

# Radical Acts of Re-imaging Ethical Relationality and Trans-systemic Transformation

Vicki Kelly

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## Article abstract

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# Radical Acts of Re-imagining Ethical Relationality and Trans-Systemic Transformation

Vicki Kelly

**ABSTRACT** This Indigenous métissage explores my engagement in Indigenous Arts-based Inquiry as a practice of Anishinaabe Ozihtoon or Indigenous making and knowledge generation. Anishinaabe Ozihtoon is a site that unlocks the theoretical potentialities of the intelligences within Indigenous Knowledge practices in contemporary contexts and reanimates Indigenous land-based assurgence. Reviving Indigenous artistic practices, as sites of co-imagining through constellations of co-creation, is part of ecological and community-based reconciliation and healing. Key to this process is the act of reciprocal recognition, a core practice that fosters ethical relationality, helps cultivate our Indigeneity, and honours the circle of life. This Indigenous métissage tracks the Indigenous pedagogical processes and Indigenous art making used in my own praxis and inquiry as a scholar while I worked in a university to create three pathways for trans-systemic knowledge creation: a university-wide President's Dream Colloquium with an accompanying graduate course; a graduate diploma in Indigenous Education: Education for Reconciliation and a master's in Indigenous Education: Truth, Reconciliation, and Indigenous Resurgence; and the Indigenous Research Institute initiation of an Indigenous Ethics Dialogue process as a trans-systemic pedagogical engagement with Indigenous and Western Knowledges, values, and ethics.

**KEYWORDS** Indigenous Knowledges, ethical relationality, Indigenous métissage, Anishinaabe Ozihtoon, Indigenous Knowledge practices, Indigenous ethics, reciprocal recognition

*"Centering ourselves in this Nishnaabe process of living is both the instrument and the song" (Simpson, 2017, p. 19)*

## Greetings

*Boozhoo, Aaniin*, my name is Vicki Kelly and I am Anishinaabe and Métis from Northwestern Ontario, and I love the teachings around the word we use in our way of greeting one another:

Aaniin...the Ah sound places us in a spiritual context, in the context of the Nishnaabeg universe. The Ni is "a taking notice as sound." When put together...how do you see yourself in all this? Or put another way, taking in all the thought and feeling of your journey in the universe, how do you see or recognize yourself? Aaniin...can also mean "I see your light" or "I see your essence" or "I see who you are." To me, seeing someone

else's light is akin to working to see the energy they put into the universe through their interactions with the land, themselves, their family, and their community. Aaniin isn't an observation but a continual process of unfolding; it is a commitment to the kind of relationship where I have to dedicate myself to seeing the unique value of the other life as a *practice*. (Simpson, 2017, p. 281)

Each day I rise on the West Coast, I greet the day "*Aaniin*," sounding my native flute in salutation and tuning to the Seven Sacred Directions and *All My Relations*. I do this practice to attune myself to the Indigenously understood sounding multiverse. I do so as one who comes from away, as a visitor on the traditional ancestral and unceded territories of the Coast Salish People, the *Səlilwətał* (Tsleil-Waututh), *Skwxwú7mesh* (Squamish), *Xʷməθkʷəy̓əm* (Musqueam), *Kwíkwəəł 'əəm* (Kikwetlem), *q̓ícəy̓* (Katzie), *Kwantlen*, and *Semyome* (Semiahmoo) Nations.

I am an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University (SFU), and in my work, I have the honour of standing together with colleagues and students as we engage in radical acts of re-imagining ethical relationality and the trans-systemic transformation of our knowledge foundations within institutions of higher learning and in the contexts of community engagement. I am using the word radical here and honouring the etymology of the word, which, in a philosophical sense, acknowledges the Latin word *radicalis*, "of or having roots," and *radix*, "branch or root," meaning "going to the origin, or the essential." Thus, the radical acts I refer to are acts of educating and community engagement that follow our roots back to the origins of knowledge, honouring both Western and Indigenous sources of knowledge. This is done by honouring the ethical space created by and fully acknowledging the hermeneutic diversity of the circle of knowledges, and by working respectfully, or in ethically relational ways, such that these processes lead to the capacity of being trans-systemically and trans-disciplinarily literate. Through this capacity, we in the academy are led to new or other ways of imagining or re-imagining ourselves, our educational praxis, and our institutions of higher learning. We work with the collective intention that this knowledge and ethical capacity informs and reforms ethical action within community engagement.

## Introduction

What you will encounter in the following is a braided text, told mainly through my perspective, animated through three story threads that weave my various experiences with my emerging understandings generated through a living inquiry over time, and now rendered into this Indigenous métissage. The word métissage comes from the Latin *misticus*, meaning "the weaving of cloth from various fibres" (Mish, 1990, p. 761). It depicts an artful craft, pedagogical practice, and a research strategy. It can also be framed as a disposition that involves the simultaneous tracing of mixed and multiple identities as well as histories, following the often blurred and messy threads of relatedness and belonging by honouring difference while developing a sense of kinship and collective affinity (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009). The autobiographical strands I have chosen here represent key moments within an ongoing Indigenous inquiry. Throughout

the writing process of this *métissage*, I have inquired into the key learnings or teachings I have gained and have paid attention to acknowledge points of affinity emerging within the process. Thus, through my own arts-based autobiographical inquiry, I have been immersed in a pedagogical process, the learnings from which were then offered forward to others through graduate courses and eventually program development. These emerging principles were then applied in my work within the Indigenous Research Institute at SFU to foster greater understanding of Indigenous Knowledges and Indigenous Ethics within community-engaged research.

In their book *Life Writing and Literary Métissage as an Ethos for Our Times*, Erika Hasebe-Ludt, Cynthia M. Chambers, and Carl Leggo (2009) identify the spirit and intent of *métissage*:

We take *métissage* as a counternarrative to the grand narrative of our times, a site for writing and surviving in the interval between different cultures and languages, particularly in colonial contexts; a way of merging and blurring genres, texts, and identities; an active literary stance, political strategy, and pedagogical praxis... We braid strands of place and space, memory and history, ancestry and (mixed) race, language and literacy, familiar and strange, with strands of tradition, ambiguity, becoming, (re) creation, and renewal into a *métissage*. (p. 9)

Dwayne Donald (2012), a member of the *amiskwaciwiwiniwak* (Beaver Hills People) and the Papaschase Cree, has articulated that the intent of Indigenous *métissage* is to create a scholarly disposition and research sensibility that is both ethical and ecological. Here is his articulation:

One central goal of doing Indigenous *Métissage* is to enact ethical relationality as a philosophical commitment. Ethical relationality is an ecological understanding of human relationality that does not deny difference, but rather seeks to understand more deeply how our different histories and experiences position us in relation to each other. I use the term “ecological” in association with this concept of human relationality to draw attention to the complex interrelationships that comprise the world....Ecology, in this case, does not refer to concerns about the natural environment separate from the lives of human beings. Rather, human beings are seen as intimately enmeshed in webs of relationships with each other and with the other entities that inhabit the world. We depend on these relationships for our survival. This insight finds expression through philosophical emphasis on the need to honour and repeatedly renew our relations with those entities that give and sustain life. (p. 535)

This disposition has been the focus of my work over the last fifteen years: bringing ethical relationality and ethical action into our relationships with Indigenous Knowledges, pedagogies, and methodologies with the intent that Indigenous values and ethics find a rightful place within our institutions of higher learning. Crucial to this work of ethical relationality is the respectful, reciprocal recognition of the diversity of our communities and acceptance of our collective responsibility to acknowledge the land or places where our institutions are situated. I come to

this work from diverse locations and contexts as a scholar/educator/artist, but have found this vision lives within me in ways that are deeply resonant with others. I humbly walk forward finding kinship or affinity along the way, co-imagining with others a pathway for education and community engagement that honours the hopes of Indigenous Peoples to reanimate their knowledge traditions and practices. I endeavour to enliven the values and ethical foundations of their unique worldviews, and to find hospitality for all of this within institutions of higher learning, such that we honour the next generation's right to encounter Indigenous scholars, knowledges, research methodologies, and Indigenous ethics, as well as Indigenous ceremonies, practices, protocols, and pedagogies. This right to encounter respectfully acknowledges the right to a way of life and a way of being within the diverse complexities of contemporary culture; it honours the right to walk Indigenously on the land and to honour our longing for the reciprocal recognition of our collective responsibilities to *All Our Relations*.

This work is very timely, given our current Canadian context of being called to action by the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC, 2015), which underscores and upholds the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP, 2008). Given the ever-growing awareness of an ecological crisis, a crisis in human relations, as well as a spiritual crisis within our societies, I am convinced that Indigenous Knowledges, values, and ethical teachings, regarding the need for acknowledging our respectful reciprocal relationship with all of Creation, are more relevant than ever. This work involves the intention to remember to re-member and awaken the living legacy of our ancestors.

### **Strand One: The Inner Fibres**

Intimate relationality in specific contexts and the implicative nature of experience are key aspects...of *métissage*...as a research sensibility it mixes and purposefully juxtaposes diverse forms of texts as a way to reveal that multiple sources and perspectives influence experiences and memories. *Métissage* as a research praxis, is about relationality and the desire to treat texts- and lives- as relational and braided rather than isolated and independent. (Donald, 2012, p. 537)

In the following, I share some of my experiences and reflections on the process of living and working as an Indigenous scholar within university settings. I gather the inner fibres that have given rise to the theory and pedagogy of my Indigenous scholarship and practice. I braid them to reveal the patterning of my emerging understanding, sharing a teaching story in the making. I acknowledge, as Mohawk scholar Marlene Brant Castellano (2000) does, that Indigenous Knowledge “derives from multiple sources including traditional teachings, empirical observation, and revelation” (p. 23) and that Indigenous Knowledge is “personal, oral, experiential, holistic, and conveyed through narrative or metaphorical language” (p. 25). To know from an Indigenous perspective is to touch, feel, smell, taste, see, and to live the experience. Indigenous Knowledge “does not flow exclusively from the intellect” (Castellano,

2000, p. 29); it is multidimensional and engages all our senses, which together contribute to our knowing. Willie Ermine (1995) writes,

Those who seek to understand the reality of existence and harmony with the environment by turning inward have a different incorporeal knowledge paradigm that might be termed “Aboriginal epistemology”...The inner space is that universe of being within each person that is synonymous with the soul, the spirit, the self, or the being. (p. 103)

Thus, the capacity or organizing principle of this Métissage is learning how to braid the threads of being and doing in the act of what Anishinaabe scholar Kathy Absolon (2011) calls *Kannadossiwin*, or how we come to know. I humbly share what I have come to know through this Indigenous inquiry process in this Indigenous métissage.

Like many other Indigenous scholars, I live in an ongoing tensioned reality. Collectively, we are trying to facilitate change in our institutions towards a trans-systemic understanding, as well as a trans-disciplinary enactment of knowledge, that honours the wholistic worldviews of Indigenous Peoples.

Indigenous Knowledge is a complete knowledge system with its own epistemology, philosophy, and scientific and logical validity...[and] can only be understood by means of pedagogy traditionally employed by the people themselves...[with] the role of the land or ecology...[as] central and [an] indispensable classroom. (Battiste & Henderson, 2004, p. 41)

As an Indigenous scholar/artist/educator, I admit that it has not been an easy path to walk, and there was a time when I was deeply distressed by this relationship. I realize now that, fundamentally, I was struggling with how to live by an Indigenous cosmology and worldview within an institution founded on another worldview and grounded in a different understanding of knowledge and what it means to be human. In other words, I was struggling to develop the capacity to live well within a trans-systemic and trans-disciplinary understanding of knowledge, research, learning, values, and ethics.

As an Anishinaabe/Métis person, I have always moved between two worldviews, and I have embraced the understanding of Two-Eyed Seeing as articulated by Mi'kmaw elders Albert and Murdena Marshall and professor Cheryl Bartlett (Bartlett et al., 2012). What Albert Marshall calls *Etuaptmumk*, or Two-Eyed Seeing, is described as

the gift of multiple perspective treasured by many aboriginal peoples...[I]t refers to learning to see from one eye with the *strengths* of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the *strengths* of Western knowledges and ways of knowing, and to using both these eyes together, for the benefit of all. (Bartlett et al., 2012, p. 335)

In my work as an Indigenous scholar, I acknowledge that the capacity for living well between worldviews, knowledges, and perspectives of Indigenous, Western, and Eastern worlds leads ultimately from Two-Eyed Seeing to a pathway of Many-Eyed Seeing (Kelly, 2013a). The latter approach acknowledges diverse ways of knowing, multiple perspectives, and the strength of Indigenous, Western, Eastern, and other cultural orientations. It also acknowledges the need for integrative, transcultural, trans-systemic, transdisciplinary, and collaborative approaches to knowledge and educational praxis (Kelly, 2013a). Ultimately, for me, this inquiry led to a transformative praxis involving radical acts of re-imagining my work and my world. Working with Indigenous *métissage* as a praxis is central to this process, as is honouring the capacity it cultivates.

In my work, I have endeavoured to create classroom contexts or scholarly spaces that honour what *Nehiyaw* educator Willie Ermine (2000, 2007) calls “ethical space.” These are spaces or “venues to step out of our allegiances, to detach from the cages of our mental worlds and assume a position where human-to-human dialogue can occur” (Ermine, 2007, pp. 202-203). He indicates that

as a process, the fundamental requirements of the ethical space include an affirmation of its existence. The ethical space cannot exist without this affirmation. The affirmation of the space indicates that there is an acceptance of a cultural divide and a direct statement of cultural jurisdictions at play. The ethical space also requires dialogue about intentions, values, and the assumptions of the entities toward the research process. (Ermine, 2004, p. 21)

In other words, there is a reciprocal recognition (Simpson, 2017) that Indigenous and Western Knowledges have a right to coexist within post-secondary institutions, and it is a question of creating a *Hermeneutic Imagination* (Smith, 1991) that honours the intrinsic nature of these knowledges, their knowledge practices or methodologies, and their ethical orientations to knowing.

As part of my scholarship, I took up my own hermeneutic inquiry into the nature of these diverse knowledges, their knowledge practices, and their ethical dispositions, as well as the possible integrative, transdisciplinary, and trans-systemic implications for research and learning. I became a student of Anishinaabe studies and began to actively reach back into my own Indigenous background. Through this process, I came to the understanding, or teaching, that I had to actively cultivate the act of reaching back to my Anishinaabe Knowledge Traditions and Teachings, and to develop such a deep relationship to them that they animated me to walk with them. They became pedagogical to my way of being, and I learned to carry them in my bundle as I did my work as an Indigenous scholar at SFU. I also realized that in order to thrive here on the West Coast, I had to actively cultivate a relationship to the lands of the people with whom I lived and worked.

I am an artist, so as a part of my sabbatical, I did a two-year apprenticeship in traditional carving at the Freda Diesing School of North West Coast Art in Terrace, British Columbia. I did this to actively engage in the Indigenous cosmologies and knowledges of the West Coast.



And I also wanted to apprentice as an artist in the Indigenous Knowledge practices of the local Indigenous Peoples on their traditional lands. Thus, for two years, I put my head down and carved 8-10 hours a day. I made traditional bent knives, and I carved and painted with other local Indigenous apprentices. I had the honour of working with some of the West Coast's most well-known Indigenous carvers: Dempsey Bob, Stan Bevan, Ken McNeil, Dean Heron, Lathem Mack, Reg Davidson, Sean Hunt, and Roy Henry Vickers. Throughout this time, I also attended many *Nisga'a* ceremonies and cultural events throughout the Nass Valley.

Prior to this time, I had taken up the Native American Flute as a practice and began to follow the traditions of the Wind Clan and to be in the Discipline of Wind (Kelly, 2013b). I took up the acoustic/ecological practice of playing in place, sounding on the land with *All My Relatives*. As part of my inquiry, I travelled into the canyon country of the *Navaho* and *Lakota* People, visited their sacred sites, and played my Native Flute as part of this visiting practice and ecological encounter, learning to dwell well within the acoustic ecologies of place.

What I learned by participating in these two artistic apprenticeships, or Indigenous Knowledge practices, was that in the act of making, I was unmaking and remaking myself. These practices were deeply pedagogical to my way of being and, gradually, through their profound Indigenous pedagogies, I began to perceive the world differently. Through these knowledge practices and the learning of my own traditional stories and knowledge traditions, my imagination and ways of knowing were worked upon. They became porous to the teachings of my own cultural background and to the Indigenous cultures on the lands I was now living. The following quote speaks to this process of naturalizing imagination to the land:

Imagination has a place because imagination is a place, and because everything is connected to everything else, the encounter with the imagination is a living communication within a sentient landscape...where one is has everything to do with who one is...When mind, spirit and land...my are understood to be as they have always been, as coevolutionary, there emerges a principle that guides imagination in its duty to integrate nature's realities and ensure the perpetuation of those realities and so all of Life. (Sheridan & Longboat, 2006, p. 370)

Thus, over time, by reaching back to my Anishinaabe Creation Stories and by being on the land of my people, I became resonant with, and porous to, the teachings of the land of my people and *All My Relations*. Additionally, by taking up the artistic practices of the Northwest Coast, by learning the Creation Stories of their place and being on their land, I gradually became more naturalized to the West Coast. The following quote speaks to both these processes:

Without being able to follow our footprints back to a Creation Story that accounts for where we and all the beings and all the elements that are Creation come from, we have no way to understand how that ecology of Creation is asking us to develop an intelligence that is symmetrical with all of Creation. When all things spoke to all things, ecology and story were simultaneous and symmetrical expressions of each other. (Cajete, 2015, p. 377)



Over time, I was aware that my cultural imagination and my understanding of Indigenous knowledges were morphing. My engagement with land-based practices and artistic knowledge practices was enacting a profound participatory pedagogy, and I felt that the hermeneutic imagination through which I was perceiving the world (Donald, 2012; Smith, 1991) was changing, undergoing a radical metamorphosis. My eyes and ears were being rinsed and washed. I was being transformed by integrating these processes, as well as traditional ceremony, into my daily life. As David Suzuki (2006) notes in *The Wisdom of the Elders*, Mayan stories are understood as an *ilbal*, a precious seeing instrument, or lens, with which to view sacred relationships. He suggests that such stories may offer us a corrective lens for our times. I now understand that Indigenous stories are rich in wisdom and knowledge, teachings that may also help re-animate our relationship with *Mother Earth* and *All Our Relations* through the pedagogy of an Indigenously imagined cosmology.

After reading Robin Wall Kimmerer's (2013) *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teaching of Plants*, I came to understand that I was not alone in my efforts of journeying back into the teachings of my culture. Many of my Indigenous scholar colleagues are also engaged in walking back toward their Ancestors and bringing forth to current contexts the ancient offerings from their Ancestors.

The People of the Seventh Fire do not yet walk forward; rather, they are told to turn around and retrace the steps of the ones who brought us here. Their sacred purpose is to walk back along the red road of our ancestors' path and to gather up all the fragments that lay scattered along the trail. Fragments of land, tatters of language, bits of songs, stories, sacred teachings—all that was dropped along the way. Our elders say that we live in the time of the seventh fire. We are the ones the ancestors spoke of, the ones who will bend to the task of putting things back together to rekindle the flames of the sacred fire, to begin the rebirth of a nation. (Wall Kimmerer, 2013, pp. 367-8)

Having been on this journey for some time now, I believe we stand within a moment in time, a space where we are being invited to encounter and enter fully the ecologies of the world in ways that are deeply respectful of all beings dwelling within them. We are being asked to honour their inherent right to exist as the implicit sovereignty of the natural world and *All Our Relations*. In the Anishinaabe Creation Stories, as part of our becoming human, we are invited to wander the world with profound reciprocal recognition and ethical relationality, such that through reverence and wonder we are gifted the name, essential essence, or quality and the wisdom teachings of each and every being in Creation. The responsibility of learning to be fully human requires us to create profound resonances within our being: physically, emotionally, mindfully, and spiritually through a participatory pedagogical process that informs our being. This process helps teach us through the creation of an elegant symmetry within our imaginations. Thus, the land animates our traditional, cultural, and spiritual cosmologies, as an act of imagination within place. This act of imagining is also the act of reciprocal recognition that is so essential to Indigenous Knowledge traditions. The rendering

of these wisdom teachings into imaginative or mytho-poetic landscapes (Cajete, 1994) is how we story our ethical relationality into an Indigenously understood multi-verse. How we hold knowledge has everything to do with who we have learned to become. The ethical relationality of learning how to be, and to hold knowledges in ways that are resonant with the law of the land, invites us to create human dispositions and, yes, institutions that are resonant or porous to being endogenous or Indigenous to our places.

In the Indigenous inquiry praxis described above, we are invited into a profound participatory pedagogy that leads to transforming ourselves and re-imagining our worlds in ways that radically re-animate our relationships to who we are as human beings and what it means to live ethically and responsibly with *All Our Relations*. We return to the teachings and to ourselves. What has emerged for me is: How will we hold such knowledges ethically and in ways that acknowledge the right of young people to engage with Indigenous Knowledges and worldviews, as well as the right of children to explore their Indigeneity and honour being endogenous to Mother Earth? For Indigenous Peoples around the world, the right to engage in and explore their cultural identity and to protect their cultural knowledge is fundamental to the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP, 2008), and essential for our collective responses to Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action (TRC, 2015). Will we honour the right to encounter Indigenous Knowledges, worldviews, and ethics in our universities? What are the real and radical implications of UNDRIP and the TRC for our post-secondary institutions? What are the pedagogies of Indigenous Knowledge practices, and what is their relevance in creating a Many-Eyed Seeing disposition as a capacity for community engagement? Can, and will, our institutions create ethical spaces, or foster ethical relationality that leads to ethical action and becomes response-able to the rights of *All Our Relations*? And what is needed to reanimate our imaginations so we can participate with resonance with the world in the spirit of right relations?

Through my inquiry, I am reaching for a vision that informs my work as an Indigenous scholar, educator, and artist. I am learning why it is important to have one hand reaching back and one hand reaching forward, as is the Coast Salish tradition and the teachings of Vince Stogan of the Musqueam Nation. Wall Kimmerer (2013) describes this process:

What does it mean to be people of the seventh fire, to walk back along the ancestral road and pick up what was left behind? How do we recognize what we should reclaim and what is dangerous refuse? What is truly medicine for the living earth, and what is the drug of deception? None of us can recognize every piece, let alone carry it all. We need each other, to take a song, a word, a story, a tool, a ceremony and put it in our bundles. Not for ourselves, but for the one yet to be born, for all our relations. Collectively, we assemble from the wisdom of the past a version for the future, a worldview shaped by mutual flourishing (p. 371).

## **Strand Two: The Story Threads**

In this section of my Indigenous *métissage*, I braid dialogically some of my experiences and reflections on the process of enacting my emerging vision by introducing Indigenous Knowledge practices, ceremony, and Indigenous pedagogies through cultivating Many-Eyed Seeing and creating ethical spaces within a Canadian institutional context. I will share a description of three practical examples as story threads. The first story thread tells of introducing Indigenous Knowledge, Knowledge Holders, and ceremony into a university context through the 2016 SFU President's Dream Colloquium called *Returning to the Teachings: Justice, Identity and Belonging*. The second story thread tells of a program, founded on community engagement with two Indigenous communities and a local school district, that offers practicing teachers an Indigenous pedagogical pathway meant to lead to profound transformation and healing through the co-exploration of Indigeneity. Within this program we understood that

Indigeneity...is the process of fine-tuning your presence in an ongoing dialectic with the places you inhabit...Indigeneity involves the open-ended cultural work of striving to integrate the storytelling animal into the shifting depths of the living terrain... Indigeneity describes the lived quality that is possible anywhere, any time. More than that, it describes a quality of participation with Earth that is necessary for any community, if they wish to endure within the storied unfolding of the fully animate, living planet. (Mueller, 2017, pp. 194-5)

It was the aim of the program to introduce Indigenous Knowledges and Knowledge practices as the active foundations for the enactment of Indigenous pedagogy, and to demonstrate that engaging in these processes helps us to understand our Indigeneity. Ultimately these processes transform us such that we become available to the teachings from *All Our Relations* and learn about being fully human in our place.

Finally, in the third story thread, I share more current explorations of and key learnings from a process weaving Indigenous Knowledges and ethics into university research and community engagement contexts. By honouring the exploration of Indigeneity in our institutions, we are also actively supporting the transformation of our institutions.

It has become clear to me that how we live, how we organize, how we engage in the world — the process — not only frames the outcome, it is the transformation...Engaging in deep and reciprocal Indigeneity is a transformative act because it fundamentally changes modes of production of our lives. It changes the relationships that house our bodies and our thinking...If we want to live in a different present, then we have to centre Indigeneity and allow it to change us. (Simpson, 2017, pp. 19-20)

### ***First Story Thread: An Emergent Vision***

After returning from my two-year apprenticeship at the Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art, I and another colleague began introducing Indigenous Knowledges and ceremony into the SFU context. The process began in 2016, when we hosted the President's Dream

Colloquium, *Returning to the Teachings: Justice, Identity and Belonging*, with the intention of addressing Reconciliation and the TRC's *94 Calls to Action*. This process was powerful because we engaged in conversations with members of the local Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh, Musqueam, Katzie, Qwantlen, and Métis Nations. We began with a gathering of Knowledge Holders and Elders from these communities and shared the invitation to co-host the Dream Colloquium. Collectively, we asked the question, "What would it look like if Indigenous Knowledges and Knowledge Holders were put in a place of honour and hosted a series of speakers with ceremony?" Knowledge Holders and scholars Chief Robert Joseph, Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, Wab Kinew, Manulani Aluli-Meyer, Stephen Reicher, Rupert Ross, Jennifer Llewellyn, John Borrows, and Wade Davis were invited as keynote speakers. The conversations led to the creation of an *All Nations Circle of Elders* who guided the Dream Colloquium. It was decided that each Nation would host two of the ceremony/lecture events following their own protocols and involving their respected Knowledge Holders and community members. I would like to acknowledge that the Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations Knowledge Holders took on important leadership in this ceremonial process. Simultaneously, at SFU, we had 30 graduate students who participated in an accompanying graduate course. People were invited into two-hour events where "the work" of the session was facilitated through ceremony and the sharing of knowledges through knowledge practices. During this time, scholars and Knowledge Holders were celebrated and blanketed while sharing their teachings and visions for the generations to come. This 12-week journey became a participatory pathway for us to gather, to engage in hosting ceremonies and feasts, and to work in ways that had profound effects on us all. It lifted us up, whether we were participating in the pedagogical process of ceremony or called to witness it, and whether we were members of the Indigenous community, the graduate student community, the wider SFU community, or the community at large. We were all deeply moved by participating in the process of ceremony. Throughout, I heard many testimonials that spoke to experiences of profound personal transformation. And still today, I am told by my doctoral students that it was the most profound learning experience of their lives. The Dream Colloquium nurtured our collective right to dream and has forever transformed us.

Ultimately, it also changed SFU as an institution, since it had a lasting effect on our university community, specifically through the inclusion of ceremony and the pedagogy of ceremony within the larger university context and in specific graduate programs. The Dream Colloquium was important for the re-imagining of what is possible, and it became a living example of the enactment of trans-systemic knowledge practices and protocols within the institution. An example of the influence on the larger SFU context is the creation of a Ceremony and Feast for Reconciliation with the Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations when the Aboriginal Reconciliation Council gifted the SFU President their final report and Calls to Action, *Walk This Path With Us*, in 2017. This important event was witnessed by the local Indigenous communities as well as the SFU community. Another example is the use of consultation and Indigenous ceremony to begin particular Faculty of Education programs held on various Coast Salish territories with the Musqueam, Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh, Katzie, Kwantlen, and Stó:lō Nations. A third example is the inclusion of ceremony in our university gatherings, such as

the *Return of the Salmon People* event held annually within the Faculty of Education teacher education program. Further articulation of this story thread can be found in “Ceremony as a Pathway to Reconciliation and Indigenous Resurgence” (Kelly, 2019).

### ***Second Story Thread: A Vision Becomes a Pedagogical Pathway***

During the same time as the Dream Colloquium, I was also working on a proposal for a Graduate Diploma in Education (GDE) in *Indigenous Education: Education for Reconciliation*, with the vision to fashion a program that was based on Indigenous Knowledges, pedagogies, and ceremony. The local Indigenous Nations would be included in the co-visioning of the program. Although we had begun to imagine this GDE in Indigenous education prior to the Dream Colloquium, we now had the courage to build upon the Dream Colloquium and the work of the *All Nations Circle of Elders*. We held meetings with the North Vancouver School District about their involvement with the new program, and we began to speak to and envision with the Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. We created a *Curriculum Council* and began to sit in circle to talk about how we might support district teachers. We asked ourselves, “What would the program look like?” “How should it evolve?” “What should be the key aspects of the curriculum and pedagogical process?” Thus, we began to lean into a co-visioning *from the ground up*. Together, we explored questions of, “How would this all emerge?” and most importantly, “What were the Nations hoping for as far as their vision of the program and the needs of the teachers?” “What capacities did they hope the teachers of their children would have?” and “What would be the community’s involvement in the curricular enactment of the program?”

Our first orientation week in August 2017 was co-designed by the Tsleil-Waututh and Squamish Nations. They hosted the week in their communities, they facilitated the activities, and they were the Knowledge Holders and facilitators of the pedagogical pathway. Through this process, it became very obvious that we were walking this pathway as a family that included members of the local Indigenous communities, the 24 teacher-learners, the North Vancouver School District, and the Faculty of Education at SFU.

We began the first orientation week together with a ceremony. The process of ceremony was the beginning of our walking our path together, through a portal or doorway into the longhouse, and our collaborative learning journey. Through that opening of ceremony, all our work unfolded. Angela George of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation brought the idea that we should begin the program with a Naming Ceremony, and, thus, Gabriel and Angela George began a lengthy process of trying to find a name, a name that could be held by the Tsleil-Waututh and Squamish Nations in their respective languages. We also began the process of co-imagining what this first ceremony would involve and how we should enact it. The teaching was offered that in naming of the program we were not naming a *thing*; rather, we came to the understanding that community members would carry the name within the community and that this name would have a long life, a living legacy carried by two individuals within each of the two Nations. What we were trying to initiate within our collective family was the acknowledgement that we are all responsible for enacting this living legacy — a legacy that

will gift us with its real fruits only in the future. As a result, the names *Staʔəlnamət* & *Stel nūmut* (deep inner learning) were bestowed on two members of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation (an elder and a young boy) and two members of the Squamish Nation (two educators). Thus, this program began the first steps in enacting a living legacy that will continue within our collective communities far into the future.

The teacher-learners arrived on that first morning, gathered in a circle around the fire in the Longhouse, and introduced themselves. Over lunch they acted as co-hosts to the feast, and by the afternoon they were actively part of a family enacting a Naming Ceremony and witnessing work that was deeply serious for the communities attending. The Elders and Residential School Survivors, as witnesses to the naming, stood up and spoke at great length about what it meant for the communities to be hosting and co-imagining this program. Every one of us felt a sense of reciprocal responsibility as we began this process, and we still do as we have continued to walk this learning pathway together. This journey and ceremonial process has proven to be incredibly powerful. The intensive first week within the communities invited the teacher/learners to radically open themselves to a process of deeply participating in a profound pedagogy. On that first day, which was also the day of the solar eclipse, we stepped into the middle of a very transformative journey. Collectively, we learned how to focus all our energy on the work, and it has been an honour to paddle in the same canoe with the teacher/learners, the Tsleil-Waututh and Squamish Nations, and the North Vancouver School District.

Over the next two years, this ceremonial pathway continued with ceremonies and celebrations of learning being held each term. These powerful events were facilitated with Traditional Cultural Protocol through Ceremonial Speakers and witnessed by the Name Holders and members of the Tsleil-Waututh and Squamish Nations. The program ended with an *Honouring and Gratitude Ceremony* held again in the Seymour Longhouse two years later. The Nations, Knowledge Holders, teacher/learners and their families gathered to celebrate, stand up, and honour the teachers for all their good work. Witnesses stood and raised their hands, lifting the teachers up and speaking to their learning and transformation. They acknowledged that they were now carrying a vision for Indigenous education that would be important for future generations of children. At the ceremony, each student wore a garment and headband they had woven and a silver blanket pin they had made. Both were created with the teaching and help of Traditional Coast Salish weavers and carvers.

It became very clear that the pedagogical processes of making, whether it is making traditional medicines or engaging in traditional artmaking or drumming and singing, were deeply transformative for the teachers. Through the participatory pedagogies of land practice, the Indigenous Knowledge practices, and their own Indigenous inquiry processes, the teachers changed, and with them their educational practices, in profoundly important ways. The metamorphosis of their person and transformation of their educational practice also deeply affected the children and students in their classrooms, and it affected conversations and relationships within school communities. I believe, in a humble way, it changed the educational landscape of the North Vancouver School District, and I know it has powerfully informed our work in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University. Through our presentations and



sharings, it has also begun to inform conversations across this country. Further articulation of this story thread can be found in “From Reconciliation towards Indigenous Cultural Resurgence: A Métissage on the Co-Imagining of *Staʔəlnamət* & *Stel númut*” (Kelly & Rosehart, 2019).

This program has continued on into a Masters of Education in Practioner Inquiry in *Indigenous Education: Truth, Reconciliation, and Indigenous Resurgence*. A core group of thirteen teachers were joined by seven other educators to journey on with their Indigenous inquiry. Each weekend, we wove together Indigenous Knowledge practices and pedagogies with Indigenous scholarship and ceremony. The students each took up a land practice, an Anishinaabe Ozihtoon or Indigenous making process, and they also did life-writing and engaged in métissage as a curricular and research practice. By working with autobiography as a critical point of departure, the students explored métissage making in various ways. Donald (2012) states:

Having theorized métissage as a curricular practice that can be used to resist the priority and authority given to official texts and textural practices. This curricular form of métissage shows how personal and family stories can be braided in with larger narratives of nation and nationality, often with provocative effects. Thus, rather than viewing métissage as solitary research, this form of métissage relies on collaboration and collective authorship as a strategy for exemplifying as text and research praxis, the transcultural transdisciplinary and shared nature of the experience and memory. (p. 339)

When métissage making in a collaborative way, different authors’ words are woven to work “collectively to juxtapose their text in such a way that highlights difference (racial, cultural, historical, socio-political and linguistic) without essentializing or erasing it, while simultaneously locating points of affinity” (Chambers et al., 2008, p. 142). Honouring these points of deep affinity allowed the students to support each other as family in ways I have seldom witnessed within my classes at the university.

Thus, by reaching back and reaching forward through weaving together the above story threads, I find the teachings of my own reaching back into the Indigenous Traditional Knowledges and practices of my Ancestors in reciprocal relationship with the land. I enacted or offered forward a pedagogical process that I knew from my own experiences with Indigenous stories, land practice, Indigenous Knowledge practices, and Anishinaabe Ozihtoon, or Indigenous making and ceremony. In reaching forward, this process created the ethical space and ethical relationality that enabled us all to envision ecologies in which these pedagogies of land and ceremony, as well as the Indigenous pedagogy of making, are part of a lifelong learning process and the capacity for ethical action. What I witnessed, in what emerged from the program, were examples of transformations similar to those I had personally experienced in my own journey of inquiry, but now as educational practices enacted within institutional contexts. These processes created ecologies of engagement and change within the schools, School Districts, and SFU through all those involved in the process. Just as Leanne Simpson (2017) acknowledges:



Indigenous internal, reciprocal self-recognition is a mechanism through which we reproduce and amplify Indigeneity. When another Indigenous person recognizes and reflects back to me my Nishnaabeg essence, when we interact with each other in Nishnaabeg way...my Nishaabewin deepens. When my Indigeneity grows, I am more connected, I fall in love with my homeland, my family, my culture, and my language, and more in line with the thousands of stories that demonstrate how to live a meaningful life, and have more emotional capital to fight and protect what is meaningful to me. (pp. 182-3)

The descriptions shared in the above braids are articulations of my experiences with Indigenous Knowledges, Anishinaabe Ozihtoon, and Indigenous inquiry, as well as Indigenous ethics, and they have become sites for change in the trans-systemic transformation of our institution. They have also become teaching stories for the enactment of faculties' community engagement in the future, with the intention that we create learning ecologies for the next seven generations that lift up the offerings of our Ancestors for the children yet to be born, and engage in the re-imagination of what it means to be human and live in harmony with *All Our Relations*.

### ***Third Story Thread: The Teachings Become a Pedagogy and Methodology***

In my current work, I am braiding or weaving the pedagogical process of the first two story threads into the creation of the third. In other words, I am working with the participatory pedagogies of Indigenous ceremony, Circle and Indigenous dialogue, as well as place-based pedagogies to explore Indigenous Knowledges and Indigenous ethics. In collaboration with colleagues and Knowledge Holders, we are asking "How can the pedagogy of Indigenous dialogue and ceremony inform understanding and reciprocal recognition of Indigenous Knowledges, research methodologies, and ethics within the university?" "How can dialogue with Indigenous Knowledge Holders create ethical spaces that ultimately inform and transform our understandings of knowledge and ethics?" and "How can this ethically relational process create trans-systemic and transdisciplinary understandings that can be integrated into ethical action within our post-secondary institutions, and what are the implications for community-engaged research?" In actualizing all this, "What are we learning about reconciliation, Indigenous resurgence, and the right to encounter Indigenous Knowledges and ethics for the next generations?" Ultimately, we are asking "How can these teachings re-animate our imaginations such that we become respectful relatives with *All Our Relations*?"

These questions form the ethical foundations of a new initiative I lead as director of the Indigenous Research Institute and co-envisioned with the Office of Vice President Research and International, along with the Office for Research Ethics. The work invites a respectful, meaningful, and practical awareness of developing Indigenous ethics within the SFU community. In this vision, ethics is understood as not only a part of academic research, but an integral component of all of the university's stated priorities in research, education, and community engagement. Our initiative aims to create a new dialogic or ethically relational

space of engagement and act as a catalyst to connect the University's three existing priorities into an integrated wholeness. It proposes a transformative inquiry and a participatory pedagogical process to help prepare the ground, cultivate culturally safe and hospitable spaces, and co-create respectful, ethically relational ways forward. It is based on an expanded understanding of knowledge and its ethical foundations, such that it offers a necessary transformation of explicit and tacit infrastructures that support SFU's stated commitments to reconciliation and ultimately Indigenous Resurgence.

The initiative invites *ethical* reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples and begins with the Nations on whose territory SFU is located. Essential to this process and pedagogy, then, is *learning from the land and peoples of the land* where SFU is located in order to inform the work that we are doing individually and collectively. Indeed, we hold that this is the very *ethos* with which the work must be undertaken. The initial phase of the work, inspired by the *All Nations Circle of Elders* created as part of the 2016 Dream Colloquium, involves creating a *Circle of Traditional Knowledge Holders* from the region to advise, share Traditional Knowledge and ethical teachings, lead ceremony, and to assist in the development of Ethical Guidance and Protocols that align with the Local Indigenous values and priorities, and support implementation of SFU's commitments to Indigenous Ethics and Ethical Reconciliation.

The sharing and exploration of Indigenous Ethical Teachings will happen through a series of *Ethics Dialogues* involving the *Circle of Traditional Knowledge Holders* with selected well-known scholars, to be witnessed by the wider SFU Research community. The process and outcomes of the *Ethics Dialogues* will be documented to help inform SFU ethics protocols and approaches to Indigenous research and research in partnership with Indigenous communities. The *Ethics Dialogues* are intended as educative and pedagogical to the institution of SFU and its Offices, Faculties, and Departments. They aim to facilitate respectful recognition and the development of capacities for institutional change within SFU. The *Ethics Dialogues* are intended as key *sites of learning*, informed and inspired by the Bohm dialogue principles (1991), Indigenous applications of Bohmian Dialogues, and the deep dialogic work of Indigenous scholar Gregory Cajete. Cajete (2015) notes:

A true circle of dialogue is the key. By true, I mean that the sharing cannot be superficial or just interesting conversation or even scholarly discourse. The dialogue must be from and of the heart...Community dialogue is not a onetime event but stimulates an ever-growing spiral: shared thoughts lead to informed actions, which lead to new knowledge, understanding, competencies, and effectiveness, all of which motivate the community to keep engaging in dialogue. The process generates an ever-evolving spiral of inquiry, action, and knowledge creation. (p. 215)

Through this co-creative, reflexive process that recognizes and honours both Western academic as well as Indigenous Knowledges and ethical traditions through a Many-Eyed Seeing approach, we seek to actively engage at the intersection of diverse knowledge systems, ethics, and values, and to cultivate *respectful ethical relationality, reciprocal recognition, accountability, and the*

*responsibility to take ethical action* as the essence of sustained mutually-respectful relationships and their living legacy.

Not only is it important, through our process, to foster the capacity for understandings of different worldviews and knowledges, we seek also to create understanding of how Indigenous Knowledges are held ethically and relationally, and how we learn to become porous and available to receiving such knowledges over a lifetime. Our ultimate goal is to weave a new basket of understanding for holding Indigenous Knowledges, Indigenous ethics, and Indigenous research methodologies within the SFU community and with Indigenous communities in our region and beyond. Creating intentional spaces for deep dialogue, and supporting the weaving together of Indigenous, Western, and other knowledges and practices, has the potential to meaningfully and powerfully inform practice and policy for post-secondary institutions. Ultimately, our aim is to create a living legacy for future generations.

### **What are the lessons learned?**

In this Indigenous *métissage*, I have explored my personal engagement in Indigenous Arts-based Inquiry as a simultaneous practice of Anishinaabe Ozihtoon or Indigenous making and knowledge generation. I described how my experiences of Anishinaabe Ozihtoon have taught me about the potential of these practices to unmake and remake us by unlocking theoretical possibilities and offering access to the intelligences within Indigenous Knowledges. They helped me understand and generate the reanimation of Indigenous land-based practices as a pedagogical pathway towards my own Indigenous assurgence. I explored the potential of reviving Indigenous artistic practices as sites of co-imagining through co-creation in graduate courses, and I showed how these practices can be sites for both ecological and community-based reconciliation and healing. I presented my experiences of how the act of reciprocal recognition, as a core practice, fosters ethical relationality, the flourishing of our Indigeneity, and the honouring of the circle of life and *All Our Relations*. This Indigenous *métissage* tracked the Indigenous pedagogical processes and Indigenous art making used in my own praxis and inquiry as a scholar while working in a university and how, when offered forward, these pedagogical practices afford a similar potentiality for teacher/learners. I described my efforts to create three pedagogical pathways for trans-systemic knowledge creation: a university-wide President's Dream Colloquium, *Returning to the Teachings: Justice, Identity and Belonging* and its accompanying graduate course; graduate programming, including a graduate diploma in *Education for Reconciliation* and a Master of education in *Indigenous Education: Truth, Reconciliation, and Indigenous Resurgence*; and the Indigenous Research Institute's initiation of an *Indigenous Ethics Dialogue* process as a trans-systemic pedagogical engagement with Indigenous and Western Knowledges, values, and ethics. Central to this *métissage* is the recognition of the capacity-forming arch – from the creation of an ethical space through reciprocal recognition and the act of ethical relationality, to the potentiality of ethical action that is radically rooted as a living legacy of our ancestors and our living connection to *All Our Relations*.

## Closing Thoughts

Finally, I would like to acknowledge that I understand this work as the work of the *People of the Seventh Fire*. The Elders tell us that in our time, we stand before a fork in the pathway of humanity. This fork is a choice between the charred road of materialism that threatens the land, the people, and the green path of wisdom, mutual respect, and reciprocity that is held in the teachings of our Ancestors and the first fire at the beginning of time. It is said that if the people choose the green path, then all races will go forward together to light the *Eighth Fire*, the final fire of peace and brotherhood, forging the great nation of humanity that was foretold long ago (Wall Kimmerer, 2013). Many of us are asking what it will take to support the lighting of this Eighth Fire, and what is the role of our Institutions of Higher Learning in this process? Perhaps there are lessons in the practice of *making fire* traditionally that will help us now, teachings offered by the people of the *Seventh Fire* and *Mother Earth* herself.

The Earth provides the materials and humans must do the work of holding the knowledge and wisdom of how to use the power of fire for the good of *All Our Relations*. The spark itself is part of the *Great Mystery, Spirit in Our Times*, but we know that before the fire can be lit with the bow drill, we have to gather the tinder, the thoughts, and the practices that will nurture the flame. We need to hone our skills in making to develop capacities, and learn the ways of being through the pedagogy of ceremony and by lighting the fire. We may struggle with our bow drill to achieve reciprocity, to find a way that knowledge and the learning of body, emotion, mind, and spirit can all be brought into harmony, to harness gifts of being human and to create a gift for *Mother Earth* and *All Our Relatives*.

Here *shkitagen* is our helper. It is the firekeeper fungus, also known as chaga. It lives on the being of the birch tree, the tree of life for the Anishinaabe People. It is the holder of the spark that cannot be extinguished. Thus, many of us are taking courage and going back to the land and the wisdom that lives with the Indigenous People of this land. We offer ceremony, like tobacco, as a gift for all that has been given and shared so generously by the Knowledge Holders. So much depends on the spark that is nurtured between us and *All Our Relations* as we gather the generous offering of golden *shkitagen* to be kindled. So much depends on the air, the nest of tinder, the reciprocity of bow and drill, and Creator's breath to make it glow – breath as wind to fuel the flame so that together we hold in our hands the fire of the future. I have seen and witnessed this awakening to be useful in myself, my students and colleagues, and in the young people I meet.

The following words of Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013) speak to the urgency of the work ahead. It is an important time that we are living in. As we are leaning into this work and reaching for a vision, I think her words honour the spirit of our intent and its possibilities of enactment.

As the seventh fire people walk the path, we should all be looking for *Shkitagen*, the ones who hold the spark that cannot be extinguished. We find the firekeepers all along the path and greet them with gratitude and humility that against all odds, they have carried the ember forward, waiting to be breathed into life. In seeking the *shkitagen* of

the forest and *shkitagen* of the spirit, we ask for open eyes and open minds, hearts open enough to embrace our more-than-human kin, a willingness to engage intelligences not our own. We'll need trust in the generosity of the good green earth to provide this gift and trust in human people to reciprocate.

I don't know how the eight fire will be lit. But I do know we can gather the tinder that will nurture the flame, that we can be *shkitagen* to carry the fire, as it was carried to us. Is this not a holy thing, the kindling of this fire? So much depends on the spark. (Wall Kimmerer, 2013, p. 373)

It is my hope that the work described herein will enable the nurturing of just such a spark, a sacred flame to greet the seven generations to come.

*"As we learn together, the journey offers the sacred gift of humility." (Iwama et al., 2009, p. 7)*

*Chi Miigwetch.*

*All Our Relations*

*ALL OUR RELATIONS!*

## About the Author

**Vicki Kelly** is Anishinaabe/Métis Scholar in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University. She works in Indigenous Education and Ecological Education. Her research focuses are: Indigenous knowledges, practices, pedagogies, healing, cultural resurgence. She is an artist who plays the Native American Flute, is a visual artist, carver, and writer. You can reach her through her email: [vicki\\_kelly@sfu.ca](mailto:vicki_kelly@sfu.ca)

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