

## ĀENTOL TFE TENEW (together with the land) Part 2: Indigenous Frontline Practice as Resurgence

Sandrina de Finney, Sarah Wright Cardinal, Morgan Mowatt, Nick XEMFOLTW\_ Claxton, Danielle Alphonse, Tracy Underwood, Leanne Kelly and Keenan Andrew

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Article abstract

In this paper, Part 2 of a two-paper series, we extend our learning on land- and water-based pedagogies from Part 1 to outline broader debates about upholding resurgence in frontline practice with Indigenous children, youth, and families. This article shares key learning from an Indigenous land- and water-based institute held from 2019 to 2020 that was facilitated by knowledge keepers from local First Nations and coordinated by faculty mentors from the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria. The purpose of the one-year institute was to convene a circle of Indigenous graduate students and faculty to engage in land- and water-based learning and meaningful mentoring connections with Indigenous Old Ones, Elders, and knowledge keepers. Students participated in land- and water-based activities and ceremonies, learning circles, and writing workshops, and were invited to develop and share culturally grounded frameworks to inform their frontline practice with children, youth, families, and communities. Drawing on a storytelling approach to share our learning from this institute, we explore the praxis and challenges of resurgence in deeply damaging colonial contexts. Our individual and collective reflections on Indigenous land-based pedagogies focus on local knowledges, our own diverse perspectives and frontline work, and ethical land and community engagements as integral to resurgent Indigenous practice.

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## **CENTOL TFE TENEW (TOGETHER WITH THE LAND) PART 2: INDIGENOUS FRONTLINE PRACTICE AS RESURGENCE**

**Sandrina de Finney, Sarah Wright Cardinal, Morgan Mowatt, Nick XEMFOLTW Claxton, Danielle Alphonse, Tracy Underwood, Leanne Kelly, and Keenan Andrew**

**Abstract:** In this paper, Part 2 of a two-paper series, we extend our learning on land- and water-based pedagogies from Part 1 to outline broader debates about upholding resurgence in frontline practice with Indigenous children, youth, and families. This article shares key learning from an Indigenous land- and water-based institute held from 2019 to 2020 that was facilitated by knowledge keepers from local First Nations and coordinated by faculty mentors from the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria. The purpose of the one-year institute was to convene a circle of Indigenous graduate students and faculty to engage in land- and water-based learning and meaningful mentoring connections with Indigenous Old Ones, Elders, and knowledge keepers. Students participated in land- and water-based activities and ceremonies, learning circles, and writing workshops, and were invited to develop and share culturally grounded frameworks to inform their frontline practice with children, youth, families, and communities. Drawing on a storytelling approach to share our learning from this institute, we explore the praxis and challenges of resurgence in deeply damaging colonial contexts. Our individual and collective reflections on Indigenous land-based pedagogies focus on local knowledges, our own diverse perspectives and frontline work, and ethical land and community engagements as integral to resurgent Indigenous practice.

**Keywords:** Indigenous child and youth care; land-based; water-based; Indigenous practice; Indigenous children, youth, and families; resurgence; child, youth and family services; youth work; child and youth care; decolonizing child and youth care

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ÍY, SÇÁĆEL SIÁM

'Uy' skweyul

tawâw, tânisi

Tawnshi kiya?

Luu amhl good'y win gya'an

Qey, tan kahk

ʔuklaasiš Imscha Hist't'ukk shitls Ahous Hist't'ukk shitls Nuučaanuł Isaak camis  
čuu λeekoo λeekoo

*The greetings that begin this paper are for our ancestors, relatives, and readers. Starting with our languages is our way of honouring the sacredness of the first stories, which come from our homelands and connect us to all our relations. We extend our deepest gratitude to the Songhees, Esquimalt, W̱SÁNEĆ, and T'Sou-ke nations on whose homelands we live and work. In making this acknowledgement, we commit to enacting everyday actions and solidarities that uphold their resurgence and sovereignty.*

We write this story together as graduate students and faculty from the University of Victoria who participated in an Indigenous land- and water-based learning institute. We belong to the nations of the W̱SÁNEĆ, Snuneymuxw, Stz'uminus, Cowichan, Nuuchahnulth, Gitksan, Sauteaux-Cree Métis, Métis-Cree, nehiyaw (Cree), Ojibwa, Anishinaabe, Kahnawake, Wolastoqiyik, and Maya. We are all frontline practitioners working with children, youth, families, and communities. As such, our work — including this paper — speaks to the urgent need for postsecondary programs to promote a more comprehensive integration of Indigenous-led, community-responsive practices that both respond to the pervasive damage caused by colonialism in our communities, and proudly uphold our original teachings to sustain child, youth, family, and community well-being and resurgence.

Held in the homelands of the W̱SÁNEĆ and T'Sou-ke nations, the purpose of our one-year, land- and water-based institute was to support Indigenous students in developing ethically and culturally grounded frameworks for their frontline, applied practice. Students participated in land- and water-based activities, circles, ceremonies, an online component, and editorial mentoring, and were invited to develop and share culturally grounded frameworks to inform their frontline practice with children, youth, families, and communities. Our group was generously welcomed and hosted in this important work by W̱SÁNEĆ Old One JESINTEN (John Elliott), Elder May Sam, T'Sou-ke knowledge keepers Jeff Welch and Thor Gauti, W̱SÁNEĆ knowledge keeper JB Williams, and Nuuchahnulth artist Denise Williams from House of Winchee. The institute was facilitated by Sarah Wright Cardinal, Nick XEMFOLTW Claxton, and Sandrina de

Finney, School of Child and Youth Care faculty at the University of Victoria. Students were also supported by faculty mentors Christine Sy, Leanne Kelly, and Mandeep Kaur Mucina.

Drawing from our institute reflections and using a storytelling approach combined with an analysis of literature and key historical issues in practice, we have created two papers to share our collective learning from our work on and with land and water. The first paper, *CENTOL TFE TENEW (Together with the Land) Part 1: Indigenous Land-based Pedagogies* (Mowatt et al., 2020), is focused on land- and water-based, restorative, desettling, pedagogical practices. In this article, *Part 2: Indigenous Frontline Practice as Resurgence*, we extend our land- and water-based learning to our frontline practice frameworks with children, youth, families, and communities. Lead authors (Sandrina, Sarah, and Morgan) collectively wrote the introduction, analysis, conclusion, and framing pieces, and invited institute participants to contribute individual stories that show the diversity of our lenses and their translation into practice.

Throughout the papers, we use both “Old One(s)” and “Elder(s)” to refer to honoured and respected teachers of Indigenous worldviews. “Old One” is a more appropriate English translation of the SENĆOŦEN word used in W̱SÁNEĆ territories. We also use both of the terms “land-based” and “land- and water-based”, with the understanding that even though “land-based” already encompasses water and air (Archibald, 2008), specifying “water” is especially important when working in coastal territories.

We raise our hands in deepest gratitude to the knowledge keepers, ancestors, relatives, waters, and lands who hosted, cared for, and fed us during this institute; to the amazing students and institute faculty mentors; to all the staff of the University of Victoria’s Indigenous Academic and Community Engagement (IACE) office, especially Indigenous initiatives coordinator Dorothea Harris and LE,NONET mentorship and bursary coordinator Jilleun Tenning; to the Centre for Indigenous Research and Community-Led Engagement (CIRCLE); to our funders, the Aboriginal Service Plan (Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training) and The Canet Foundation<sup>1</sup>; and to Spirit Bear Art Farm<sup>2</sup>, who hosted us during the institute.

We begin this paper with a description of the institute followed by an analysis of historical issues in practice before sharing individual stories written by students and collectively edited by our circle.

### ***Learning to Practice with and from the Land and Water***

Whereas decolonization, the act of undoing or dismantling colonialism, has roles for both Indigenous and settler peoples, Indigenous resurgence is a call specifically to reclaim Indigenous nations’ teachings and practices that are rooted in natural laws (Garrouette, 2005; Gaudry, 2011; Grande, 2000). These natural laws, essential to resurgence-based praxis, are embedded in the

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<sup>1</sup> [www.thecanetfoundation.org](http://www.thecanetfoundation.org)

<sup>2</sup> [www.spiritbearartfarm.com](http://www.spiritbearartfarm.com)

lands and waters that sustain Indigenous communities (Grande, 2000; McAdam, 2015). Leanne Simpson (2017) suggested that an everyday place-based practice of resurgence requires “aligning oneself and one’s life in the present with the visions of an Indigenous future that are radically decoupled from the domination of colonialism and where Indigenous freedom is centered” (p. 192).

As a way of orienting our circle of students to the idea of “Indigenous practice as resurgence”, our institute featured knowledge exchange activities, including learning from and with knowledge keepers and land and water relatives, conferring with faculty mentors, ceremonial work, circle, peer sharing, networking, and writing and editorial supports. During our land-based days, Elders JESINTEN (John Elliott) and May Sam and knowledge keepers Jeff Welch, Thor Gauti, and JB Williams welcomed and gifted us with invaluable teachings, stories, language, and hands-on practices. Our circle gathered along beautiful shorelines and in old growth forests at SNIDÇEL [Tod Inlet] and other WŚÁNEĆ homelands, and in T’Sou-ke homelands; we shared songs and prayers, walked through ancient forest and meadow trails while learning plant and tree knowledge, gathered berries and medicines for tea, prepared and cooked salmon, and learned to weave cedar. We gratefully learned about sacred gathering and harvesting places that hold storied memories that have been carefully stewarded and transmitted across generations, often at great risk to knowledge keepers. Our hosts shared the numerous impacts of their communities’ forced dispossession of their homelands, where our relatives such as the cedars, pines, and camas, and the medicines they hold, face the constant threat of colonial expansion and climate change.

**Figure 1.** *T’Sou-ke Gathering at Spirit Bear Art Farm*



*Note.* Knowledge keeper and educator Thor Gauti teaches students how to make cedar roses at Spirit Bear.

As we explored the ways in which the growing footprint of colonialism has devastated homelands, communities, and the places in which we practise, it was immediately clear to our circle that a land- and water-based, Indigenous-led way of learning about frontline practice took us far beyond the physical and ontological confines of building-based, too often depoliticized, colonial pedagogies of traditional child and youth care classrooms. As frontline practitioners, we considered the links between the kind of knowledge taught in frontline programs, and the damaging colonial practices that continue to be present in child, youth, and family services. We considered questions such as: How have colonial policies impacted generations of Indigenous families, children, and youth? What kinds of issues have these policies created for frontline practice, and how do we prepare practitioners-in-training to do work that addresses — and unsettles — the colonial violence that permeates the systems in which we work? These questions were at the heart of our work throughout the institute.

### ***The Urgent Need to Reformulate Frontline Practice***

Indigenous communities across the world have been harmed by colonial discourses and practices. Indigenous homelands, kinship structures, languages, and identities have been targeted for genocide by colonial projects such as residential and day schools, the justice system, health and educational services, and the child welfare systems (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2016). Colonial child- and family-serving systems were explicitly tasked with eroding the fabric of Indigenous kinship and governance systems (de Finney et al., 2018; de Leuw, 2015). Child welfare is one particularly detrimental system that has formed an integral part of Canada’s colonial policies, and in which the prevalent assimilative force has been disconnecting Indigenous children from their families and their understandings of the world (Wright Cardinal, 2016). Further, “parents, and grandparents, who were usually acknowledged as the primary producers and transmitters of knowledge, were no longer considered part of the educational process of children” (Wright Cardinal, 2016, p. 53).

In a context of continued and pervasive erosion of our family and kinship networks through child and family services, it is critical that frontline practitioners access training that restores original teachings and frameworks for upholding Indigenous land-based systems of care (de Finney & di Tomasso, 2015), since these are integral to Indigenous self-determination and resurgence. At the institute, the land- and water-based learning assisted us in “express[ing] and nurtur[ing] extended kinship” (Corntassel & Hardbarger, 2019, p. 92) with each other and with all our relations, for the purpose of fostering a relational worldview (Smith & Varghese, 2016) to inform practice-based resurgence. The stories and reflections we present here amplify our integration of Indigenous ways of being and learning with a focus on local knowledges and ethical land and community engagements as integral to Indigenous frontline practice.

Some of the issues that most animated our discussions centred around the question of how Indigenous practitioners can honour their own healing and support their capacity to do this crucial work when they are working in often deeply harmful institutions and agencies; this

question is especially salient considering that practitioners and their families must also live with the same colonial legacies that impact the lives of those with whom they work. In this context, what kinds of responses, skills, practices, and ethical frameworks are important for frontline practitioners to have in order to support Indigenous resurgence in child and family services?

The colonial history of human services calls on practitioners to rethink the norms and values we uphold in our practice across colonial systems, and to consider whether they harm and demean Indigenous families, or uphold their dignity and resurgence. Indigenous frontline workers are increasingly called upon to provide culturally congruent services that address — and seek to redress — the deep violence of the colonial state. In what could be considered a cruel irony, this work falls onto our shoulders as caregivers and professionals in our communities. Offering culturally rooted practice requires a level of historical and personal engagement that is not typically addressed in mainstream frontline practitioner training (de Finney & di Tomasso, 2015). We acknowledge the challenges of framing Indigenous ways of knowing within settler structures, and the ethos of relationship with the land and water. Understanding that Indigenous resurgence stems from the collective learning foundations that happen in community is key to nurturing a frontline practice grounded in wellness. As communities call on us to contribute to a groundswell of resurgence, we bear witness to restorative practices that sustain our work across diverse communities.

In the following sections, individual institute participants share their unique stories about their learning and the impact of the institute on their restorative practice frameworks.

***XAXE ĆE TFE SKÁL ŁTE*, by Nick XEMFOLTW Claxton**

XAXE ĆE TFE SKÁL ŁTE. ĆSE LÁ,E TFE XAXE TFE SKÁL ŁTE. NIŁ ĆO TFE SKÁL E TFE SELÁLEW LE ŁTE I, TFE SELÁLWÁN ŁTE. LÁ, TEN ĆO, TFE XAXE TFE TENEW I, TFE Á,LENENEĆ ŁTE ĆŁ HIF ĆO. I, TÁU ONESTEN TFE ĆELÁNEN TFE SKÁLS I, TFE ŠXENÁNS ŁTE ÁŁE E TIÁ TENEW. NIŁ ĆE TFE ĆELÁNEN ŁTE. SNOUEŁ E TFE SKÁL MEQ TFE WĆISTENS I, TFE SKÁLS ŁTE. HIF SE ĆENSIST TFE SQÁ, ŁTE E TFE SKÁLS. *[Our language is sacred. Our language is from the sacred one. These were the words from our past Elders and our Elders' advisors. The Great Spirit made our homeland long ago, and our beliefs and our ways, culture, and language of this land long ago. This is our birthright. Inside the language are our laws, beliefs, and teachings. Long into the future we will hold that belief.]*

Indigenous peoples in Canada and around the world had societies that developed and evolved over thousands and thousands of years (many, if not all, Indigenous peoples' oral histories state that they have been present on their homelands since the time of creation). Each Indigenous nation has an intricate society that is founded upon their own Indigenous knowledge, contained in their language, infused with their worldview, and rooted in their land. Their knowledge system is a unique way of living and being in the world and guides ways of relating to each other and to



the land. Many Indigenous worldviews, like many Indigenous languages, are threatened in Canada. Fostering Indigenous resurgence in Indigenous children and youth in our communities entails creating learning and teaching opportunities for children and youth so they can grow up intimately related to and strongly connected to their homelands, immersed in their languages and spiritual worldviews, and practising and embodying their cultural practices and traditions. Settler colonialism, through the implementation of the Indian Act, the reserve system, and state-run education, has severed Indigenous peoples from their lands and attempted to assimilate us into mainstream Canadian society.

**Figure 2.** *A Walk at SNIDÇEE in W̱SÁNEĆ Homelands*



*Note.* Nick XEMFOLTW Claxton (facing camera), faculty in the School of Child and Youth Care, shares teachings about local tree and plant medicines with students.

In W̱SÁNEĆ territories, it is very important to explore development of land-based pedagogies from a W̱SÁNEĆ perspective: this will foster the connection of W̱SÁNEĆ children and youth to their homelands and strengthen their identities as W̱SÁNEĆ people through language, story, and place. The land-based child and youth care institute was designed to create learning experiences for Indigenous students, who came together to learn from local Indigenous communities and knowledge keepers of T'Sou-ke and W̱SÁNEĆ in their homelands. Through this training, child and youth care students will be able to envision the ways their work with

Indigenous children and youth can foster a new generation of Indigenous people who are strongly rooted in their Indigenous knowledge systems. Indigenous knowledges are distinct and represent diverse ways of understanding the world. Indigenous peoples and knowledge systems have developed from generations of being in relationship with, living with, and depending on the physical and spiritual worlds — most importantly, the land. Child and youth care practice with Indigenous peoples is incomplete without Indigenous knowledge and connections with land. It is vital that future generations think and live within our Indigenous philosophies, laws, and beliefs and are able to enact their philosophies, laws, and beliefs to counter the ongoing colonialism that Indigenous nations face. Indigenous land-based child and youth care pedagogies are vital to this. The land is our foundation. When we are engaged in healing the land, we are healing ourselves.

***Tiichma [heart], by Keenan Andrew***

As I walk through the traditional lands of the W̱SÁNEĆ and T'Sou-ke First Nations, I spend the days listening, sharing, and learning traditional teachings from local Elders, professors, and the respected stewards of these lands. I am reminded of the pouch of medicine that has been sitting in my front pocket. I walk to the water and place the medicine into the ocean and ask for clarity to guide my practice in a good way, to help me move gently with myself and towards those that I work with and support. Finally, I ask the Creator to watch over my family, friends, and all those who need care and love. Sitting in circle and spending quiet time by the water, I learn that I deeply connect to learning from the land and that the land helps reground and guide my child and youth care practice. As a master's student in child and youth care who also holds a bachelor's degree in child and youth care, grounding myself in land-based pedagogies helps support my overall well-being and produces deeper connections to my ancestral birthright and Indigeneity (Rorick, 2018). This in turn fully informs the skills, worldview, and lenses I bring to my child and youth care praxis across contexts. My hope is that these transformative, healing methods will be available to more of us working in community. As I transition into more advanced practice roles, I hope to support holistic land and water well-being and healing with young people who might not have these opportunities readily available. The institute inspired reflection on my own knowledge-seeking as a practitioner. It provided me with a vision of, and guidance on, supporting gender well-being through working with Indigenous young men, boys, Two-Spirit youth, and gender-fluid youth living in male bodies. For my master's degree, I am expanding on these teachings through cedar hat weaving workshops that uphold gender well-being and sovereignty while unsettling gender-based violence in the lives of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit people, and vulnerable Indigenous young men and boys.

The teachings of our ancestors, both human and nonhuman, offer a tremendous wealth of knowledge that grounds our Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. These teachings have guided our Indigenous ancestors since time immemorial (Black, 1999; Claxton & de France, 2018; Rorick, 2018), and they guide me today. Through the institute, I realize that my ancestors are always present, providing me with knowledge and love. I saw many relatives in the water and on the land. I felt an especially strong connection to the T'Sou-ke lands and was

reminded of a story my mother told me of when she was a little girl. She would boat down from Ahousaht with her parents to Pacheedaht and T'Sou-ke to sell fish. Connecting to the same lands and waters that harvested so many wonderful and fulfilling memories for my mother — and generations before her — helps me reconnect to why I am doing this work.

As we sat on the beach making cedar roses and I listened to the water crashing onto the shore, I thought about how my ancestors must have felt being on the same beaches while working with cedar medicines; this filled my *tiichma* [heart]. As I completed my cedar rose, I chose to place it among the pebbles on the beach and take a photograph with the ocean gently washing over it. A traditional teaching was once shared with me about how the Creator only gives us as much as we can handle. In our child and youth care work, we are gifted opportunities to work with children, youth, and families to remind them (and ourselves) that although life can be stormy and leave our beach in disarray, the tide will wash up and leave us with another beautiful canvas once the storm clears. Listening to the sounds that resonate through the forest, I feel invigorated, grounded, and recentred. The sounds of *gwatwena* [raven] and robin, as well as our water relatives (seals) coming to visit us from the water, remind me of how important it is to connect to these places. This institute has reminded me that if we sit still, acknowledge our surroundings, and truly open our *tiichmas* to the lands, waters, and ancestors, we can see that our ancestors are with us, guiding us. By incorporating these Indigenous teachings into our child and youth care work, we can continue to decolonize and dismantle settler colonialism to protect Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and being on Indigenous lands (Simpson, 2014).

*čuu łeekoo łeekoo* [respectfully, thank you]

Imscha

### ***My Resurgence, by Tracy Underwood***

*Water*

*Necessity, life giving,  
beauty.*

*Depraved, life taking,  
dark.*

*Sparkly, dark green,  
soul refreshing.*

ÍY SÇÁĆEL, my name is ESKISELWET, I live on STÁUTW First Nation, located in WSÁNEĆ Nation, Coast Salish territory. I attended the University of Victoria for my bachelor's (2001) and master's (2010) degrees, both in child and youth care. I am married to Romaine Underwood and we have four children, Ruth, Abigail, Romaine Jr., and Victor. I have four adult children who live on their own, Joshua, Brett, Jewelia, and Savannah. From my four older

children I have eight grandchildren. On my father's side, I am from WSÁNEĆ (descendant of ZIĆOT). I am part Scottish, as his maternal great-grandfather was from Scotland. I also have a paternal great-grandmother from Tseshah (Nuu-chah-nulth) and another with Hawaiian heritage. My father died from alcoholism a month before I turned 16. He attended residential school from ages 7 to 14. On my mother's side I am (paternal) Snuneymuxw (Nanaimo) and (maternal) Qw'umiyiqun (within Cowichan Tribes). I have two brothers and one sister and many, many cousins. My writing is connected to my place, which is embedded in my homeland of WSÁNEĆ, and is woven with culture and staying active in our SENĆOFEN language. I am also writing out my JÁELNONET (acknowledge/receive) framework. JEÁLNONET means to manage to thank, to be given opportunity to give thanks. This teaching is guiding my current practice and research as a doctoral student in child and youth care; it expresses my hopes for my children and grandchildren (my resurgence) on their educational and reconciliation journey. They represent my resurgence.

*Depraved, life taking, dark.*

My most recent encounter with racism required me to write a victim impact statement. Racism, discrimination, investigations, misunderstanding, judgement, policies, mandates, reporting, call-ins — these are all products of the faceless monster named “System”. System sells merchandise that causes harm to those who don't even intend to purchase. System is life taking, maybe not of the body, but the soul and heart, as well as the mind. It thrives in buildings with titles on them, like courthouse, hospital, child protective services, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, and schools at all levels.

In my whirlwind of encounters with this monster named System I have had to find ways to heal my hurts. In my own life, many times I have concluded that hurts can be covered with the band-aid solution of addictions, which has proven to be only temporary. My own journey of healing at first was not named anything but survival. Now, at times, it can be named self-care. I have learned that an immediate aid is simply breathing — deep breaths. Among other strategies of looking after myself, resilience has been my armour. Resilience has direct connection to being grounded in who I am, where I come from, my ancestors, and my roots — all connected to the land. It is hard to describe how and why I even have resilience. I follow the four directions of Indigenous intelligence: spirit, body, emotions, and the mind. I do know that I have to be resilient when the System monster is out and about.

*Water. Sparkly, dark green, soul refreshing.*

I see water as hope. I hope that creating knowledgeable spaces and explaining who the monster is, what the monster looks like, can prevent the monster from creating more pain. I imagine the monster sitting and listening, genuinely caring and wanting to help. Although Indigenous people have a number of caring people in these buildings and are training our people to be a part of these systems to eliminate harm, the monster still exists. *Soul refreshing* is

connected to healing as well as hope and being able to move on after experiencing trauma, pain, and lashes from the System monster.

*Necessity, life giving, beauty.*

The poem at the start of my story is made of words for a reason: words carry great power. The poem led to the creation of a healing “wordle” for myself that I imprinted on a rock for my own healing. Since then I have created more, and many people have been able to understand the big picture: holistic healing that hands-on creating can generate. If we can practise our ways of healing, and turn to the land, water, and nature, the monster will not win. We will win. The force behind what I do is my children and grandchildren. I continually want to make the world a better place for them. We live in a beautiful part of the world. I am lucky to be W̱SÁNEĆ.

### ***Connecting to Community-Based Learning, by Danielle Alphonse***

#### *Prayer*

*Creator please help me as I try to listen carefully to the words of the wind, songs of the birds, and the sounds of the waves to help give me insight in thinking about my path and teachings connected to the land. I fully acknowledge the missing piece in my soul, a heartache of not having my language. I recall my late grandmother discussing the importance of using language when gathering medicines or interacting with the water from the river and ocean. I feel a deep sense of responsibility to embrace my family’s spiritual relationship with the natural world and to carry forward the teaching of my ancestors. Thank you for the wind cleansing my soul, brushing away from my mind, body, and spirit things that are not needed on my path forward. Also, I raise my hands in gratitude for the butterflies who show the possibilities of inner transformation. All my relations past, present, and future will stand by me and support me.*

My name is Danielle Alphonse. Qwul’stun’a’wat is my traditional name passed down from my late grandmother Philomena Alphonse. I am Cowichan on my mother’s side and Kahnawake, Welsh, Irish, and Scottish on my father’s side. I am currently in my sixth year as the BC Regional Innovation Chair for Aboriginal Early Childhood Development at Vancouver Island University. I also teach in the Early Childhood Education And Care program. My educational background is in early childhood education, child and youth care, and education. As an Indigenous practitioner, researcher, and educator, I must develop and bridge both Indigenous and mainstream ideas through academic inquiry and asking questions that focus on the needs of our communities, children, and families. In my work, I consider questions such as: How does one align ancestral healing approaches when working with Indigenous children and families? How can I use my understandings about the importance of the land to promote understanding of the past, present, and future in communities? How can I help mainstream academia understand and value our sacred teachings?

I know that when I truly connect to the land, the signs reveal my path and my spirit trusts my inward sense of direction. By learning through my Indigenous worldview, I am developing my cultural, spiritual side to complement my mainstream education and support my profession in research and teaching. I resonate with the words of Bell and Brant (2015), who wrote:

The land communicates as a teacher and is a receptacle of knowledge and wisdom. When Aboriginal people seek wisdom, it is to Mother Earth that they return. With her they dream, have vision quests, and obtain the knowledge and wisdom they need. The knowledge and wisdom they glean from the land are not founded in logical thought framed within the Western rational scientific tradition. Rather, they are grounded in the land. (p. 16)

Situating myself on the land at SNIDŪĒĒ during this institute provides the perfect place to think about culturally relevant frameworks to guide my work. For me, the land holds all the knowledge of the past, and I believe that by honouring and acknowledging the past, we can create resurgence for a better future. In our cultural and spiritual learning specific to the W̱SÁNEĆ Nation, Old One JESINTEN (John Elliot) shared that nations follow the cycles of the moon. These old cultural practices reflect the seasons of preparing and gathering: fishing, planting, harvesting, and gathering cedar to sustain oneself throughout the year. In an academic and practice context, I need to consider ways to represent learning through themes such as gathering, sharing, and teaching with others. Interpreting a cultural approach alongside mainstream knowledge is a complex task, yet it is absolutely central to my work. For me as an Indigenous person and practitioner, co-creating a relationship with the land to guide my practice is essential. Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie (2015) stated that “relationships to land are familial, intimate, intergenerational, and instructive” (p. 57.) Manulani Aluli Meyer (2008), a Hawaiian scholar, echoed the significance of our kinship ties for place-based learning:

Land is our mother. This is not a metaphor. For the Native Hawaiians speaking of knowledge, land was the central theme that drew forth all others. You came from a place, you grew in a place and you had a relationship with a place. This is an epistemological idea.... One does not simply learn about land, we learn best from land. (p. 219)

During our time at SNIDŪĒĒ, Nick XEMFOLTW Claxton shared the sacred names of the trees and plants and how they keep us protected and help us in our life both internally and externally. As the ancestral knowledge emerges and its importance is strengthened by the gentle teachings of Old Ones, I wonder how to reconnect with the land and renew our relationships to our sacred places to strengthen my educational journey and my practice with young children and families. XEMFOLTW told the story of camas, an essential food source of our past, and challenged us to connect to the camas and gain strength from how it sustains itself by growing bigger with each passing year. I realize I need to nourish myself in each year of my learning, to sustain myself over the long term.

My thoughts always return to the children and future generations. I am reminded of the importance of research, education, and practice being community-based and community-driven. Indigenous knowledge and practice need to be anchored in a cultural perspective to be meaningful to the community. Alexandria Middlemiss (2018) has highlighted that the two greatest predictors of success for Indigenous students are “access to traditional knowledge and teachers who employ a culturally responsive pedagogy” (p. 17). “For Indigenous students,” she wrote, “education must be designed from an Indigenous perspective and provide a relevant cultural context to be meaningful and effective” (p. 17). The crucial role we play in transmitting teachings to future generations brings contentment to my spirit, because I realize my ancestors prayed for my path and are behind me in the spirit world. Thinking about these teachings from our land-based institute, I realize the value of being part of a collective that creates momentum and energy to be a change agent. To me, being on the land and learning in a circle allows us to use an Indigenous approach and experience an Indigenous worldview.

### ***Learning to do Land-Paced Work, by Leanne Kelly***

My name is Leanne Poitras Kelly and I identify as a Métis-Cree woman with family roots in the Qu’appelle Valley in Saskatchewan. I currently reside as a guest in Coast Salish territory. My family can trace our Métis lines through migration across Canada with the fur trade. My mother, Rose Amyotte, was born in a place called Katepwa, Saskatchewan, in an area where many Métis families settled. It is home.

Living on Vancouver Island now and working for Cowichan Tribes for the last 25 years has given me perspective on the value and role of one’s roots. The teachings of the Cowichan and Coast Salish peoples have helped me to find my place in honouring the land that I now live on as a guest, but it will never be mine. Yet I have a responsibility to support and create space for these ways of knowing, especially when I remember how my own family knowledge was suppressed. This is part of the ethical framework that guides my frontline practice. When I started work for Cowichan Tribes, I soon realized that life within this Coast Salish community was different from the prairie culture that I knew. The timelines and community expectations were all connected to place, identity, seasons, and community norms. Basic knowledge, like knowing when the salmon came in for families and how that would impact health centre programming, was new to me. Understanding the winter ceremonial season and how that influenced the demands placed on families, resources, time, and division of labour was crucial in knowing how and when to connect with families, how I could support them, and how I might be invading intimate spaces. These community ways of living are solidly rooted in Cowichan. They are foreign to my Métis-Cree understanding and my Western biomedical training, and yet so crucial to the way I would offer my service. Thus, this land determines the pace of my work.

It has been crucial to my practice ethics to understand the influences that have shaped this community, such as the physical location of the Cowichan traditional village sites and the intersection with settler-owned land. The tensions of racial division have had a profound

influence on how people have learned to move within this geography. I came to understand the history of this particular place, the community flow, and how community members were perceived and treated within Western institutions like schools and hospitals. My work with youth often involved walking and talking about the pulls of both worlds, the tensions the youth have to navigate, and the restlessness that motivates their acts of defiance. These opportunities to get on the land and walk and reflect remind me that the meaningful engagement the land provides can act to create calm and introspection. Reorienting my practice to spend time in relational, land-based spaces has allowed formation of what Andrew Hatala and his colleagues (2019) referred to as “soothing places where nature and land interactions could occur” and which created “a sense of distance from stressors associated with the everyday lives” (p. 127). The seasons and the land have always defined what happens in the community and how priorities are shaped and implemented. Community ceremonies and cultural and family obligations influence school attendance, family attendance, and medical appointments, and set up competing demands from family members and professionals in positions of mainstream power. My own need as a health care provider to keep families on a strict schedule did not match the priorities of many families, nor did it have clear relevance outside the world of trained professionals.

This intersection of the competing ways of seeing community practice is important to understand. As an outsider, I come to community work knowing that I bring my own set of teachings and values that must be reconciled with the people of the land I live on now. Giving myself space to explore my gaps in knowledge and the tensions that arise from my personal worldview, my own land teachings, my professional training, my past experiences, and my current learning are crucial to developing a supportive relationship with families. When I reflect on the work I do with families, I maintain that there are key principles, informed by the land and relational experience, that are essential for any practitioner. These are:

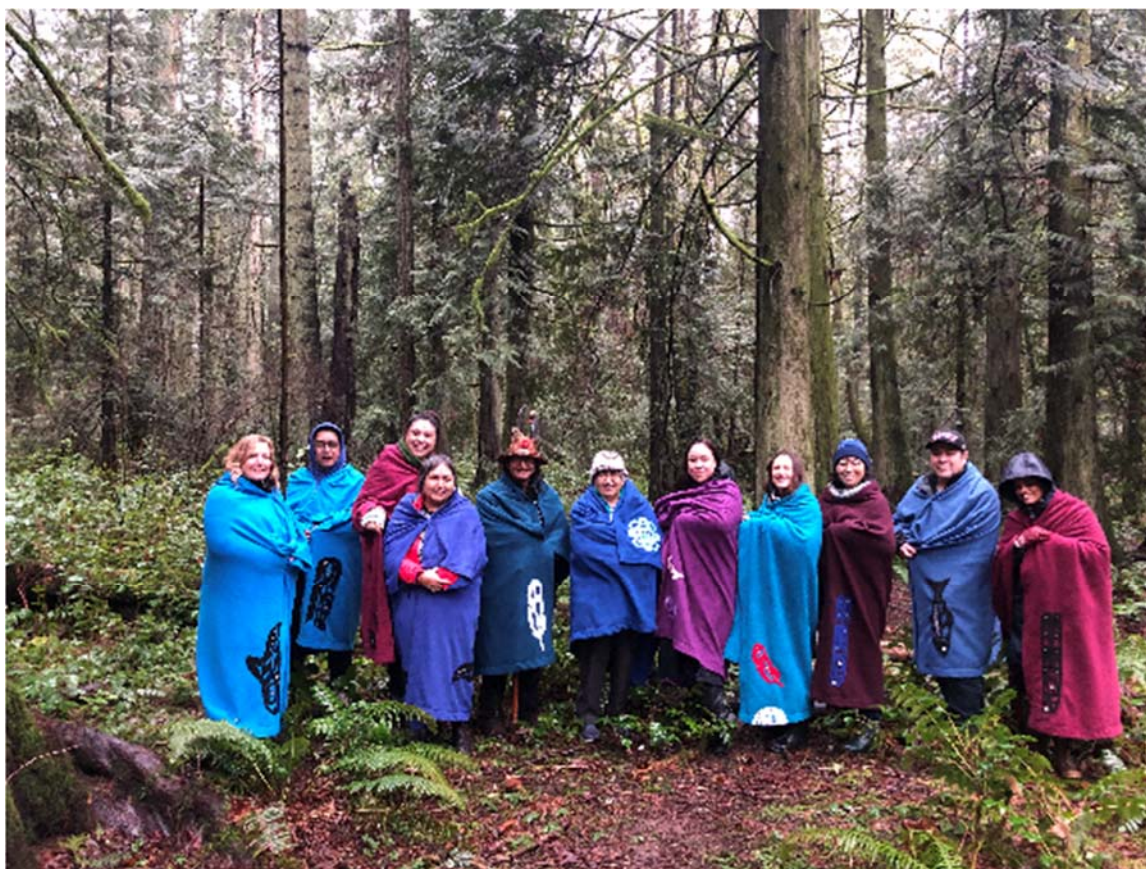
- Knowing who you are and the land you come from: Identification of your own “place” comes first (Absolon, 2011).
- Knowing where you are now and how you have connected with the land and the people you will serve: How will the land inform your presence and the work you are being asked to do (de Leeuw, 2015; Wildcat et al., 2014)?
- Knowing that colonization has dispossessed many Indigenous people from their lands and teachings: Practitioners must work to create opportunities for reconnection by seeking guidance and leadership from local knowledge holders and learning about the complexities of land teaching and learning (Smith, 2012; Wildcat et al., 2014).
- Knowing what drives your daily work and asking yourself whose needs are being met and why: Placing the Western professional agenda in a position of greater power than Indigenous lifeways is counterproductive to achieving Indigenous self-determination and creates barriers to learning from each other (Cormier & Ray, 2018).



I have come to understand that my professional identity is best built upon my root identity and that only through recognizing that we all have this profound need to seek connection to our original teacher, our Mother, will we find the connections that we need to sustain both our soul and our relationships with each other. Seeking relationships with those I hope to serve, built on acknowledgement and intentional regard for the teachings of the land, honours the ancestral knowledge specific to that land and people. Working to decolonize my professional role by elevating relationships in this way ultimately helps me to find an authentic space to do the work I am asked and trained to do.

### **Conclusion: Blanketing our Communities with Resurgence**

**Figure 3.** *Institute participants receive blankets with crests and colors that represent their vision for resurgence in practice, made by Nuuchahnulth artist Denise Williams*



*Note.* During our closing blanketing ceremony, participants were blanketed while Elder May Sam and knowledge keeper JB Williams shared seasonal land-based teachings and protocols.

Through our institute circle, we supported each other in reflecting on the diverse ethical and cultural teachings and guidelines we carry as we work towards Indigenous resurgence and self-determination. To extend these kinship and healing pathways into their frontline work, textile artist Denise Williams invited each student to envision a crest, colours, and images representing

their ethical commitment to resurgence in practice. Denise then made each blanket by hand, and they were gifted to us during a blanketing ceremony at the close of the institute. These blankets will shelter and teach us as we walk in and with communities. Creating spaces in community for children, youth, and families to engage in land-, water-, and spirit-based cultural, ceremonial, and everyday activities can help repair the intergenerational relationships that are under constant assault by colonial systems, structures, and policies (Hart, 2010). As Sylvia McAdam (2015) stressed:

Indigenous people are not lawless people; the Creator's laws are strict and inform every part of a person's life. It is these laws that governed and guided in the days when Europeans did not walk the territories of Indigenous people. These laws still exist and can be revitalized. (p. 23)

Red pedagogy (Grande, 2000), radical Indigenism (Garoutte, 2005), and other Indigenous resurgence frameworks provide a pathway towards restoring the Indigenous knowledge systems that nurture community healing and wellness. This work constitutes a tall order for new generations of frontline practitioners; our community-based resurgence work does not in itself sever all of the elastic, far-reaching tentacles of colonialism that operate in many aspects of Indigenous lives. We deal with the ways in which colonial violence is reformulated, not only in damaging structures and systems but also through lateral and vicarious forms of trauma that infiltrate our relationships and work conditions. Teaching Indigenous practitioners therefore involves preparing them to work ethically with Indigenous communities in the face of complex issues, including entrenched racialization, growing wealth disparities, and an expanding global ecological crisis, all of which represent formidable threats to Indigenous resurgence. Given increasingly mobile forms of neocolonialism, including new corporate, environmental, and extreme right-wing colonial formations, we know that our practices have to adapt and be increasingly astute, agile, and brave. We are also mindful of the challenges of “reclaiming” practices that can be too easily homogenized, romanticized, appropriated, and institutionalized, and thus sapped of their sacred power. We wonder how land- and water-based learning can be equitably resourced and made ethically accessible to students and families who are living in increasingly compromised urban environments. As a response, we return to a productive, enacted, collective resurgence, a resurgence that is nested in connections with homelands and kinship. We have so few places where the beauty of Indigenous knowledge and kinship systems can be unapologetically celebrated without being subsumed by debates about the loaded politics of reclaiming and longing. When we revitalize sacred Indigenous laws we are not seeking a simplistic return to a static, essentialized memory, because the ancestors are always walking with us in the present. Across thousands of diverse Indigenous worldviews, knowledge is often understood as collective and human beings are only a small part of the cosmos. Vine Deloria (1991) explained the intimate connections we have to the environment — an inseparable existence — and that humans are the “youngest member of the web of life” (p. xi). The humility in this teaching is at the heart of resurgence in frontline practice with children, youth, families,

and communities. Many Indigenous knowledge systems include this notion of being in relationship with all living beings and honouring the spirit of each being. Our frameworks emphasize that land- and water-based knowledges are tied to personal identity, spiritual development, and relationships with and accountability to others (Meyer, 2003, cited in McGuire, 2010, p. 123) and to past, present, and future generations.

What we have learned is that a resurgent, decolonizing praxis requires an active resistance to colonial paradigms, a critical perspective on history, and a reimagining of collective life and accountability. Resurgence invites us to remember the ways we sat with Old Ones and cared for family and land and water kinship — for all our relations — prior to colonization. We need to unburden coming generations of the imprint of colonization and engage in restorative, decolonial, community-centered practices. Kathleen Absolon (2011) described Indigenous collective practices as ones in which “we journey, we search, we converse, we process, we gather, we harvest, we make meaning, we do, we create, we transform, and we share what we know. Our Spirit walks with us on these journeys. Our ancestors accompany us” (p. 168). This generative way forward is a lived, dynamic praxis of everyday resurgence that carries us into the future. There is no “one way” to practice these teachings. They are brought alive every day, as an ethic of accountability, across all of the contexts in which we work, care, and practise. As caregivers, witnesses, and stewards — as frontline practitioners — we engage in brave, powerful truth-telling; we live with the backlash, denial, and resentment placed on us by our own institutions and colleagues; we support place kinship and spirit-based projects; we respect Indigenous knowledges as complex systems of governance, education, health, and wellness; and we ensure that Indigenous children, youth, and families are upheld and celebrated with dignity to engage in their own nations’ teachings and practices.

All our relations.

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## Biographies

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**Danielle Alphonse** is the BC Regional Innovation Chair for Aboriginal Early Childhood Development and a faculty member in the Early Childhood Education and Care program at Vancouver Island University. Danielle is completing an interdisciplinary PhD in Indigenous early childhood education and child and youth care at the University of Victoria.

**Tracy Underwood** is the Indigenous Academic Coordinator for the Indigenous Students Support Center in the Faculty of Human and Social Development (HSD). She is the mother of eight children and grandmother of six grandchildren. She has a bachelor's and master's degrees in Child and Youth Care, and is completing a PhD in Child and Youth Care, focused on reconciliation in university settings and WSÁNEĆ resurgence.

**Leanne Kelly** is an Assistant Teaching Professor with the School of Nursing, University of Victoria. Leanne is a Metis/Cree cisgender woman, mother of two sons, and a Registered Nurse. She has spent her career working in First Nations communities in both Saskatchewan and British Columbia. She is currently working on her PhD with a focus on supporting nursing education to address anti-Indigenous racism within our health systems.

**Keenan Andrew** holds a bachelor's degree in Child and Youth care and is an MA student in Child and Youth Care, a child and family counsellor, and a *Sisters Rising* research facilitator who is working with Indigenous boys and young men to address the colonial roots of gender and sexual violence. Keenan is the recipient of SSHRC, Jordan's Principle, Chief Joe Mathias, and LE,NONET student awards.