

Disrupting Colonial Narratives of Place: The q'ícəy' Slough Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow Project

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Abstract

What happens when traces of the past are invited to “haunt” the present, disrupting the colonial narratives inherent in local spaces, and creating openings for new stories and new relationships? Guided by Indigenous and post-human worldviews, this project facilitated community learning about the q'ícəy' Slough, while collectively imagining new futures for this waterway. Elementary students learned from Elders and environmentalists at the Slough, while simultaneously caring for the land. They then made art *with* the land, which, along with Elder stories, guided the creation of a school mural. The teachings of the mural and the children’s art continue to reverberate as their stories are shared

with post-secondary students and teachers. This research informs how we might engage learners with the complexities and complicities of settler colonialism and provides an example of a local land-centred curriculum that informs how we might all live well together, contributing to real-world change.

Key words: land-centred learning, anti-colonial learning, post-human pedagogy, Indigenous pedagogy, relational renewal

Résumé

Que se passe-t-il lorsque les traces du passé sont appelées à « hanter » le présent, bousculant les récits coloniaux inhérents aux espaces locaux et ouvrant sur des possibilités de créer de nouveaux récits et de nouvelles relations? Guidé par une vision autochtone et posthumaine du monde, ce projet a favorisé l'apprentissage de la communauté sur le « q̓ícəy̓ Slough » (marais q̓ícəy̓), tout en imaginant collectivement de nouvelles perspectives pour l'avenir de ce cours d'eau. Lors d'une activité visant à lui apporter des soins, des élèves du primaire ont appris des anciens et d'environnementalistes à propos du marais. Les enfants ont ensuite produit des créations artistiques sur la terre et les récits de l'ancien, ce qui a inspiré la création d'un mural à l'école. Les connaissances acquises grâce au mural et à l'art des enfants continuent de retentir alors que leurs idées sont partagées avec des étudiants et des enseignants du postsecondaire. Cette recherche nous éclaire sur la façon d'impliquer les apprenants aux complexités et aux complicités du colonialisme de peuplement et fournit l'exemple d'un programme d'études local centré sur la terre qui nous éclaire sur des moyens de mieux vivre ensemble, en contribuant à changer le monde de façon concrète.

Mots clés : apprentissage centré sur la terre, apprentissage anticolonial, pédagogie posthumaniste, pédagogie indigène, renouveau relationnel.

Introduction and Introductions

This article responds to the challenge of creating wholistic and complex educational opportunities that can contribute to what amiskwaciyiniwak (Beaver Hills Cree) scholar Dr. Dwayne Donald (2021) refers to as “relational renewal” (p. 55). As Donald (2021) contends, “a pressing curricular and pedagogical challenge faced by educators in Canada today is how to facilitate the emergence of a new story that can repair inherited colonial divides and give good guidance on how to proceed differently” (p. 55). In this article we tell the story of one such endeavour—the *q̓ícəy̓ Slough: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow Project*—a collaborative, land-centred inquiry project that disrupted colonial spaces and encouraged the development of new relationships with place and with one another. We¹ invited traces of the past to haunt the present and to call forth anti-colonial futures along a sacred waterway within the territories of the *q̓ícəy̓* people on the west coast of the country colonially known as Canada. Our story provides an example of how we might engage learners, from kindergarten to post-secondary and beyond, with the complexities and complicities of settler colonialism and collaboratively envision how we might all live well together.

Apologies, we are getting ahead of ourselves. Introductions are in order.

Good day. My name is Rick Bailey. I am an Elder and a long-serving member of Chief and Council with *q̓ícəy̓* First Nations. I have been hunting and fishing nearly all my life, learning these skills from my father, grandfather, and Elders. Wherever I go, I tell people about the salmon. They need all the help they can get right now. Each year, fewer and fewer salmon come back to our watershed due to development, pollution, overfishing, global warming, and fish farms. My people come from the sockeye salmon. We need to care for the waterways so that my family will come home in numbers like they once did.

1 In this article, we primarily tell our story as a collective based on our shared experience, and typically write in the second person, using the pronoun “we.” We also wish to maintain our distinct voices in places, or to situate aspects of our storytelling within our unique perspectives. In these instances, we will refer to ourselves in the third person.

I am Carman McKay, a Contemporary Salish Artist, Cultural Educator, and Life Skills Facilitator. My father's ancestors, the "River" People, have benefited from this livable region for at least 9,000 years. My history speaks of geological events, which have shaped how we lived and adapted to this vast British Columbia coast with direct links to the Cascade Mountain Range. My teachers from all over North America facilitated a cultural, experiential learning environment in its traditional and contemporary space. Walking alongside teachers who found no fault in my learning for what I didn't understand has given me an awareness of how I wish to be with others. I excel as a self-determined artist with passions for sharing Indigenous life skills, understandings, and perspectives through education to all learners. All My Relations.

I, Cher Hill, have lived on unsundered Indigenous territories all my life as an uninvited guest. I have been on a seven-year learning journey to educate myself about local knowledges and Indigenous worldviews, as well as the impact of settler colonization. I have become poignantly aware of the privilege I carry as a White-settler. I am also cognizant of the deficit in my own upbringing and education in comparison to that of my colleagues, who carry rich, multi-generational knowledge of the land and are profoundly connected with their ancestors. I am deeply committed to Indigenous sovereignty over their lands and a passionate supporter of restorative, community-based learning.

We welcome you to this storytelling that unfolds across time and space, and we are grateful that you are here to listen and to help us carry this work. We begin with an explanation of why the story of the q̓ícəy̓ Slough is an important one to tell.

Although commonly discursively condemned, the colonial legacy is an enduring aspect of the everyday spaces we inhabit, and its presence is continually working on us. Through the materiality of our environment, we are constantly being educated within dominant mainstream colonial ideologies based on our embodied experiences. As Alfred and Cornassel (2005) explain,

contemporary Settlers follow the mandate provided for them by their imperial forefathers' colonial legacy, not by attempting to eradicate the physical signs of Indigenous peoples as human bodies, but by trying to eradicate their existence as peoples through the erasure of the histories and geographies. (p. 598)

One of many places where Indigenous histories have been largely erased and the Land has been colonized is the q̓íc̓əy̓ Slough. Pre-contact, the Slough was a wetland of abundance that nourished the people, plants, animals, and fish, and was of great importance to the q̓íc̓əy̓ people. The Slough and these kin relations changed drastically when the wetland was diked to create farmland for settlers over 100 years ago. Today, what remains of the Slough is a narrow, stagnant, polluted waterway where few beings (other than invasive species) are thriving (Porter, 2017).

For those currently living on or near q̓íc̓əy̓ territories, the Slough is a regular part of everyday encounters, although it is typically backgrounded. When we shop at the local strip mall, commercial garbage disperses along the waterway; when we buy produce from local farms, those fruits and vegetables have been nurtured by water diverted from the Slough; when we commute on roads built on lands that used to be underwater, we are driving over places where salmon once swam and canoes glided through the marshes. Within these everyday encounters, the colonial reconfiguration of the Slough—including the displacement of the q̓íc̓əy̓ people and the degradation of the land—are normalized. Outside of Indigenous communities, few people are aware of how the Slough was prior to contact, the sacredness of her waterways, or the diversity of the ecosystem that she nurtured. There are few traces of how the Slough used to be, although Elder Rick will tell you that in certain places, if you know where to look, you can see depressions in the land where the Slough once was. As recently as 50 years ago, there were still some freshwater springs that flowed freely into the Slough, oxygenating the water and creating circulation that enabled fish and other inhabitants to survive in this waterway, even during the driest summers. Over time, however, the springs have been diverted and buried to make way for industrial warehousing, commercial buildings, and residential housing. Many of these changes have occurred so gradually that few people are consciously aware of how drastically the land has been changed over their lifetimes. Jared Diamond (2011) coined the term *landscape amnesia* to describe such phenomena.

The historical, geographical, cultural, and relational stories of places like the q̓íc̓əy̓ Slough are central to understanding settler colonial and Indigenous relationships to land, as well as with one another (Donald, 2021). These curricula, however, are rarely taught in schools. As Donald (2021) contends, “the stories that are typically told in schools continue to perpetuate the damaging and divisive colonial legacies that result from relationship denial” (p. 55). How might education shift if we focused learning on

local storied landscapes (Paperson, 2014; Styres, 2019)—not only in wild spaces, but within cityscapes as well? As Styres and colleagues (2013) contend, “land in cities speaks to us too—whether we choose to listen or not” (p. 39). All educators carry the responsibility of teaching their students about Indigenous histories, contemporary contributions, and the impact of settler colonialism (Government of Canada, 2015), and BC teachers must “integrate First Nations, Inuit and Métis worldviews and perspectives into learning environments” (BC Teachers’ Council, 2019). This can be challenging within schools and universities, which are embedded within colonial institutional cultures. Within this project, we took children out on the land to uncover the sedimented layers of colonial and Indigenous relationships inherent within the materiality of local landscapes (Donald, 2021). Our work provides an example of how students and teachers might learn from the land in ways that are consistent with Indigenous pedagogies, as well as disrupt colonial myths.

Our story begins with Elder Rick’s wish for educative signage about the q̓íc̓əy̓ Slough, as he describes it: “Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow.”

q̓íc̓əy̓ Slough: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

Ever since Cher has known Elder Rick, he has wanted to create public signage to educate people about the history of the q̓íc̓əy̓ Slough, inform community members about the current environmental challenges, and invite others to co-envision alternative futures for this waterway. The q̓íc̓əy̓ Slough is a 10-kilometre channel of water (as the crow flies) that runs between the Pitt and Fraser Rivers, in the lower mainland of what is colonially known as the province of British Columbia. According to the q̓íc̓əy̓ creation story, the Slough was carved out by Swanaset, one of the original ancestors of the q̓íc̓əy̓ people, who was instructed by the One Who Dwells Above to shape the wetlands to provide for the community (Jenness, 1955).

Prior to contact, the Slough was a tidal wetland connected to three rivers that sustained a diverse ecosystem. Elders will tell you that the Slough was once a land of abundance. Salmon, ducks, wapato (Indian potato), cranberries, blueberries, plant medicines, and much more were all plentiful in and around the Slough (see Lyons et al., 2018). There was more than enough food to sustain large communities, which is evident in the massive longhouses (reported to be 100 metres in length) that once stood on these lands. As Elder Rick shares, people came to q̓íc̓əy̓ from the four directions—from upriver to the

east, from the United States to the south, from the Island and the Sunshine Coast to the west, and from up and over the mountains to the north. The q'icay' community always had resources to care for them. The Slough nourished the q'icay' people physically, emotionally, and spiritually, and served as a transportation route between their summer and winter villages (Jenness, 1955).

Over 100 years ago, the area was diked and dammed to create farmland for settlers, severing the canoe route between the villages. Current flood control measures in the area impede the flow of water, which is now mostly stagnant, polluted, and overrun by invasive species (see Figure 1). As Porter (2017) shares,

Before dikes and gates, the slough would be flushed twice a day with tidal influence. Flood gates create a polluted closed system, gathering sewage outflow, agriculture and urban runoff and accumulation of invasive plant species. High temperatures in summer cause eutrophic conditions which limit the life of less-tolerant native plant and animal species. The stress of bank erosion and scouring contribute to the accumulation of muddy sediments and require constant dredging, which also promotes the proliferation of invasive species, like knotweed and blackberry which flourish on disturbed sites. Dredging creates a monoculture of vegetation which adds to a lack of biodiversity. (pp. 6–7)

The concentration levels of dissolved oxygen in the Slough are insufficient to sustain salmonids (Porter, 2017). As we experience more cycles of drought, parts of the Slough are drying up—right to the muddy bottom. One area of the Slough near a strip mall serves as an unofficial camp for unhoused folks, and the number of discarded needles indicates heavy drug use in this area. This is a stark contrast from the abundance of the Slough that nurtured so many beings prior to contact.

The Slough has also changed significantly within Elder Rick's lifetime, before the land was so developed. At that time there were still a significant number of springs creating some circulation in the Slough. He remembers how it used to be when he was a boy. It was a safe place for kids. He shares,

My brother and I trapped muskrats to finance our hunting because we loved hunting. We would go out and sell our pelts. Our grandfather taught us to only take what you need. During the war he could have sold pelts for exor-

bitant prices, but he only took what was needed to put food on the table.

As kids we would canoe all around the Slough. There were fish, there were ducks, there were frogs, turtles, muskrats, mink, and otter. All these used the Slough. It's a vital part of life. An important part of life. A q̓íc̓əy̓ way of life.

And yet, the enduring presence of this waterway is evident as springs pop up and sinkholes develop in housing complexes built where the Slough used to flow.

Figure 1

q̓íc̓əy̓ Slough Near the Strip Mall, and Along a Blueberry Farm



Positioning Ourselves Theoretically

This work was guided and informed by Indigenous and post-human worldviews carried by the authors. Elder Rick and Carman have lived on these lands for most of their lives and carry deep, place-based knowledge of the forests, mountains, and waterways, as well as ancestral and Elder teachings. Both Elder Rick and Carman walk in two worlds—Carman has worked as an educator in K–12 schools for over 20 years, and Elder Rick regularly liaises with governmental bodies through his long-time service as a community leader. Cher carries knowledge of post-human and Indigenous scholarship from many years of academic study. She is also incredibly privileged to be mentored by Elders and knowledge keepers². Growing up within Western worldviews, Cher's understanding of Indigenous knowledge systems remains limited however, despite years of study. Further, there are protocols regarding who can learn, carry, and share specific Indigenous teachings, and some Indigenous authors are not necessarily writing for non-Indigenous audiences. Cher turns to post-human theories, not to centre European worldviews, but to engage respectfully in this work through a body of scholarship that is, in many ways, complementary to Indigenous knowledge systems, and also disrupts the human-centric and individualistic underpinnings of mainstream understandings³.

Informed by our diverse experiences and perspectives, we are inspired by the process of braiding knowledges as described within *métissage* methodologies (Donald, 2012; Kelly, 2010, 2013). As Dr. Vicki Kelly (2013) describes, *métissage* “culminates in celebrating the capacity of many-eyed seeing and honouring multiple perspectives in the circle of understanding” (p. 18). Working across post-human and Indigenous knowledge systems poses unique challenges (Hird et al., 2022). We, however, have found that these two perspectives can inform one another in generative ways, particularly when situated within respectful practices that are outside of institutional spaces. As Carman shares, this process is akin to the longhouse cultural traditions within his community. The house

2 Cher expresses her deepest gratitude to Elders Rick Bailey, Yvonne Pierre, and Ed Pierre (*q'icay'*); Elders Lekeyten Antone and Cheryl Gabriel (*k'wa:nlan*); Carman McKay (*mathxwi*); Jennie Blankinship (*nlaka'pamux*); Kau'i Keliipio (Kanaka Maoli); and Dr. Vicki Kelly (Anishinaabe and Métis) and Dori Luke (Métis).

3 A review of the relationship between Indigenous and post-human knowledge systems, which has often rendered the Indigenous roots of post-humanism invisible, is beyond the scope of this article. Readers are encouraged to read papers by Todd (2016) and Rosiek et al. (2020).

posts within the longhouse that face inward are representative of the interconnectedness of community that extends beyond the local Nation and are inclusive of those who are not related by blood. Both perspectives are woven through this project in ways that allow for synergies to be created and for neither knowledge system to be subsumed within the other. Within our group there is a feeling of aligned intentionality, as each contributor is guided by their unique internal compass and shares ideas from their own perspective, which extends the thinking of the others. Several key interrelated concepts that have complementary, yet distinct, understandings across Indigenous and post-human scholarship were imperative in guiding this work. They include time, inter/intra-connectedness, agency, and knowing. While a fulsome review of these concepts is beyond the scope of this article, some guiding principles and assumptions are shared below.

Time

Within both Indigenous and post-human worldviews, conceptions of time are non-linear. Within Indigenous knowledge systems, time is circular (Marker, 2011), and the cyclical nature of events, such as the recursive cycles of seasons, planetary rotations and revolutions, and salmon runs, predominate. As Arapaho scholar Michael Marker (2015) explains, circles of relationships “intersect and overlap through time” (p. 230). Carman adds to this explanation, describing continuous cycles of geographical change and adaption by Indigenous peoples:

Land and water have been in constant motion over millennia, which requires people to adapt. Tidal waters create movement and erosion of land. The Cascade Mountain Range is still being pushed up by Salish waters. Geology and geological events have always shaped the land, and Indigenous communities have always adapted. With adaptation, new life has always emerged. These occurrences are documented in our legends. *Raven Steals the Light*, for example, lends itself to the large volcanic eruptions occurring in ancient times that darkened the skies. We have continued to learn with the land. People must be flexible depending on where you are and the timeline of geological events in your location.

Carman also speaks of climate change in relation to cycles: “Some people theorize that it’s a cycle. That we have had droughts in the past. There’s definitely a change today and that may be part of the cycle. But the humans contributed, and we need to work together to get through this cycle.” While recognizing the importance of attending to historical events that continue to unfold into the future, such as the moving mountains or impact of colonization, Carman also reminds us of the importance of situating Indigenous Peoples within contemporary contexts, as Western accounts often consider us within historical contexts (see Douglas, 1999).

From a post-human perspective, time does not advance in a linear way, but unfolds rhizomatically, characterized by continuity and discontinuity. As Karen Barad (2017) asserts, different times “[bleed] through one another” (p. 68). Consistent with Carman’s explanation, the events that occurred on these lands so long ago continue to unfold daily. Drawing on quantum physics, Barad (2017) describes the ways in which matter can co-exist in different times. Within these tellings of cosmology, the modern assumptions about time are disrupted, and materiality can co-exist across yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Within this project, we constantly looked for traces of materials that flowed across timescapes that could disrupt colonial narratives.

Connectedness

Within Indigenous worldviews, the interconnectedness of all beings is honoured (Wilson, 2008). This context of connectiveness implies sacred relationships with all kin, as well as a sense of responsibility to the whole (Kimmerer, 2013). As Carman explains, we draw on life with gratitude and humility. For example, at the First Salmon Ceremony, held each spring when the salmon return, there is a reciprocity and a recognition of returning. The first salmon harvested must be shared. After everyone has had a small piece, prayers are offered for our (salmon) relatives, and their bones are returned to the water. When we draw on this life, every part of the salmon is appreciated and used—as a food source, as clothing, as jewelry—and this can extend toward creative embellishment as well.

A related teaching that Carman shares with his students is the story of when eagle takes salmon to their nest. They lock the salmon in their talons, with the salmon’s head facing the same direction the eagle is flying so that there is no wind resistance. Eagle travels

away from the stó:lō/ staləw⁴, away from the river. Eagle shares a meal with their family, utilizing most (if not all) of the parts, and whatever is not consumed is discarded. The discarded bones hit tree branches all the way down, and bits and pieces go here and there. Coyotes collect them, and slugs and snails consume every part. When the slugs go to the bathroom, and when the rains come, everything becomes one. The salmon becomes part of that soil that gives the tree life. One more thought is that the tree is helping us breathe.

Within post-human perspectives, all beings are understood as open systems that are continuously in process of becoming through their entanglements with other beings (Bennett, 2010; Ingold, 2011). Barad (2007) refers to encounters as intra-actions, rather than interactions, to highlight the fact that beings are not preexisting or distinct, but rather always in a state of relational becoming through the formation of particular entanglements. Aspects of salmon, for example, can be understood as a fish, a school, a meal, and a resource, as well as a run. These “agential cuts” (Barad, 2007) temporarily separate matter into distinct entities and can serve to create hierarchically organized differences, as well as afford distinct agencies. We might think of humans as separate from, and superior to, salmon, for example, ignoring our common ancestry and the flows across our bodies that sustain our mutual existence. These reconfigurations of boundaries between humans and the natural world during encounters can serve to reify difference, but they can also create openings, and enable different modes of knowing and being. In this way, post-human perspectives can work to disrupt common binaries that separate mind and body, human and nature, and self and other, challenging these categories as reproductions of imbalanced notions of power and agency (Braidotti, 2013).

Agency and Knowing

Within Indigenous knowledge systems, humans are not the only beings understood as agential and knowing. Knowledge cannot be separated from place, and the aliveness and knowledge of the land is the foundation of human knowing (Donald, 2021; Watts, 2013). Land and water communicate to humans (Cariou, 2018; Charnley, 2019) and are part of knowledge societies. Within these processes of reciprocation, knowledge is formed wit-

4 stó:lō means “river” in the upriver dialect, and staləw means “river” in the downriver dialect of the Halkomelem language.

hin the connection with the water and the land. This is what Donald (2012) refers to as place-story, and Anishnaabe and Haudenosaunee scholar Vanessa Watts (2013) refers to as place-thought.

Similarly, through the lens of post-human theorists, we come to know that all things have a vitality (Bennett, 2010), that agency is distributed across encounters between humans and more-than-humans, and that reality is fluid (Barad, 2007). Here, land and water, as well as human-made artifacts, such as raincoats, iPads, and tripods, are sentient and agential—they “make things happen” (Bennett, 2010, p. 5). Knowledge is produced within entanglements across diverse beings, both humans and non-humans, as they gather. Within this line of scholarship, the spirit of all beings, including non-humans, is not acknowledged, as it within Indigenous scholarship (Wilson, 2008).

Now that we have identified and honoured our teachers who guide this work, including Elder Rick and Carman’s ancestors and more-than-human kin, we can return to the heart of our story: Elder Rick’s wish to post educational signage about the q̓íc̓əy̓ Slough in his core territories. Five years ago, an environmental organization raised funds to enact Rick’s vision. Elder Rick and colleagues proposed the project to the local municipal government but, interestingly, their request was denied. Guided by salmon teachings to never give up, Rick continued to tell the story of the Slough and to share his vision to teach the community about the yesterday, today, and tomorrow of the Slough.

In 2021, Cher received a research grant to support the development of educative signage about the Slough while studying the learning process. Although we could not post signage on so-called municipal lands, a local school enthusiastically volunteered to host a mural about the q̓íc̓əy̓ Slough. The school was not near the Slough, so we had to find ways for the land to speak through the mural. We decided to bring the children to the Slough to create art *with* the land and water, which would then inform the mural.

Settle in and get comfy as we share the next part of our story—our work to catalyze relational renewal (Donald, 2021) and collective healing at the Slough.

Methodology

Methodologically, this work is guided by an Indigenist research paradigm (Wilson, 2007, 2008). As Wilson (2007) contends, “It is my belief that an Indigenist paradigm can be used by anyone who chooses to follow its tenets. It cannot and should not be claimed to belong

only to people with 'Aboriginal' heritage. To use an analogy, one does not need to be female to be a feminist" (p. 194). Indigenist inquiry is relational, respecting all living beings and the interconnectedness of us all. Further, it is situated within Indigenous worldviews, process-oriented, and must be guided by Elders and benefit Indigenous communities.

Consistent with both Indigenist and action-research research traditions (Wilson, 2008), our goal was to contribute to community transformation. Our process was informed by Kelly's (2019) model of Indigenous inquiry, based on the work of Gregory Cajete (1994). This guiding pathway involves eight embodied practices that "[circle] the medicine wheel twice" (Kelly, 2019, p. 22). The pathway begins with *Asking*, which Cajete (1994) identifies as prayer that "sets into motion the process of making ready and preparing the ground" (p. 69). For many years, Elder Rick carried a prayer for the Slough deep in his heart and was unwavering in his determination to bring his vision into reality. Asking is followed by *Seeking*, which involves experimentation, wandering, humility, opening up, and letting go (Cajete, 1994). Through actively trying to decolonize understandings of the Slough through a collaborative and creative process and including the land herself, we learned through the process of doing. This work involved our own transformation (see Kelly, 2019). *Making*—the act of creation based on our collaborative work—is the next practice within the pathway. The project involved the creation of a mural to bring the stories of the Slough forward, which was central in our process of listening to the land and one another. As Cajete (1994) contends, "with our gift of creativity, empowered by our vision, what we create has the power to affect the lives and thoughts of others" (p. 71). Making is followed by *Having*, which involves an embodiment of the learning through a process of reflection, as well as a "re-cognition" and honing of our capacities (Kelly, 2019, p. 23). Final stages include *Sharing* the work within the community, *Celebrating*, and *Being*, as we embody our learning. We continue to share our learning with others, honour our collaboration, and embody the teachings that presented themselves through this work. As Kelly (2019) contends, the stage of Being "strengthens our sense of the wholeness of self, our place in the world, and allows us to make more fulsome contributions to the circle of life and 'All Our Relations'" (p. 24).

Between 2021 and 2022 we visited three places along the Slough with six classes of children ranging in age from five to 12 years old. The first site was a blueberry farm, the second was a walking trail along the dike, and the third was under a bridge adjacent to a strip mall. As Carman noted, our pedagogy was aligned with Medicine Wheel teachings

and included thinking, feeling, seeing, and doing (Twigg & Hengen, 2009), centring the child within the middle of the circle. Rick shared stories about the Slough and surrounding q̓íc̓əy̓ territories from his lifetime, his grandfather's lifetime, and back to his ancestors from time immemorial. Meghan Rooney, from Watershed Watch Salmon Society (<https://watershedwatch.ca/>), spoke about the current environmental challenges of the Slough, including the predominance of invasive species, lack of clean oxygenated water, and the pump stations that both create barriers for aquatic kin and butcher any fish that inadvertently enter the pumps. As Rick described, "it grinds them up like hamburger."

During the encounter, we invited the past to haunt the present and bring forth the future by changing the materiality of the space. Through a pop-up exhibit of archeological sketches of q̓íc̓əy̓ territories pre-contact, we endeavoured to (re)create what was/is/will be at the Slough. The visuals of a family encampment with their canoes along the Slough, based on artefacts recovered within the area, enlivened the yesterdays of this place and emphasized its importance since time immemorial. Rick speaks often about the sketches and how, once he saw them, he could imagine exactly how the Slough was, with seasonal homes along the waterway and marshes from the Fraser River to Pitt Lake. Cher recalls the first time Rick showed her the sketches. She texted him, "I am in tears. The drawings have a visceral effect on me." The sketches clearly have a vitality and force of their own.

At the location of the Slough under the bridge, where the land is the most disrespected, learners were invited into a sharing circle created from rocks by Saulteaux eco-artist Darrell Stevenson (see Figure 2)⁵. Darrell built the circle during COVID. He prayed to Mother Earth to give him something good to do and was guided to create a circle where people could share stories and come to heal. Cher often wonders if the sharing circle is a reverberation across time. Regardless, on this day the pop-up gallery and the sharing circle disrupted the everyday production of this colonial space and encouraged different ways of relating to this place and to one another.

5 Story and photos shared with permission.

Figure 2*Gold Eagle Sharing Circle*

At the Slough, we invited the children to care for the land and water—to engage in what Donald (2021) might call “an intentional act of relational renewal” (p. 56). They picked up garbage or removed Himalayan blackberry bushes to create space for Indigenous plants⁶. We asked the children to listen deeply to the water and the land, as well as the storytellers, and to create art of past, present, and future aspects of this place that called to them. Carman shared that in the longhouse, children are encouraged to not look anyone in the eye—the meaning being that if you really want to learn, your eyes are going to be on the floor because you are listening. The children were encouraged to draw what they were holding in their hearts after hearing from Elder Rick and Meghan,

6 This is a part of our pedagogy where we experienced a felt tension between Western environmentalism and Indigenous worldviews. Within Western perspectives plants are often considered Indigenous and therefore “good,” or invasive and therefore “bad.” Caring for the land typically involves eradicating invasives by ripping them violently from the earth and discarding them. Within many Indigenous perspectives, all beings are considered useful and worthy of respect (Reo & Ogden, 2018). Elder Rick, for example, speaks of the importance of balance in relation to re-introducing wolves within his territories, and Carman noted that in the past, plants that dominated may have been maintained by animals, such as deer, who are no longer part of those ecosystems. Indigenous relational perspectives are far more complex and thoughtful than current Western practices and require being in continuous relationship with place. We are in the process of developing more respectful practicing in this regard. For example, when Cher harvests dominant English ivy in the forest, she does so respectfully and has been using it to weave baskets.

to paint *with* the land and water—including earth, flowers, grass, and rain—and to create visuals of how the Slough was, is, or how it could be. As a visual artist, Carman had the intentions for the children to learn by doing. This is a Medicine Wheel teaching (Twigg & Hengen, 2009) that is echoed in Jo-ann Archibald's (also known as Q'um Q'um Xiiem) (2008) book *Indigenous Storywork*.

The children were invited to attend to the stories and the land and conceptualize in their own minds the past, present, and future of the Slough. Rather than colonizing the children's learning experience by saying, for example, "there is a mountain there," the children were encouraged to use their imagination to find a moment, creating a unique encounter. As Carman describes, the best moments are when no one is talking and children focus on what they are observing, hearing, and feeling. We used arts-based methods to carry the teachings of the Slough forward, knowing that land and water speak to us in pre-signified ways through non-literal signs within the environment (Charnley, 2019; Watts, 2013). As Rick explains, "the kids all drew from their hearts, and nothing was pre-conceived. They get a vision in their minds based on what they take from my talks, and they put it down." We also documented any stories that the children wanted to share about their art, although we were less interested in their accounts that were mediated by language.

All students were welcome to engage in all the pedagogical activities; however, only children whose parents consented to their participation in the inquiry were asked if they would like to contribute their art to our project and/or have the story of their inquiry documented. Most children generously donated their drawings and paintings but several chose to take their art home with them. Some shared the meaning of their art, while others declined to be filmed or had difficulty translating their visuals into words. Once we collected over 100 sketches and paintings, Cher and Carman gathered at our favourite local restaurant, spread the art out across the table, and sat with the renderings for some time. Within the context of our meaning-making, we were less focused on the children's intent and more interested in how the renderings affected us and how the land and water spoke to us through the art.

Before reading our accounts, we invite you to scan down, look closely at the renderings shared below, and read them through the history of the Slough. How do they affect you? What do they allow you to know about the yesterday, today, and tomorrow of this sacred waterway? How do they make you feel?

Renderings with/from/of the Slough

Our meaning-making process involved attending to the visual components within and across the renderings, such as colours, scale, composition, shapes, repetition, variation, emphasis, and contrast, as well as the material, and the affective qualities of the children's art. For example, we experience a joyful feeling from the depiction of the salmon swimming under a rainbow, and from the visual of the water, land, and sky enclosed within a heart (Figure 3). It gave us hope for the Slough and her inhabitants. Hearts, rainbows, and cheerful colours were common features in the children's art and these renderings touched us deeply. Even in the place where the Slough was the most decimated, the children could hold in their hearts what the land once was or could be. Rick and Meghan's messages were deeply felt. When asked if she wanted to share a story about her art, a girl who created one of the visuals of a salmon swimming under a rainbow said, "there is no story, I just really want this to happen."

Figure 3

Salmon Swimming Under a Rainbow, the Slough Held Within a Heart



The paintings enabled us to attend to aspects of the Slough that were not necessarily part of our conscious experience when visiting the waterway. The pre-signified affective intensity (Latham & McCormack, 2009) of the art acts on viewers, enabling us to see and feel aspects of place we may not notice with our bare eyes. For example, the industrial linearity of the rows of crops planted by farmers on these lands is evident wit-

hin the depiction of the blueberry farm along the Slough. This contrasts with the rings of connection depicted in the rendering of the sharing circle (See Figure 4). These paintings communicate Western and Indigenous ways of shaping the land, and different relations with more than human kin. Within the blueberry fields, the single-crop plants are in service to the humans and planted to maximize efficiency. Within the sharing circle, a sacred place of gathering is created through the arrangement of grandfathers and grandmothers (rocks) forming a circle that calls people in from the four directions to heal themselves and one another. The composition of the longhouse (created with paint and dirt) is so big in relation to the page, it gives us a sense of the vastness of its structure and the large community that it housed. We can imagine the size of the q̓íc̓əy̓ village and the richness of the land and waters that nourished so many people.

Figure 4

Blueberry Farm, Sharing Circle, a Long House that was So Big



A theme evident in the drawings, but not necessarily discussed at the Slough, was the colonial containment of animals and fish. Fences constrained animals and birds in many depictions (see Figure 5). One contrasting piece is the painting of the escaping salmon, which provides a sense of possibility, agency, and freedom. This piece holds a lot of energy for us, as the mediums used included watercolour paints and what appears to be blood. The salmon, a standalone element against a white backdrop, and painted with an unusual

medium, pulls us in. The possibility that a child gave of their very self in creating the fish touches us and reminds us that the boundaries between us and fish are porous and fluid.

Figure 5*Containment and Escape of More-than-Human Kin*

It is not surprising that many of the drawings focused on salmon and human–salmon relationships. At the Slough, Elder Rick spoke passionately about his salmon family and about the sadness he feels when many are not coming home to the *q'icay'* watershed. Depictions of salmon-people and fishers spoke to human–salmon connections since time immemorial on these lands (see Figure 6). In the first image of human–fish relations within a modern context involving fishing with a rod, the paint colours bleed into one another, making the boundaries between the human, mountains, and water blur into one another. It reminds us of how the Slough was pre-contact, when the boundaries between land and water were fluid, as well as the interconnectedness of us all. The second rendering of the fish-girl carries the idea that the salmon are our relatives. Our beingness is entangled.

Figure 6*Human–Salmon Relationships*

Some renderings depicted salmon cycles and/or waterways full of salmon (see Figure 7). For Cher, the abundance of fish, trees, plants, and medicines in and around the Slough in these renderings depicts the land pre-contact. Carman, however, questioned if the abundance of salmon was necessarily past-tense. He described how in contemporary times, the Adams River can get really full of salmon because it is geographically narrow, and also in Spuzzum—because it is a canyon. It is important to remember that abundance continues to characterize particular landscapes. These renderings could also be a calling from the future. One final depiction of salmon that holds energy for us is the salmon with a world of potential inside of it, while swimming in a river of garbage. The artist explained that the inside of the salmon represents the future, and the outside of the salmon depicts the present. This rendering speaks to the latent and agential potential of the future that is embedded within the present. As Carman explained, because the Slough was tidal, marine DNA is part of the landscape. The salmon, although no longer visible, are still present within the Slough. For us, this painting signals that the salmon will return when the time is right, and the cycle will continue. Indeed, this story is beginning to unfold as Indigenous Nations revitalize salmon runs that have been inactive for 70 years or more (Kozelj, 2024; Richardson, 2024). Carman is drawn to the background of this painting and notices the green fields, the blue mountains, and the atmosphere that cycles into the skies. The salmon is part of the animals and the trees, and hovers between the earth and the sky. We are all connected.

Figure 7

Cycles, Abundance, and Latent Potentiality of Salmon



The geographies of the distinctness of the q̓ícəy̓ Slough yesterday, today, and tomorrow are carried through the children’s art. This includes the tidal flow of the Slough that once was, the aliveness of the water, and the spirit of the Slough that is currently constrained by the diversions and blockages. The Fraser Valley was predominantly a wet-land waterway that drew life to it cyclically. In the contemporary space, q̓ícəy̓ Slough, and other waterways such as semá:th xo:tsa (Sumas Lake), have been altered. In the paintings, we see the rigidity of the human-made Slough, and the natural flow that has been impacted.

Figure 8

The Spirit of the Slough: Flows and Rigidities



The Cascade Mountain Range is a predominant aspect of the q̓ícəy̓ landscape, and this prominence was echoed in the children's drawings. Carman felt that the children had a good sense of consideration through the art and understood the mountain ranges and tidal waters (see Figure 9). Mountains are the eyes of the ancestors and stand witness to all that has occurred on these lands since time immemorial. The old ones are there. The range has eroded over time, creating a space for Indigenous communities out at the mouth of the river. The mountains have retained some of the ancient spirit of the Earth's history. They have played an important role in Carman and Rick's families since the Ice Age. Much can be learned from that mountain range reaching back to ancient times and into contemporary time, and those mountains can speak to so much. There is history there.

Figure 9*Mountains as Witness***The Mural**

Carman created a mural of the q̓ícəy̓ Slough—Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow—based on Elder Rick's stories and the children's art. The mural was informed by the body of work created by the children as a whole, rather than individual drawings or paintings. As Carman describes, the mural was possible because of a collaborative energy and a colla-

borative initiative; in other words, *All My Relations*. As he explains, “Considering those of the past, us in the present, and those in the future, helped me to see and feel that space. The mural is not just an artistic initiative. It is much bigger.” As an artist, Carman listened for the possibilities, knowing that these possibilities exists and that they could be acted upon: “The goal for this initiative involved an interconnected collective from the people participating from ancient times, to modern contemporary, as well as the future.”

Are you ready for the big reveal? Here it is! The ǰǰǰǰ Slough Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow mural...

Figure 10

The ǰǰǰǰ Slough Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow Mural, by Carman McKay



What connections do you see between Rick’s stories of the Slough, the children’s drawings, and the mural? Honouring Rick’s appreciation of the art of Bev Doolittle, who camouflages animals within the backgrounds of her paintings, Carman embedded three animals within the mountains. Each one of them is connected to one of Rick’s stories. Can you find them? Can you see the eyes of the ancestors?

Through the various forms of co-creation involved in this project, the materiality of the Slough takes a journey (Freedman & Siegesmund, 2023) as it moves from the encounter at the waterway, through the children's drawings, and ultimately informs the design of the mural. Building on the work of Graeme Sullivan, Freedman and Siegesmund (2023) identify three domains of "thinking through art" (p. 99), including *meaning* (the empiricist domain), *explanation* (the interpretivist domain), and *change* (the critical domain). Our arts-based inquiry traverses all three domains as: (1) the land and water speak to the children in pre-signified ways (empirical); (2) Carman, Cher, and others (including yourself) sense and feel aspects of place and the voice of the land and water through the children's renderings (interpretivist); and (3), Carman translates these intuitions, stories, and possibilities into a mural that calls for justice for these waterways, as well as for her past, present, and future residents (critical).

Cher had hoped that some of the Grade 7 students could carry the stories of the q̓íc̓əy̓ Slough mural and share them with others in transformative ways. However, our vision didn't always unfold as planned.

Teachings that Zigzag

The children did an extraordinary job of learning many of the teachings from Elder Rick, Meghan Rooney, and the Slough in a very short period of time. Other stories, however, also became mapped on to the mural. For example, the line of the fisherman's pole severs the visual depiction of the flow of the Slough, representing the dike. Some children, however, told the story of the importance of the dike for protecting the houses. This of course is true, but this is not the story of the land and water. The heron is an important aspect of the mural. They are often seen along the Slough, and they teach humans about fishing. Within the school, however, the heron represented a tribute to the city, as a heron appears on the city signage as a sort of mascot. Once again, this is not the story of the land and the water. We have found that the stories that flow from the mural zigzag through the materiality of the institutional space, and some become reterritorialized (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

Knowing that Indigenous knowledges are often assimilated within mainstream discourses (Simpson, 2004), we were not surprised that some of the landscapes of the mural were re-colonized. Institutional spaces in many cases serve to reify colonialism,

even within programs and curricular undertakings that claim to be doing the exact opposite (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005; Kerr, 2014). Consequently, with the support of web designer Quincy Wang, we have created an interactive website (<https://salmonasfamily.ca/katzie/>) featuring Carman's mural using Thinglink. Visitors to the site can click on various elements of the mural and hear an audio recording of Elder Rick's stories that are connected to different parts of the mural. When sharing open representations of knowledge, it is always important to ask learners, as Carman recommends, "Did we learn something? Is there a moral? What is the teaching?"

Stay close, we have one more story to tell.

Living Inquiry: Sharing Our Learning

We continue to share the children's art, Elder Rick's stories, and the mural with new audiences at academic conferences, professional development events for teachers, and university classes to educate people about the colonization of the q̓íc̓əy̓ Slough and to engage them in the process of relational renewal (Donald, 2021). These audiences typically include settler folks. We start by asking people what they know about the q̓íc̓əy̓ Slough. Often when presenting locally, people have personal connections to the Slough—they might live near the waterway, their family farm might draw water from the Slough, or they might walk their dog along the dike. Rarely does anyone know much about the pre-colonial history of the Slough or its significance to the q̓íc̓əy̓ people. Elder Rick shares his stories, speaking in a low, soft, and kind voice. People lean in and a hush falls over the crowd. In these moments, you could hear a pin drop. He talks about the abundance of the Slough pre-contact and how it nurtured the q̓íc̓əy̓ people, as well as his own childhood stories of hunting, fishing, and canoeing on the Slough, which is no longer possible. As he talks, people's understandings of their day-to-day encounters with the Slough expand. The layering of these shared stories of this place across time and through the multiple encounters of those who experience it differently, create openings for new tomorrows. As Dwayne Donald (2012) shares, "the creation of texts and stories that emphasize human connectivity can complexify understandings of the significance of living together that traverse perceived frontiers of difference" (p. 8).

We then invite participants to reflect on the art created by the children and the land. This begins our first cycle of hermeneutic inquiry, through which everyday rea-

dings of the Slough are disrupted through land-centric, wholistic, storied, and relational knowing (Kerr, 2019). We ask them what they are noticing, how they are affected by the paintings and sketches, and how they might connect to the stories shared by Elder Rick. As we share stories, catalyzed by the children's art, the depth and complexity of our understanding of the many tellings of the q̓íc̓əy̓ Slough grow, reflecting the "[living] dimension of curriculum life" (Aoki, 1993, p. 263). The stories of the renderings are not static, but rather complexify and crystallize in relation to Rick's stories and the lived experiences of audience members. For example, audiences are often drawn to the rendering of the salmon-girl (Figure 6). They typically notice the unusual colour of the water in which the fish-girl is swimming. Some think it could be symbolic of the fact that her/our home is literally on fire due to global warming. Others suggest that it reflects Rick's teaching about Red Slough. The freshwater flow to this wetland was severed by the logging industry. This resulted in a buildup of oxygenated iron, which coloured the water red and made it uninhabitable for salmon. The emphasis here is not about the "true" interpretation, but what the images, read through Rick's stories, can enable us to see, feel, and know. Then we reveal Carman's mural and ask them to make connections between the mural, the stories, and the children's art. This engages us all in a second layer of hermetic inquiry, as we map on imagery and meanings from multiple sources. Our inquiry is alive and continues to unfold.

As the sun is now setting on the q̓íc̓əy̓ territories, it is time for us to draw our storytelling to a close. As Elder Rick teaches, we cannot tell stories after dark without a fire...

Concluding Thoughts

Through this process, in which the paired concepts of teaching and research and curriculum and pedagogy were inseparable, the materiality of the Slough took a journey (Freedman & Siegesmund, 2023). Aspects of the land and water were carried through the children's art and reverberated through the mural, giving voice to Slough and calling for justice for this waterway and her past, present, and future residents. As others engage with the art, they participate in the continuous act of world-making (Beyes & Steyaert, 2011) as they map their own readings onto the mural. Through collaborative conversations and storytelling, we come to understand the q̓íc̓əy̓ Slough outside of colonial narratives.

Engaging in this inquiry as guided by the land and water enabled the work to be informed by place-thought (Watts, 2013).

Through our collective imaginings with the Slough, we have been able to tell a story that is as old as it is new, one that informs how we might become good ancestors to this place, as Elder Rick says, and how we might all live well together. As Donald (2021) asserts,

I am convinced that decolonization in the Canadian context can only occur when Aboriginal peoples and Canadians face each other across historic divides, deconstruct their shared past, and engage critically with the realization that their present and future is similarly tied together. (p. 5)

Teachers can contribute to this work as part of their responsibilities to support the learning of Indigenous worldviews and knowledge systems and about the impact of settler colonialization (BC Teachers' Council, 2019; Government of Canada, 2015). We hope that our stories inspire you to take your students out onto the land where you live and attend to the ways in which waterways have been colonized and to learn the stories of these places—yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Authors' Note

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