching to the strengths of a subject area.

Specific subjects touch upon specific ways of knowing and Brewer (2002) suggests that “the arts, he says, are affective and participatory, celebrating the life of feeling and imagination; science is objective, detached, precise, and rational; and the humanities deal with the analysis of moral actions” (p. 32). The approach of specific goals in advancing student knowledge based on the merits of a particular subject runs counter to the integrated approach. In the case of art educations compared to arts-integrated education, a case can be made that teachers need a solid foundation of knowledge, skills set and appreciation of art if they are going to integrate art-based practices into their classroom. A disservice is achieved when a teacher without a base knowledge
in the area of integration uses it in her lesson. Art must be valued for what it does and teachers must be careful when they integrate art or IWK into their subjects.

**Teaching Indigenous art and culture as a non-Indigenous person.** I have gained knowledge about Indigenous art through university courses, engaging with Indigenous art in the community and through my relationship with Qwaya. Indigenous art goes beyond the aesthetic and has a cultural and ancestral component associated with each work of art. As a non-Indigenous person teaching First Nations Studies, I can relate Fritzlan’s (2017) observation that “A non-Aboriginal educator teaching Aboriginal knowledge and ways of knowing risks exposing their own ignorance and entering into negotiation of personal relationships that take into account cultural differences” (p. 4). When I am in the presence of Indigenous Elders I often learn about the connection they share with artworks and culture. Having an Indigenous artist working with students is an effective way to achieve justice while honoring the iconography of the artists nation. As a non-Indigenous teacher, I am lucky to have Qwaya to help me understand Indigenous artwork. The reality is that non-Indigenous teachers can get it wrong.

Teachers are not always accurate when teaching about another culture. So, what do you do? Do you avoid teaching students about a different culture? Do you teach the content and risk doing a cultural injustice? Thinking about teaching Indigenous art to students, it is important to have students experience and appreciate the principles that make meaning in the art. In the case of Indigenous art, there is an inseparable connection between art and environment. By having Qwaya in my classroom and on field trips, students are better able to understand his perspective as it relates to Indigenous art and culture. I learned about Indigenous art through co-creating art and conversation with Qwaya. This process allowed me to gain understanding of Indigenous culture and to be better prepared to educate students more accurately and authentically. Through
story we were able to learn more about each other. He has gifted me with trust, and I have reciprocated it to him through sharing my personal stories. As well, Qwaya shared stories from his culture and lead an art lesson in my classroom. Filled with traditional teachings and IWK, his stories were monumental for students to gain authentic understanding of Indigenous art and culture.

**Connecting experience and art.** According to Fritzlan (2017), she had her students write about why they felt connected to an image, explaining that “After the students had chosen an image, they were invited to write about why they liked or felt connected to that image” (p. 5). This is a good strategy to reflect and to express how one feels about what they have created. It allows for introspection and further discovery. Taking this process one step forward, I would bring students into the local forest and create art from their experience. Then they could write about the artwork and their experience in nature. According to Qwaya when “All the discipline and all these things that were a part of it, that made me think about how strong our ancestors were, and how they were so, you had to be, in tune with nature” (Q. Sam, personal communication, June 15, 2018). Qwaya’s traditional Indigenous art style comes from his ancestors and his personal connection to nature. Being in tune means being present in your surroundings and being connected to the environment.

Indigenous art reveals the interconnected philosophy of their culture. One novel way to encourage students to discover and explore is through meandering as Fritzlan (2017) explains that “Allowing time for meandering as a teacher means to engage curiosity, discovery, and invention” (p. 6). Providing time for invention, discovery and curiosity is crucial for all student’s comprehension of self. Allowing students time to meander and create rather than performing for the teacher aligns them to their intrinsic being. As a non-Indigenous teacher, I often face the
challenge of justifying a nature walk or exploration as a valid pedagogical tool. However, when I have done these activities with Qwaya during our field trips, I found them to highly educational as Qwaya would share stories and encourage students to connect to the environment; listening to birds, watching the trees, and being present where some things we did on our field trips. I was forced to detach from EWWK and through IWK I learned to be present in my surroundings.

**Challenges with arts-based research.** The challenge with a purely ABR method is that the affiliate interpreting the data may come to a far-off conclusion. Also, to submit a thesis that is solely comprised of artworks would prove challenging when quantifying the outcomes of the research. Communicating outcomes in the form of artistic experimentation possess many challenges for the researcher and the beneficiaries of the research conducted (McNiff, 2013). To provide an artistic body of work possess the challenge of misinterpretation. Art also differs from written methodologies as it is a different medium.

Art allows for uncertainty. To maintain academic rigor, I have utilized a blended method that involves conversation and co-created artwork. Creating art can be stressful as new learning occurs, processes are unknown and outcomes are undetermined. Art poses a unique approach to research because of its subjective nature. This is partially because art challenges academic traditions and involves a deep connection with the creator. By having Qwaya co-create art with me, a world of possibilities is available.

**Art as transformative.** As the artist creates works of art they are experiencing the perceptual, motor, emotional and executive domains which results in transformation (Perminger, 2012). New knowledge is acquired, skills are developed and the artist grows in competency. From the lenses of a teacher, it is critical to be aware of the transformative power that art evokes in students. When the teacher provides time for artistic enquiry students gain to learn about
themselves. McNiff (2013) brings to light a characteristic of artist enquiry, “What holds us from seeing the obvious contributions that artistic enquiry can make to human understanding? I think it is tied to our inability to appreciate how personal enquiry can serve others and transcend introspection for its own sake” (p. 6). Introspection can be a great starting point for garnishing influence which leads to the creation of art. Based on my experiences, introspection is often an approach that leads to deep and profound existential understanding. Introspection allows the individual to form opinions on how they relate socially and what unique characteristic they possess. The human experience does not occur in isolation. People are social and our experiences have underlined similarities. These similarities can often be brought to light when someone experiences an artwork and transformation becomes possible. I propose that co-created art is a profound way to gain deep understanding of another person, and in turn their culture and ways of being.

**Co-creating art.** Co-creating art involves reciprocity. It is through the acceptance of individuality, not the demonization of individuality, which furthers authentic collaboration. Winters (2016) discusses how the uncertainty of enduring negotiation creates new artworks among collaborators and explains that “There are benefits in working collaboratively and thereby recognizing one’s individuality as an equal presence amongst others; and an art of friendship and friendships is being made available by these new collaborative enduring negotiations” (p. 4). The negotiation process is substantial when Qwaya and I are co-creating art. We exchange ideas, go back and forth and then settle on the next step. The process of allowing influence creates trust and arguably paves the way towards reconciliation. If Canada is to repair the broken relations with Indigenous peoples, it must start on a grassroots level.
Dialogue is an exchange of ideas which, in the case of this study, results in collaborative artwork. “One of the motivations for much contemporary art, the turning away from the artist as genius, is the outward looking social aspect of collaborative art production” (Winters, 2016, p. 2)

In the case with Qwaya and I, we are co-creating visual dialogues that take on a meaning that cannot be achieved singularly. Humility is necessary because the artwork will change with the influence of the collaborators. The self is growing through collaboration.

**Healing through art and the connection to place.** Throughout my time with Qwaya, healing has come up. The legacy of residential school has impacted Indigenous communities across Canada. Healing is an important process in order to move forward. It is no surprise that Indigenous peoples have been uprooted and moved from their traditional territory or their territory has been downsized into reserves. The idea of place is very important in IWK. In Ferrara’s (2004) writings, an Indigenous art therapy patient, Ella, explains that “she thinks with the landscape and not just about the landscape. Ella added that the animals, the plants, the berries, the sunset and sunrise are as much a part of her as her mother, her ancestors, and herself” (p. 90). Ella articulates the importance of being connected. It is through this connection to the landscape and her people where meaning and understanding are created. The parallel between Ella’s interconnected views and Indigenous iconography illustrates the connection of Indigenous art and the tapestry of life.

Qwaya often mentions this idea of being connected, and that he has healed through connecting and being present in nature. His art often has an undertone of transformation and healing. Qwaya shared, “One of the most important ways to connect to culture is through medicine. Traditional medicine is all things from the land. It's from the environment” (Q. Sam, personal communication, June 15, 2018). When art symbolizes healing, people gain from
knowledge embedded in the artwork. Indigenous medicine allows the land to heal us, and it is important to respect and preserve the land which gives us all we need. Our co-created art reflects the environment and Indigenous medicine.

Conclusion

Indigenous students are educationally disadvantaged because they have to adapt to EWWK. By incorporating IWK in education Indigenous students have a better chance of success. Attention is brought to the importance of incorporating IWK into mainstream education especially as it relates to Indigenous students, as “Indigenous pedagogy may also offer the hope for Indigenous students to thrive in educational settings where they are currently leaving as ‘drop outs’ or ‘push outs’, depending on one’s perspective” (Richardson, Carrier & Bolbo, 2017, p. 194). While progress is being made towards the incorporation of IWK, the educational system has traditionally failed Indigenous students. These students are left in a setting where they must conform to Euro-western traditions and often struggle with the academic demands that contrast their identities. Colonization has shaped schools across Canada and have been dominated with Euro-western values.

In this chapter, I reviewed the literature connected to this research study. I first discussed Euro-western and Indigenous ways of knowing. Next, I described how Indigenous people have suffered in Canada since the dominance of colonization and having been seen as the “other”, Indigenous peoples were placed in residential schools, forced to assimilate and went through a cultural genocide. The indoctrination of Indigenous peoples caused socio-economic disparity. I explored the variations in Indigenous Nations within Canada and examined the importance of Elders in the classroom.
Then I looked at specific Indigenous frameworks that could be used in schools. I found an array of frameworks that were used in institutions and academia across various level of education. By looking at various approaches I was better able to render unique ways to incorporate IWK in classrooms. I looked to the BC ministry of education to find concrete evidence of IWK in the curriculum. I touched upon ways in which we can Indigenize education and found that the Medicine Wheel is an IWK model that can be used for all students to better understand IWK. I found a way in which teachers and students can be active members in creating the content of a course through an intelligent specific co-created framework. I finished this section by suggesting that a CRP program can be an effective way to validate all cultural backgrounds. This moved me towards art.

Art connects us in a different way than words. Arts-based research is a novel way to do research in academia. I discussed the merits and downfalls of arts education compared to arts-integrated education. As a non-Indigenous person, I shared my struggle teaching Indigenous art and culture to students. Through the process of connecting experience to art we are able to better understand the hidden meanings in arts. Next, I reviewed the challenges with ABR and its unique paradigm. The transformative beauty of art was explored and finally Qwaya and I learned many valuable lessons throughout the process of co-creating art. This chapter concludes by looking into healing through art through the connection to place.

In the following chapter I will touch upon my approach to research design. I will then share my research methodology (1) Indigenous, and (2) participatory. I will then review my research methods (1) co-created artworks, and (2) conversation. I review the procedures that were followed throughout the thesis and bring forth reliability and validity as it pertains to my study.
Chapter 3- Procedures and Methods

Introduction

In this chapter I begin by explaining the research design and how I use Indigenous and participatory methodologies. I found these methodologies to be relevant to the study I was conducting. Then, I review the qualitative analysis that I employed during my study. I investigate general coding principles, narrative coding, theming data and analytic memos. Next, I delve into the two methods used (1) co-created artwork and (2) conversation. Towards to the end of the chapter I touch upon procedures followed, reliability and validity.

Research Design

My research design is driven by arts-based methods within qualitative research, specifically using Indigenous and participatory research methodologies. Already having a relationship with Qwaya, I asked him if he would be willing and open to co-create art and share his teachings and perspectives. He agreed and we began co-creating artworks and had five formal recorded conversations that I transcribed. I gave him a copy of the transcripts to member check. From the co-created artworks and conversations data was collected and put into themes. Through narrative coding I was able to bring forth importance information relevant to the study. Finally, analytic memos were used in collaboration with Qwaya to interpret the co-created artworks.

Research Methodology

Indigenous methodology. I choose to use an Indigenous methodology because my participant is an Indigenous Elder and because I teach First Nations Studies. I was curious about Indigenous methodologies and how IWK can be used in schools. Porsanger (2004) provides an enlightening view of the place Indigenous methodology occupies:
The indigenous approaches to research on indigenous issues are not meant to compete with, or replace, the Western research paradigm; rather, to challenge it and contribute to the body of knowledge of indigenous peoples about themselves and for themselves, and for their own needs as peoples, rather than as objects of investigation (p. 1).

Indigenous methodology is different than traditional western research practices. It is an alternative way to research which is not based on empirical data or scientific approaches. Indigenous methodology is based on reciprocity, IWK, and creating connections with the participants instead of objectifying Indigenous peoples as objects of research. Indigenous methodology involves a collaborative approach of restoration and protecting sacred knowledge. It is unfortunate that Indigenous peoples have been used as objects of research to inform racist policy and government sanctions. Porsanger (2004) reflects on this, explaining that “Research has been used as a tool of the colonization of Indigenous peoples and their territories. Looked at from the Indigenous people’s perspective. The term ‘research’ has been linked to colonialism” (p. 3). The history Indigenous peoples have endured under colonial rule is deplorable. Indigenous people faced research practices that further segregated them into reserves and caused forcible separation of Indigenous children from their family by residential schools. With that said, Indigenous methodologies differ from western methodologies as they are designed with ethical and cultural approaches to the study of Indigenous peoples.

Since my research involves an Indigenous Elder it was ethical and necessary to use an Indigenous methodology. Our research went beyond traditional western paradigms that were previously linked to colonization. Our research involved mutual exchange of knowledge, influence and reciprocity. The opportunity to generate knowledge came through conversation and co-creating art. We came to discuss the idea of ‘connecting to the land’. Qwaya explained how this is important to him and how his people connect to the land. Later that week we took a
plunge into the freezing cold lake to connect to water, a traditional teaching his parents taught him and a teaching that he gifted to me. That is Indigenous methodology. It transcends the written word and observation. It is ancestral knowledge connected through experience.

Indigenous knowledge differs among Indigenous Nations, community and tribe. The First Nation that Qwaya comes from is Ahousaht, on the pacific northwest coast of Vancouver Island. His people are connected in a specific way and therefore the knowledge he has shared with me is contextualized to his experience learning from Ahousaht people. Indigenous scholar Margaret Kovach has Plains Cree and Saulteaux ancestry and she is a member of the Pasqua First Nation. She explains that “In a research project which incorporates an Indigenous methodology, the paradigm (nest) would be Indigenous knowledges with specific contextual knowledge assumptions emerging from a particular tribal knowledge base” (2010, p. 2). Since there are 634 Indigenous Nations within Canada, it is important that specificity directs the research being conducted. In my case, I acknowledge that the knowledge being shared to me from Qwaya is from Ahousaht and that it is unique to the land he grew up in. A mutual respect enabled our relationship to grow and learn about each other’s world views and individual perspectives.

If there is a relationship between the researcher and the participant it has often been considered a bias approach to traditional research. Kovach (2010) brings forth, “While certain western research paradigms frown upon the relational because of its potential to create bias research, Indigenous methodologies embrace relational assumptions as central to their core epistemologies” (p. 3). An Indigenous methodology embraces the importance of relationship within research. My research with Qwaya was largely based on mutual respect and the understanding that this work is a reciprocal process, which was fundamental to the study. Qwaya has expressed to me throughout our relationship that he is getting hope that his traditional
knowledge and teachings are being listened to and respected. “What I’ve noticed and what I feel, what I’m getting from you is hope” (Q. Sam, personal communication, September 12, 2018).

Qwaya is not concerned with the color of a person’s skin, rather he believes that the spirit of his teachings will benefit all people. The truth is that people in his community and outside his community are learning from his teachings. That is why he is compelled to share his knowledge with myself, in culture groups, in schools and in the community.

**Participatory methodology.** The idea of co-creating knowledge is congruent with IWK. Through participation and experience new knowledge can be manifested.

What is needed are methods that promote greater equality in knowledge creation in which the *co-creation of knowledge* and appreciation of diverse perspectives and epistemologies are possible. We need to enable people to develop critical political, ecological, epistemological and spiritual awareness through learning and sharing processes (Seedat, Suffla & Christie, 2017, p. 62).

Qwaya and I shared knowledge in a process of co-creating artwork and conversation that was mutually beneficial and respectful. We both gained insight into each other’s mindset while working through the process of the study. The participatory methodology does not give hierarchical dominance of researcher or participant, yet provides a platform in which both members share, gain, and understand. A participatory methodology is a way to understand complex knowledge through experiential participation.

**Qualitative Analysis**

**Coding.** The beauty of codes is all around us. “A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 3). I aligned myself to essence-capturing rooted in visual data through conversation and co-created artwork. When co-created artwork emerges as research an essence is captured and brought to life, which
can be challenging to describe with words. It is something that has to be experienced to understand the relationship that occurs between two people creating artwork. Within this context—collaboratively creating art with an Indigenous and settler Euro-western—mutual reconciliation occurs during the co-creation process. Reconciliation is defined as “the action of making a view or belief compatible with another” (Oxford dictionary, 2018). It is the process that Qwaya and I went through. The willing participation of co-creating art is finding a way to visually express reciprocity. With that said, the artist brings a unique perspective to the co-created artwork that must be rooted in humility. When authenticity is brought to the process of co-creating artwork then an experience of reconciliation occurs. Whereas, if the artwork has no value or authenticity for the creators, or appreciation, then the process of making art and reconciliation will not be meaningful.

**Narrative coding.** Narrative coding is appropriate because it links with the conversational method. As Saldaña (2013) points out, “Narrative Coding is appropriate for exploring intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences and actions to understand the human condition through story, which is justified in and of itself as a legitimate way of knowing” (p. 132). The relationship that developed between Qwaya and myself took participation and effort. We both had to show up with a willingness to be open minded, share, and learn about a different and contrasting culture. We also had to take our ideas and concepts and co-create artwork, which captures a visual narrative. The narrative inquiry used in this research was “not a solitary research act but a collaborative venture between the researcher and participants” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 134). We explored and have demonstrated a way to collaborate between two people, from different cultures. We forged a new path, a new way of understanding, a new way of gathering knowledge. It is a beautiful thing when two cultures with historical
friction can come together and co-create something beautiful and learn from each other through conversation. It is imperative, in this case, that the data collection and analysis processes weave Indigenous ways of knowing and Euro-western ways of knowing.

**Theming data.** The way I categorized the data is through broad themes that emerged through our conversations. Saldaña (2013) explains theming as, “an extended phrase or sentence that identifies what a unit of data is about and/or what it means” (p. 198). The findings and interpretations in the themes are presented organically in a way that weaves co-created artwork and our conversations. Furthermore, my research questions are answered and woven throughout the themes. It is important to note that the themes that emerged were present during informal conversation and discussion.

**Analytic memos.** After we created the artwork, we captured our interpretations with analytic memos. “Rather than one-word or short phrase codes, the researcher’s careful scrutiny of and reflection on images, documented through field notes and analytic memos, generate language-based data that accompany the visual data” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 52). Qwaya and I analyzed the co-created artwork together, through conversation and writing analytic memos that we placed on the artwork. The analytic memos, manifested as yellow lined sticky notes that were used to capture: (1) detailed elements of the painting, (2) suggestions and ideas for the artworks next steps, and (3) general interpretations of the artwork. Analytic notes captured key thoughts and interpretations from our conversations.

**Methods**

**Co-created artwork.** One of the methods used in the study was co-created artwork. Qwaya and I co-created artwork over 8 months. We would meet when convenient and did not have a routine schedule. To begin our meeting, we would usually have a cup of tea and converse.
We would go into the studio and co-create art. We would brainstorm different ideas and then get to work. The artwork was created in a reciprocal fashion. Together we merged our styles and learned from each other. Since we come from different backgrounds we would share different techniques and approaches to creating the artwork. This interwoven approach allowed for unique artworks that transcended our individuality and culture, while at the same time honoring it.

**Conversation.** The conversational method employed is best described as a dialogic approach to gathering knowledge which is in congruence with IWK. The spirit of the dialogic approach is based on the reciprocation of conversation, relationship building, value discussions and the importance placed on the development of the individuals involved as they relate to a complex social community (Arnett, 1992, p. 16). Qwaya and I shared many stories. We discussed family, connecting to the land, healing, suffering, community and education to name a few topics. Within our stories we shared morals, teachings and humor. As I listened to Qwaya speak, there was usually an element of gifting ancestral knowledge. Through him, I was reaching into thousands of years of knowledge from his stories that were passed down to him. It was powerful. Qwaya was stepping into my world through my stories. It brought him back to when he attended Emily Carr Art School and how he learned a new way of thinking from his time there. Qwaya often tells me how I have helped him to see in a way that differs from his traditional teachings. Storytelling is powerful for all people and cannot be underestimated as a source to gather knowledge. The dialogue between two people is participatory and organic. It involves a relationship between the people involved in the conversation. Conversation interweaves thoughts, ideas, and beliefs.

At times I utilized open-ended, semi-structured interview questions, as known in the western academic paradigm. I chose the semi-structured interview questions when I was seeking
an answer to a thought or question that needed clarification. Most of the time it was an organic conversation between us. On the other hand, interviews are designed for one person to give while the other receives; reciprocity is not usually highlighted. Conversation allows both people to think in new ways and gain understanding from each other. The mutual growth that occurred, as expressed in our conversations, has opened a metaphorical portal into each other’s lives. Conversation has encouraged mutual respect and has broken down barriers of the “other”.

**Procedures Followed**

The process I undertook throughout the thesis are as follows. I provided Qwaya, the participant, with a recruitment script (APPENDIX 1). The recruitment outlined Qwaya’s role and how the information gathered will be used. I gave Qwaya the recruitment script during a friendly visit. Qwaya was interested in participating, and because of that, I provided him with a consent form (APPENDIX 2). After the consent form was signed and collected, the recorded conversations began and the co-created artworks took shape. A total of 5 recorded audio conversations occurred between us. I used prompting questions on occasion while at other times an organic beginning to the conversation ensued. I then transcribed the conversations and provided Qwaya with copies for him to member check. The member checking process was very important in maintaining Indigenous methodology of sharing and collaborating knowledge. The conversations were then coded into themes and used as data.

The co-created artwork approach was less formal. We gathered many times to co-create artwork and had non-structured conversations. The artwork was collaboratively coded using analytic memos and analyzed as data by both researcher and participant. Continuing the dialogic approach, we shared our thoughts and knowledge about the artworks which were then used for the coding and data analysis process.
Reliability and Validity

The reliability and validity of this research is in part structured on IWK. I would like to acknowledge the Indigenous traditional method of passing knowledge through storytelling and experiential learning. Aligned with Indigenous story principles, “The power of story work creates a synergistic effect among the story, the context in which the story is used, the way the story is told, and how one listens to make meaning” (Archibald, 1997, p.1). It is presumed, through a trusted relationship, that the stories shared are both valid and reliable. This qualitative research study is filtered through the knowledge and perspective of the researcher and participant. If the research study were to be duplicated with a new researcher and participant, the data collected will yield different results because of the complexity and uniqueness of the individuals.

The reliability and validity are also based on traditional academic standards. The transcript produced a document that captured the conversations verbatim. Participant member-checking of the transcribed conversations increases the reliability and validity of this study. The use of narrative coding and analytic memos supported the production of valid data. With that said, the findings and conclusions will alter depending upon the researcher(s) and the participant(s) involved.

Conclusion

In this chapter I explained the research design and how I used Indigenous and participatory methodologies in this study. Afterwards, I touched upon qualitative analysis through an explanation of coding, narrative coding, theming data and analytic memos. Next, I dove into the two methods of research (1) co-created artwork and (2) conversation. I found these methods to be relevant in this study, as I was exploring IWK and reconciliation. Thankfully
Qwaya agreed and consented to the study and we followed the procedures outlined. When conducting a study that resembles IWK it is important to understand that the stories shared are unique to the context in which they are shared. I explained how reliability and the validity will vary depending on the individuals involved. In the following chapter I share the results and findings from the co-created artwork and conversations.
Chapter 4 – Results and Findings

Introduction

What happens when two people from different cultural backgrounds co-create artwork? The process enables co-created knowledge to become a single unified tangible artifact. The artwork is then interpreted by the viewer who can create new understanding from the artwork. The examination of culture through collaboration and conversation, as Qwaya and I have pursued, is a small but important process when considering reconciliation on a larger scale, such as in education or government affairs. The key is that both members must come together in a respectful and reciprocal way to move forward.

In this chapter I explain the results and collaborative findings from Qwaya and myself through the use of co-created work and conversational methods. I used two main principles of coding to quantify my findings: (1) narrative coding and (2) theming coding. Analytic memos were then used to capture interpretations of the co-created artworks. Throughout the process of co-creating art and our conversations, three broad themes emerged: (1) the importance of culture and traditions, (2) connections to land and the environment, and (3) community and self. Within each theme I provide detailed findings that weave ideas, interpretations and findings from the co-created artwork and conversations. Each theme is accompanied with artwork and quotes from our conversations to help paint the picture.
Theme I: The Importance of Culture and Tradition

Figure 5. Nuu-chah-nulth mask. Co-created cedar masks by Qwaya and myself (2017-2018).

The above figure depicts an artwork that is in the Nuu-chah-nulth style of mask making. When I was creating this artwork with Qwaya, he mentioned to me how being present is important for his people. He articulated to be present when carving, but more important, to be present in culture and when connecting to the environment and people around you. Visualize the tree that gave you the wood to carve, the water that nurtured the tree to live, in essence, to be connected to what you are creating. In a recorded conversation he says “It’s good to be an artist, but without culture, I am just drifting. It’s something I’m fighting for” (Q. Sam, personal communication, May 23, 2018). The importance of culture and tradition is a theme that came up
frequently during our conversations. It should be noted that in reviewing the first transcript conversation, ‘culture’ was mentioned 33 times. It was mainly a word spoken by Qwaya (he said it 32 times and I said it one time), which is an immediate reflection of what is important to him.

Through observation I have witnessed that many middle school students, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, are not connected to their culture or lack the awareness of their cultural practices and traditions. I have an introductory activity with my students in my First Nations Studies program that is a group share, asking: what is my ancestry? Some students can name their ancestry while others cannot. I have observed that the students who can identify their ancestry are often confident and proud when they can do so, and the others who cannot name their ancestry are left wondering and without an understanding of personal cultural context. I have found that Qwaya has a way in which he provokes me to explore my ancestry and culture. He usually does this by explaining his own culture and then challenges me to identify and explore my own cultural practices and ancestry.

The mask we made has an Indigenous ancestral connection. The mask is more than artwork, and usually masks are worn in ceremonies to evoke the spirit. Qwaya shared a story when he and his Father made a mask together, explaining “Making a mask with my Dad, we didn’t know what the heck we were doing, but we made it for a dance. To me that was the most I felt proud. I was happy to be doing it” (Q. Sam, personal communication, June 15, 2018). Qwaya explains how he learned through experience. Making a mask with his Father was something that Qwaya felt proud of. I find that students can be hesitant when doing something beyond their comfort zone, yet it is the act of doing that leads to growth. Indigenous ways of knowing is fundamentally rooted in experiential learning.
During the mask making process he would tell me not to rush, not to force the blade. He said, “If you push too hard, you can hurt yourself or ruin the mask” (Q. Sam, personal communication, May 23, 2018). When I carved into the mask Qwaya was teaching me a skill that was passed down to him. Someone taught Qwaya, and someone taught Qwaya’s teacher and so on and so forth. The achievement and knowledge of carving masks is passed along from many generations. Thinking about my research question, how may this knowledge gained impact the teaching within an Aboriginal Education program for a settler artist teacher? Today, I have gained experience of IWK through co-creating art and conversation with Qwaya. With this experience and knowledge, I better understand IWK for the program because it has been modeled for me by Qwaya. He gifted me the experience of making a cedar mask and taught me Indigenous values along the way. I felt that I gained Indigenous ancestral knowledge through our collaboration. In a sense, we transcended boundaries, moved towards Indigenization and enacted reconciliation. By working with Qwaya he has pushed me to learn about who I am, where I come from and what my ancestral connections are.

Our culture is very intimate, it’s very personal. In my own sense of looking at life and teachings, education, I'm trying to find a balance for me, for my family, and to make a connection to anyone who wants to look at their life in a different way. (Q. Sam, personal communication, May 23, 2018)

Spending time with Qwaya has caused me to look at my life in a different manner. He has challenged me to learn the stories of my parents, grandparents and my ancestors. As well, he has helped me to think about my culture and where I come from. From his teachings I find myself thinking of nature in a way that is aligned to medicine and healing. I think about the interconnected elements of the environment, like how people, trees, plants and the earth all rely on water and rain for survival. My perspective has evolved because of my relationship with Qwaya.
Coming together.

Figure 6. Abstraction. Co-created painting by Qwaya and myself (2018).

Our narratives came together through co-created artwork and new meaning was created. The following painting intertwines Indigenous forms with abstract expressionism. This painting represents an interwoven, or coming together, of two art traditions and two personal artistic expressions. To Qwaya and myself, this painting is what reconciliation looks like. Two worlds/cultures coming together in a vibrant interwoven artwork. The rejection of boundaries to make something new and unique.

During one of our meetings, Qwaya and I discussed the process of creating artwork. “I couldn’t see really myself making, you know, art, without culture. You know, it’s to me, I think it would be just flat, art would have no life” (Q. Sam, personal communication, June 15, 2018). He mentions how art without culture would have no meaning. While I typically make art to create something beautiful or experimental, Qwaya creates art to bring his culture to life. For
Qwaya, culture runs through veins and he does not separate state, spirit, art or culture. They are all interconnected to each other and are a part of his existential make up. Genuine art reflects who we are, and who we are reflects the culture in which we were raised.

I asked him what he thinks about the painting above. He mentioned that dots would look good, and that it would make it look like a button blanket. It became a learning experience as he took a paint brush and showed me how he would add dots to the painting. He explained how you use the backside of the brush to apply the paint and use a blow dryer to dry it quickly. While this may seem like a simple exchange of knowledge, it was, in essence, reciprocity. Later I showed him how I mix many colors to create new colors. I showed him how I use tones to create gradation in my work. These types of exchanges happened countless times over the course of our relationship. It is our partnership that transcends boundaries and the colonial idea of the “other”. The art is an objective expression of the action of reconciliation.
Theme II: Connection to the Land and the Environment

Figure 7. Our land, oil land. Co-created painting by Qwaya and myself (2017-2018).

The artwork depicts an Indigenous shaman on the right side of the painting sitting on the edge of a cliff side. The shaman is in transformation between a human and a thunderbird, the physical world and the spirit world. He peers over the landscape to see strands of human made deterioration. The creatures represented, in traditional shapes and forms, are connected to the environment. The shaman holds his spear as a guardian tool to protect the environment, yet the damage has already been done.

At the top middle area of the painting it appears that a subtle moon is behind the clouds. Qwaya shares “A full moon is a sacred time in my culture. It is also the time to start a quest. My people are connected to the environment” (Q. Sam, personal communication, September 12, 2018). Indigenous teachings are connected to the environment. Qwaya mentions how his
teachings are connected to nature and that the medicine is found in nature. In order to make this planet well again, we have to return to nature. Qwaya’s perspective and spirituality is revealed in one of our conversations, “nature provides everything we need. Nature is our medicine. Traditional medicine is all things from the land. It’s from the environment. For myself, that is where our connections to our highest self, our spirituality” (Q. Sam, personal communication, October 3, 2018). Being around Qwaya and listening to him speak about how he connects to the land and Indigenous medicine has impacted the way I perceive healing. I have a greater understanding of how his people view the world. Our collaboration has lifted a veil of Euro-western ignorance from my eyes, through his ability to bring me into his culture and teachings. Before I was confused, and very uncomfortable when speaking about Indigenous peoples’ way of life, and how they are connected to the land. It took this process of co-creating art and conversation for me to feel equipped with an authentic understanding of IWK.

What has Qwaya gained form me from our conversations and co-created artwork? He explains “If there’s any weakness inside me, it’s my education. The one thing I learned, that has built this bridge, between me and you, is that education is the way out of our situation” (Q. Sam, personal communication, October 6, 2018). I invited Qwaya into my classroom many times, and had an open door if he ever wanted to stop by. He shares that he has grown from education and that the future success of his people, to reduce the struggle, is through education. His reference to ‘our situation’ reflects the socio-economic struggle that Indigenous people endure. His sentiment is shared in the words of Chartrand, “Education is the key to improving the lives of Indigenous peoples and to improving Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations across Canada” (Red River College News, 2017, para. 5). While Qwaya typically speaks about environment from the perspective of nature, school is also an environment. Both Chartrand and Qwaya find that
education is a way to improve the lives of Indigenous people and to create positive relations across cultures. It is imperative that the school environment is conducive to Indigenous students so that they can show their strong leadership skills, creativity, innovation and ability to lead successful lives in academic environments.

I brought Qwaya into my world by sharing stories about my military upbringing and how I was connected to the Catholic church. I shared stories about my cousins and how we would connect to nature by running in the forest and playing games. We would jump in the lake at our cottage and swim to the nearest island. I brought him into my life through storytelling which provided him with context of my being. He brought me into his world and I brought him into mine. We shared stories of struggles we faced. Our open conversations deepened the authenticity of our relationship. I realize that we are not that different and that the human condition is cross-cultural. By sharing personal and shared stories with students, they are able to witness how relationships are built and this provides a platform towards reconciliation.
Medicine and healing.

*Figure 8. Fishing with the sun.* Co-created mixed medium artwork by Qwaya and myself (2018).

The sun crested over the stormy ocean, paint splattered on paper. In this picture, I see myself and Qwaya fishing, but more deeply we are together on the rough ocean. Qwaya shared stories about fishing on the west coast and being in storms. The sun is the protector and provides guidance, as I interpret the image. Being connected to the environment and standing up to protect it, is a high priority for Indigenous communities. When Qwaya was with me on a school field trip he shared his teachings and stories about his ancestors. They were fisherman and whalers on the pacific northwest coast of Vancouver Island. He told the students that medicine is found in the ocean, in the forest and in nature.

Throughout our relationship I have learned about him and his people. He is cultural leader who represents his people:
That has always been a big part of teachings, culture and medicine, is making that connection, to be in tune. That's kind of what I think and feel about being connected. I talk about the teachings and medicine, it is about being connect, going out and being alive (Q. Sam, personal communication, June 15, 2018).

I have come to realize that western medicine is very different than Indigenous medicine. When I used to think of medicine, I would think about pills, drugs, doctors, hospitals, and others things that can be externally sourced. For Qwaya medicine comes from nature. In January Qwaya took me to the lake and we jumped in the lake with snow all around us. He brought me into his world and showed me what he would do when he was young. He would connect to nature, to the water and for Qwaya it is his way to be alive, to be in tune. It is the medicine that saved him and he wants to share it with others. From being around him and his stories, I have been able to better understand his people’s way of life.

Reflecting on Figure 8, the splattered paint was applied much like nature - randomly and instinctually. The drops landed where they needed to. My conversations with Qwaya are like the paint splatters of the painting, the narratives are intuitive and co-created. I have discovered through my interactions with Qwaya, that our artwork progresses and moves like our intuitive conversation. We are both unsure of each other's next artistic decision but since we have gained trust in one another, we do not worry. The reciprocal process is repeated many times over when co-creating art. Repetition is a great way to become connected to each other while inviting transformation.
Theme III: Community and Self

Figure 9. Thunderbird drum. Co-created drum by Qwaya and myself (2018).

The drum represents Qwaya and I coming together to co-create artwork. According to Qwaya the thunderbird is a mystical and spiritual bird that brings thunder. The bird is soaring out of the ground, bursting from the self and thrusting forward from the land. The lightning bolts declare “I am here” and thunder ensues. With confidence, the thunderbird spreads its wings, makes noise and flies.
The art that Qwaya and I have made has an individual component and an ancestral historical narrative. The Indigenous shapes have been used over thousands of years. Art is an extension of ideas, thoughts and the inner workings of our minds. New meaning emerged with our co-created artwork and new invention created novelty and excitement. A juxtaposition that is both introspective and alluring. We involved the self, each other and culture.

I have found that our collaborative efforts have created a safe social space in the art studio. The social space where artists collaborate and make art is not singular as Winters (2016) explains, “Making art in a social space that includes at least other artists, thereby excluding the authority of any one artist as a singular subjective voice” (p. 1). The inhabited space becomes plural and the artists are beyond introspection and are interwoven. The artist is now working with another artist to co-create a visual narrative. In the case of teachers, the social space is the classroom. As a teacher, I have used the collaborative process Qwaya and I established. I have found that students develop a group identity, similar to what Qwaya and myself created. The main difference between students’ projects and what Qwaya and I did is the magnitude, commitment, and depth of the process. With that said, students benefit and learn from each other through reciprocal collaboration.

The benefit of reciprocity through co-creating art is evident in our work. Our artwork weaves our cultures together creating a new contemporary expression. Traditional Indigenous art practice converge with European contemporary art practices. These two different art traditions come together in an interwoven art piece that is a creation of something unique and unachievable without the other. In essence our co-created artwork is a physical object that symbolizes reconciliation. An Indigenous person and a European person working together, co-creating
something new, based on mutual respect, an open mind to try something new, and friendship. That is reconciliation.

I am constantly learning about Indigenous culture, traditions and practices when I am around Qwaya. I am fortunate that he is open and shares this information with me. His stories are filled with valuable teachings. “Nuances of narrative can become richly complex when the researcher explores the participant’s subject positioning and presentation of self” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 132). With all the rich and vibrant stories about culture and teachings, the impact of residential school plays a significant influence on his community and his narrative as an Indigenous person. In Canada, Indigenous peoples cannot escape the painful reality of intergenerational trauma caused by residential schools. It is important for students to understand the history of residential schools to better understand the struggle that Indigenous communities face.

The importance of family, you know, that’s a big part of, you know, our pre-contact. I’m sure our family had everything, you know, and after contact, there was a big change. In fact, there was a lot of, you know, stuff that destroyed our families, and created a lot of, you know, hardship, created a lot of hurt, created a lot pain, and shame and guilt and anger and denial, you name it. That’s what we’ve become, from the churches from the residential schools (Q. Sam, personal communication, June 15, 2018).

The hardship and hurt of Indigenous communities from residential schools is still felt today and is still a part of the narratives and stories of Indigenous communities. Pre-contact, families and communities were vibrant with teachings, culture and traditions. These communities were not subjected to the traumas of colonialism and lived as their ancestors did for thousands of years. How do we reconcile Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities? This complex question cannot be answered in one simple way with one outcome. Based on my collaborative experience with Qwaya, one solution for creating a positive change in the large context of communities, is to be the best possible version of yourself. We discussed Indigenous communities and how they can
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improve. “To lift these dreams that I have for our people, you know, and I believe art and culture is a good thing to have. Keeping those teachings alive. Making that reconnection, to nature and to the real teachings”. From Qwaya’s perspective the teachings do not belong to one person, but the teachings from his ancestors are meant for all people. His teachings have an underlined principle that you must protect and preserve yourself, your community and the environment.

Qwaya has shared with me that I have given him hope that his teachings are being passed down to anyone willing to listen. He is also hopeful for the future generation and cherishes his interactions with students in schools. Qwaya is hopeful that his people and non-Indigenous people will see the value in IWK and practices.

During our conversations his Father and Uncles have come up many times. Since, communities comprises of many people with various degrees of knowledge, we intrinsically learn from each other and grow from the people we surround ourselves with. Qwaya mentioned in our conversations that his Uncles and his Father passed down many of his teachings to him, and that he is doing the same with his son.

When there is a hunt, the hunters will get ready for it by going into nature for months at a time. They are preparing themselves for the hunt to catch a whale. By connecting to nature and the environment, even in the really cold months, you are making yourself strong. The hunter sacrifices to feed the village. (Q. Sam, personal communication, October 6, 2018)

This story was shared with him by his Father and he shared it with his son and it was shared with me. It is a story of sacrifice to feed the village. A story that describes the tradition of his people who were whale hunters. There is a Nuu-chah-nulth word that Qwaya has used many times, uusimch. The meaning is to be strong, to connect with the environment when your struggling. The whalers getting ready for the hunt were focused on uusimch.

When taking on an important task, or facing a particularly tough problem, we accompany our daily prayers with ritual bathing, most often high in the
mountains, as close as possible to the snow. During these ritual prayers, which we call uusimch, we rub our bodies vigorously with herbs and greens (Joseph, 2005, p. 47).

It is through an Indigenous Elder that authentic teachings can be illuminated in schools. The teachings connect students with something beyond standard curriculum and shed light on IWK. Indigenous teachings can teach students ways to face struggles and to overcome them. Furthermore, local Indigenous teachings give voice to Indigenous students who are members of the local Indigenous Nations. When schools place emphasis on honoring local Indigenous teachings accompanied with Elders, the attitude of the colonial “other” is reduced. Qwaya’s willingness to go to schools and share culture and his teachings is a monumental leap in creating community links between schools and Indigenous communities. It is a step towards decolonizing education while heading towards an interwoven educational system.

**Personal honesty.**

![Figure 10. Skull. Co-created digital image by Qwaya and myself (2018).](image)
Figure 10 is a photograph that was taken when Qwaya and I were creating art in the studio. We took photos of each other and this image became a digital artwork layered with skulls. Qwaya has shared his connection to residential school with me. While he never attended residential school, his brothers and sisters were forced to attend. He mentions how residential school broke his people and caused cultural disconnect. The skulls represent death and the carnage of residential school, not only to Qwaya, but to all Indigenous communities. Likewise Figure 10 represents the personal adversity that Qwaya has overcome.

Our conversations often lead to deep meaningful subject matter. Personal narratives emerged of adversity struggle and perseverance:

I look at it as, culture changed me. It was culture that helped me. Culture is what saved me and it is culture that changed me into the person I am today, if it wasn’t for culture, I would be probably be in a bad spot. (Q. Sam, personal communication, May 23, 2018)

Our meaningful conversations often lead to areas of our personal life. Through honest exchange of personal narratives and storytelling we grew with empathy. Our conversations went beyond the surface and at times delved into territories of the sacred. That is the beautiful gift that a trusting relationship offers, the ability to open up and share sacred elements of the soul. In an educational setting, sharing personal information about ourselves involves humility. Exchanging meaningful stories is an act of vulnerability that requires strength. Not all teachers are willing to make themselves vulnerable, however I have noticed that when I make myself vulnerable students often reciprocate with their own stories. When students share their personal stories in the classroom and make themselves vulnerable deeper understanding occurs for all who listen. This power to connect individuals through story is an IWK that builds social competency, empathy, and requires humility.
Conclusion

Co-created artwork and conversation has brought our worlds together. Through art our ideas become palpable. The co-created artworks that Qwaya and I produced all have the spirit of reconciliation. The exchange of influence that occurs during the process of co-creating artwork is transformative.

Just as no two people most likely interpret a passage of text the same way, no two people will most likely interpret a visual image the same way. Each of us brings our background experiences, values system, and disciplinary expertise to the processing of the visual, and thus our personal reactions, reflections, and refraction. (Saldaña, 2013, p. 54)

By bringing our life experiences together and sharing through participatory and collaborative efforts we achieved new meaning in our co-created artwork. Furthermore, the artwork is a by-product of the reconciliatory approach of this study. Connecting to Saldaña’s explanation of interpreting a visual image above, we each brought our personal narratives, values, and artistic expertise to the artwork and conversations. It was two cultures coming together seeking to explore a novel way to reconcile. The themes that emerged were specific to the relationship that formed between Qwaya and myself. Furthermore, the process of co-creating artwork involves ongoing interpretation, negotiation, suggestion and reflection.

“We are trying to find the right frame to reconcile. Hopefully it doesn’t come to that place where it is forced” (Q. Sam, personal communication, June 15, 2018). I believe co-creating artwork is an approach to building relationships and anyone willing to give it a chance, regardless of cultural background, will benefit. The importance of individuals to act towards reconciliation is mammoth and we cannot solely rely on the government to solve our problems. In the following chapter I provide a brief summary of the need for the study. Then I offer
suggestions for what’s next?, following with recommendations and the limitations of the study. I finish the chapter by answering my research questions and bestow a heartfelt conclusion.
Chapter 5- Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

In this final chapter I offer a summary about the importance of reconciliation among Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Next, I share how co-creating artwork and conversation can brighten the future of teachers, students, Indigenous community members, Elders and anyone who is open and willing to build a relationship across cultures. Further, in this chapter I discuss limitations, implications and recommendations. Through relationship building and conversation people can transcend boundaries and gain perspective. As well, collaborative art-based approaches provide a visual artifact that encapsulates the action of reconciliation. I provide suggestions for future research, answer each research question and close the chapter with my final thoughts.

Summary

This research is born out of curiosity to explore reconciliation between a settler and an Indigenous person and to provide an approach that teachers can employ. With a purpose to gain reciprocal insight and knowledge through collaborative efforts through co-creating artwork and conversation. Through relationship we come to new understandings, and in turn the “other” does not seem so fearful. I chose arts-based research because it is a novel and effective way to build off past knowledge and weave new knowledge. Conversation was also necessary for the study as it offered storytelling, personal narratives and dialogic creation of meaning. This project is advancing research through this unique approach to reconciliation of co-creating art and conversation between an Indigenous Elder and settler teacher. Mutual value among participant and researcher were essential as the study embraced Indigenous and participatory methodologies. Qualitative data and analysis resulted in heartfelt findings and interpretations.
Discussion: What’s Next?

By co-creating new knowledge with Qwaya, we have learned and experienced the process of reconciliation. A new and bright future is possible when education encompasses IWK in schools. Indigenous communities and Elders must be involved in the education system to move towards an authentic representation of Indigenous people and culture. We proved that an Indigenous and a Euro-western person can come together and share culture with each other. We plan to continue our partnership of co-creating artwork and conversation to come to new understandings. We also plan to work collaboratively to create art-based approaches that involve Indigenous culture in schools. Through our willingness to reciprocate life lessons, stories and culture, we shepherd reconciliation to life, and hope to share our approach with teachers, students and communities. It is through education that positive steps forward will be made.

Limitations

One limitation is the lack of funding available for Indigenous community members and Elders to be consistently active in schools. While some money is available, such as the Elders role model grant available in the CRSD, long term sustainable funding is beyond reach. I would like to see school districts create a permanent position for Elders to be active throughout the school year. With that said, there may not be enough Indigenous Elders at this time who are able to engage in such a process. Many do not have the time or the energy to do this work. Furthermore, countless of them have experienced too much intergenerational trauma to support others. Another limitation is the reality that some teachers will not place emphasis or effort into developing a friendship with an Indigenous Elder to undertake the process of reconciliation. Teachers have limited time outside of school due to obligations, families and others responsibilities. It takes a willingness to establish a reciprocal relationship between Elder and
teacher, and even more time to co-create new and exciting projects. With that said, I can affirm our experience has been beneficial and served us well to move forward in our understanding of the “other” and to reconcile in an authentic meaningful way. Lastly, in communities with little or no Indigenous presence, there will not be the same urgency to instill school district protocols or place emphasis on IWK.

**Implications and Recommendations**

I would recommend that school districts form meaningful connections with Indigenous communities and with Indigenous Elders that are willing to engage in education and schools. Having an Indigenous Elder in a school with Indigenous students is an important way to represent Indigenous peoples and for all students to learn IWK. Students need to see themselves in their mentors and need to see relations supported by districts and Indigenous communities.

Secondly, I would encourage teachers to co-create a study or project with the Indigenous Elder. It does not have to be art related, but it must be guided by IWK, Indigenous teachings and have some form of connection to the land. The study or project would have to be co-created with the teacher and would be in an area of expertise of the Elder. The process of creating a novel study or project, places careful intention on the relationship among Elder and teacher. I would recommend that the relationship among Elder and teacher extend beyond the professional and weave into the personal.

**Relationship building.** Through openness to accept and provide influence we grow as individuals and collaborators. Relationship building should be founded through influence, commitment, reciprocity, mutual growth and a value to learn from each other. When both people benefit from an open exchange of dialogue reconciliation is possible. Qwaya and I created a way to reconcile through co-creating art and conversation. I recommend all teachers and students to
nourish relationships outside of your cultural group, to learn and grow in love. I believe co-created artworks and conversation are important components for successful reconciliation.

**Collaborative art-based approach.** Qwaya and I utilized an arts-based approach of co-creating art to gain insight into each other’s life and culture. Growing and learning from each other occurred throughout the research and is best expressed through the artwork, which are included in Chapter Two and Four. The implication of using qualitative methodologies resulted in visual data that was rich and filled with substance. Analytic memos are a good way to capture the essence of our organic conversations, free from recording. The result was a unique and natural way to capture the soul of the artwork through conversation and interpretation.

The process of co-creating artwork was an interwoven approach to reconciliation. It was through co-created art where our worlds merged and deepened. Since Qwaya and myself are both artists, co-creating artworks was our best path for reconciliation. I therefore recommend co-created artwork as a method to reconciliation, however if the members involved are not confident in the field of art, I suggest finding a middle ground were both members are proficient, such as through poetry, drumming, weaving, etc..

**Conversational approach.** I recommend to anyone who is seeking to experience reconciliation to develop a relationship with an Indigenous Elder and have conversations. Often in our conversations stories were shared and new knowledge was formed. Also, conversations caused us to develop a deep understanding of each other and the unique cultures each of us embody. Over the course of the year we had approximately 30 formal and informal conversations about the three themes (1) culture and tradition, (2) connections to land and the environment, and (3) community and self. The implication of having themes emerge throughout our conversations is that it allowed for our respective perspectives to widen. Furthermore, we
built upon each other’s knowledge set. In between meetings, we would reflect on the previous conversation which would invoke a natural curiosity and often set the tone for the following conversation.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

We ended up creating an approach to reconciliation that can be used for people who seek to develop rich and meaningful connections. I suggest to researchers to study the local Indigenous frameworks in collaboration with Indigenous communities. This would require an active role in relationship building and would have to be approached in a respectful and reciprocal way. Furthermore, one could study the role of school districts policy in the integration of IWK. Study the context of the researchers’ local school district and their approach to IWK, or analyze how the BC ministry of educations policy and curriculum practices inform IWK.

I also suggest that a contemporary analysis of Euro-western/Eurocentric education and ideology be presented because the educational principles emerged at the beginning of the 20th century. With changes in education it would useful to provide a current data set of Euro-western practices in education. This would have to be specific to province, as education is a provincial jurisdiction in Canada.

**Research Questions**

The research questions (italicized below) that guided my study have been interwoven throughout the study. In addition, I have provided more clarity to the research questions as presented in the sub headings below.
Flourished themes. What themes within reconciliation arise and become clear through a relationship between an Indigenous Elder and a settler teacher? The themes that emerged through the relationship with Qwaya and myself were (1) culture and tradition, (2) connections to land and the environment, and (3) community and self. These themes became clear through our formal and informal conversations and during our co-created art sessions. The themes were often interwoven and overlapped with one another. While we discussed many issues and topics, the themes outlined were the most repetitive and discussed themes.

Hope. How do collaborative art-processes and conversations influence the themes that emerge? Through co-creating art and conversation themes organically emerged. Throughout the art making process elements of the themes were strong in the artworks. Not all the artworks are the same, yet there was plenty of thematic characteristic that wove into the artworks. Indigenous forms play with contemporary abstract brushwork to create new and exciting artworks. The artwork connects to our individual background and personal artistic style. We learned about the others culture through art making. The beautiful thing is that a physical artifact was created that symbolizes the themes manifested through our relationship and conversations. Seeing how people are highly individualized, the data that surfaced and the artworks created cannot be duplicated.

The conversations that we shared throughout the study were insightful and enlightening. As a friendship grew, we revealed information to each other that established the themes. Since our relationship was built on trust and honesty we were able to reconcile and learn from each.

New narratives. What knowledge is gained in regards to self and culture through these collaborative art-processes and conversations between the settler teacher and Indigenous Elder?
The knowledge gained through Qwaya and my interactions are heartfelt and on-going. The process we shared goes far beyond anything you could read in a textbook or watch in a film. Our conversations caused us to examine ourselves through introspection and reflection. As well, we furthered our understanding of each other's culture through co-creating artwork and conversation. Our cultures came together by the forces of two people willing to work together to forge a new collaborative narrative.

**Forming connections.** How may this knowledge gained impact teaching within a middle school First Nations Studies program by a settler teacher? The knowledge I have acquired throughout the study has impacted my confidence in teaching First Nations studies as a non-Indigenous teacher. I have learned about the intricacies of Indigenous culture and teachings and the necessity to honor local traditions. I have learned that the best way to learn Indigenous ways of knowing is through relationships with Indigenous community members. The knowledge that I was gifted from Qwaya helped me educate students in a more accurate way that respects Indigenous methodology. For example, I used these principles in a classroom setting with students. Qwaya and I sat on cedar rounds in a circle and shared stories, and some student shared stories with us. Storytelling is an effective Indigenous principle that reveals knowledge and builds personal relations. Furthermore, taking my class into nature is a useful way to learn and appreciate IWK and Indigenous perspectives towards the environment. I am hopeful that IWK will further gain strength in education because I believe an interwoven approach to education can yield great outcomes.

**Benefits of Indigenous ways of knowing.** How can this research benefit other educators in a similar position? First, the teacher must be prepared to engage and be open to establish relations with Indigenous communities and Elders. Without that first step teachers who share a
similar position will not be able to move forward in learning authentic IWK. Being a teacher who teaches First Nations Studies as a non-Indigenous person has its limitations. It is complex and challenging to provide Indigenous protocol, teachings, traditions, culture, and frameworks as a non-Indigenous person. I have limited knowledge in the subject of Indigenous studies, however I am a testimony to teachers in a similar position that an effective way to learn IWK is through relationship. Since teachers in the CRSD are encouraged to incorporate IWK into their classrooms, I feel that I have developed a novel way through co-created artwork and conversation to build on prior knowledge.

Conclusion

There is still much room for progress between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada to reconcile. With Stephen Harper’s public apology (2008) and the creation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) progress on a government level has been made to move towards reconciliation. With that said, I believe that reconciliation begins on a person-to-person basis. The government did not force Qwaya and I to reconcile, we chose to try something different. “Reconciliation isn't about doing new things, as TRC Commissioner Marie Wilson says. Reconciliation is about doing all things differently” (Wente, 2017, para 27). We dared to try something new, something novel and something that involved our interests. I believe that our conversations have opened each other’s minds and perspectives into the truth that each of us live by. Through honest exchange of dialogue Qwaya and I learned that our different backgrounds have unique perspectives and spirit. The truth is that one culture is not better than the other. Each have great things to bring to the table and through sharing it, we enriched each other’s view on the world.
Through co-creating artworks, we shared stories, ideas, taught each other techniques, used new materials, and created something new. The art we created could not have been done on an individual basis. It required a collaborative approach. Art allows us to express ideas through a visual artifact. Since we set out our intentions to co-create and reconcile, our artworks reflect the process of reconciliation. Art is a powerful form of expression. I believe that teachers can use the model on this study to deepen their understanding of IWK, EWWK and pave a new future where reconciliation is the norm. I hope that Canadian people arrive at a place where IWK and EWWK perspectives are respectfully woven into the fabric and heart of Canadians and in our education.

I challenge anyone to walk courageously towards reconciliation as we have and to be open to the possibility of ‘what if’. What if all Canadians were treated equally under the law? What if policy and government truly listen to Indigenous voices and operated in a way that incorporates IWK? What if stereotypes were broken and individuals established profound relations with each other?

One time when we were co-creating art Qwaya, with a sense of humor said, “waltz to reconciliation” (Q. Sam, personal communication, October 6, 2018). Two people waltzing together paving the road to reconciliation. You see, I have learned that you cannot always approach these manners in a serious way. Through humor you can still get your message across. In the spirit of Qwaya and myself reconnecting in the future “Chu”. 
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https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.viu.ca/docview/755262421?accountid=12246


Recruitment Script

**Researcher:**
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Vancouver Island University

**Student Supervisor:**
Amanda Claudia Wager, PhD.  
Department of Education  
Vancouver Island University

*Reconciliation Through Conversation and Co-creating Artwork with an Indigenous Elder and a Settler Artist Teacher*

Recruitment Letter

Hello Qwaya Sam Sr. As you know, I am a graduate student from Vancouver Island University (VIU) in the department of education. The purpose of the project is to explore historical and current practices of reconciliation through the relationship of an Indigenous Elder artist and a settler artist teacher. I am inviting you to participate because you are an Elder, artist, friend and a cultural leader.

Your involvement in the research will involve audio recorded conversation and co-creating art with me. You will be audio recorded 5 times with my goal to gain insight and knowledge into the teachings of Indigenous culture. Prompts for these conversations could begin with discussions that connect to land-based knowledge and pedagogy, medicine and healing, and governance (i.e. treaties). Since I teach Aboriginal Education in our local middle school these conversations will greatly help me further this teaching. After our conversations, I will transcribe each conversation and then inductively code the conversations to examine themes that emerge. The conversations will vary in length, and you may share anything at your own level of comfort. I estimate that the conversations will be between 20 - 45 minutes in length. I will transcribe the conversations within 2 weeks and provide you with a copy of the transcript. I will provide you with 2 weeks, or if needed longer, to make adjustments or omissions to the transcripts. I will collect the revised transcript upon your completion of the adjustments or omission.

The amount of time required for co-creating artwork will be a significant amount of time and will be at your discretion. With your permission, the artworks will be photographed and used in the research project. You will have the option to omit any photographs that you do not want me to include. The photograph will then be immediately discarded.

You may choose withdraw your participation in this study at any time prior to our August 30th 2018, the date that I complete my data analysis. If so, all recorded and transcribed conversations...
and any analysis will be deleted. Your choice to not participate in the study would have no effect on our continued co-creation of art-work, recorded conversations and friendship. The only difference will be that I would not record or analyze our conversations for my master’s thesis if you choose to not continue to participate in the study. The only reason it would be difficult to withdraw from the study after August 30th 2018 is because my data analysis will be complete. If you choose to withdraw from the study, all information you provided during the conversation and co-created artwork would be withdrawn from the study. The conversations and transcripts would be destroyed. The artworks and photographs would not be destroyed, and would be kept by the researcher.

I ask you to consider this request and reply within a 1 week period. If you have any further questions or comments feel free to contact the researcher.
## Appendix B

**Consent letter**

**Consent Form**

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**Reconciliation Through Conversation and Co-creating Artwork with an Indigenous Elder and a Settler Artist Teacher**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal Investigator</th>
<th>Student Supervisor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Darren Larose</td>
<td>Amanda Claudia Wager, PhD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master of Education</td>
<td>Department of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vancouver Island University</td>
<td>Vancouver Island University</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I am a student in the Master of Education in Educational Leadership at Vancouver Island University (VIU). My research, entitled “Reconciliation Through Conversation and Co-creating Artworks with an Indigenous Elder and a Settler Artist Teacher” aims to explore historical and current practices of reconciliation through the relationship of an Indigenous Elder artist and a settler artist teacher (myself).

You will be asked to have conversation and co-create artwork with me (researcher). The conversations are intended to be mutually beneficial with an emphasis on the teachings of Indigenous culture. Specifically, prompts for these conversations could begin with discussions that connect to land-based knowledge and pedagogy, medicine and healing, and governance (i.e. treaties). If you agree, we will record five 20 to 45 minute long conversations together. I will transcribe the conversations within 2 weeks following the conversation, and provide you with a copy of the transcript. This will give you the opportunity to review the transcripts and let me know if you would like to make adjustments or omissions to the transcripts. I will collect the revised transcript upon your completion of the adjustments or omission, within a 2 week time frame or longer if you need it. With your permission, the artworks will be photographed and used in the research project. You will have the option to omit any photographs you would not like me to use in my thesis. The photograph would be immediately discarded.

Our conversations may be emotional and discomforting if they lead to such topics as residential schools. You may choose to not discuss specific topics, withdraw from the research at any time if desired, and/or the discussions can happen in a space such as the Laichwiltach Family Life
Society (http://www.lfls.ca), or any other space where you have close support (eg. near family members, etc). You may choose where you would like us to hold the conversations.

Other than my thesis supervisor, all transcribed conversations will be kept confidential between you and I, unless you choose to share the transcript with anybody. If you choose not to be identified a pseudonym will be used and all identifiable information will be coded. Unless you request anonymity, the photographs taken of the co-created artworks will be attributed to you and I.

The results of this study will be published in my master’s thesis and may be used in conference publications, presentations, and published in peer-reviewed journals.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You will receive $20.00 compensation after each conversation totaling the amount of $100.00. You can withdraw from the research at any point, until August 30th 2018, because my data analysis will be complete. If so, all recorded and transcribed conversations and any analysis will be deleted. Your choice to not participate in the study would have no effect on our continued co-creation of art-work, recorded conversations and friendship. The only difference will be that I would not record or analyze our conversations for my master’s thesis if you choose to not continue to participate in the study. The only reason it would be difficult to withdraw from the study after August 30th 2018 is because my data analysis will be complete.

I have read and understand the information provided above, and hereby consent to participate in this research under the following conditions:

I consent to the conversations being audio recorded.  
Yes  No

I consent to having my personal identity disclosed in the products of the research.  
Yes  No

I consent to being quoted in the products of the research.  
Yes  No

I consent to photographs being used in the research.  
Yes  No

Participant Name ________________________ Participant Signature __________________________

I, Darren Larose, promise to adhere to the procedures described in this consent form.

Principal Investigator Signature __________________________ Date _________________
If you have any concerns about your treatment as a research participant in this study, please contact the VIU Research Ethics Board.