Being a SpaceMaker: Critical Reflections on Indigenous Digital Storytelling

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April, 2023

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A thesis submitted to the Department of Child and Youth Study in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Arts in Child and Youth Study

Dedication & Acknowledgment

To the youth at ‘Our World’ who demonstrated through media art how I needed to learn the seven sacred teachings and depend on different types of love to guide me through this arduous process of writing a thesis. Your stories brought this research to life and redefined my citizenship.

To Patrick Small Legs-Nagge who taught me about your star people and that the sun wasn’t the center of life as we know it. You always directed the responses to my questions through the seven sacred teachings; truth, love, courage, humility, respect, honesty, wisdom and as I hold grandfather, I will remember.

To Shane, two things I will always remember in life are to continue to be slow and steady and to always land the plane. Thank you for being a SpaceMaker alongside my creations.

To my SL, your dedication to my research, embracing my student life when we met, and admiration through it all, propelled me to this end. Your belief in my ideas and unwavering support even when you couldn’t understand is unforgettable.

To Naomi, for providing childcare so I could complete my courses – I am so deeply grateful.

To Becka, for unlocking JoyRiding so that all parts of me were open to the power and languages in media art.

And, to my Ruqayyah and Xavi, may you always know you are being guided and are supported and that the love each of you has is nothing this world has seen.

Abstract

Stories illustrate humanity and its relationship to creation, time and place situating us all in an invisible web of interconnectedness. Storytelling is an integral and valued site of knowledge among Indigenous peoples in Canada and is an invitation to (new) settlers to listen and participate in reconciliation. One of the dilemmas is how do we listen and why should we? I address these tensions in my research by centering Indigenous digital storytelling through short films and animation available online and produced by youth in remote and rural First Nations communities in Canada. Using media art as a form of storytelling highlights Indigenous worldviews and connects the artist to their community centering it as a site of power. Media art liberates Indigenous youth voices encouraging democratization for their communities and practicing relational accountability with settler viewer audiences aiding them to become SpaceMakers. A SpaceMaker is a non-Indigenous ally who finds everyday ways to engage in reconciliation. As a Goan immigrant who came to Canada via Dubai in the late 90s, becoming Canadian challenged my relational responsibility to the Indigenous stewards whom I benefit from. Historically, the tyranny of colonialism has ravaged the Canadian social landscape, and, in this paper, I propose the antidote, disrupting hegemony with digital storytelling because it negotiates a collective definition of living together. This paper centers Indigenous epistemology and social semiotics as methodologies to engage media art and encourage reconciliation in a dialogic way in Canadian classrooms and to anyone who wants to learn to listen.

Keywords: Indigenous ways of knowing, media art, SpaceMaker, critical visual methodology, social semiotics, digital storytelling, reconciliation, relational accountability

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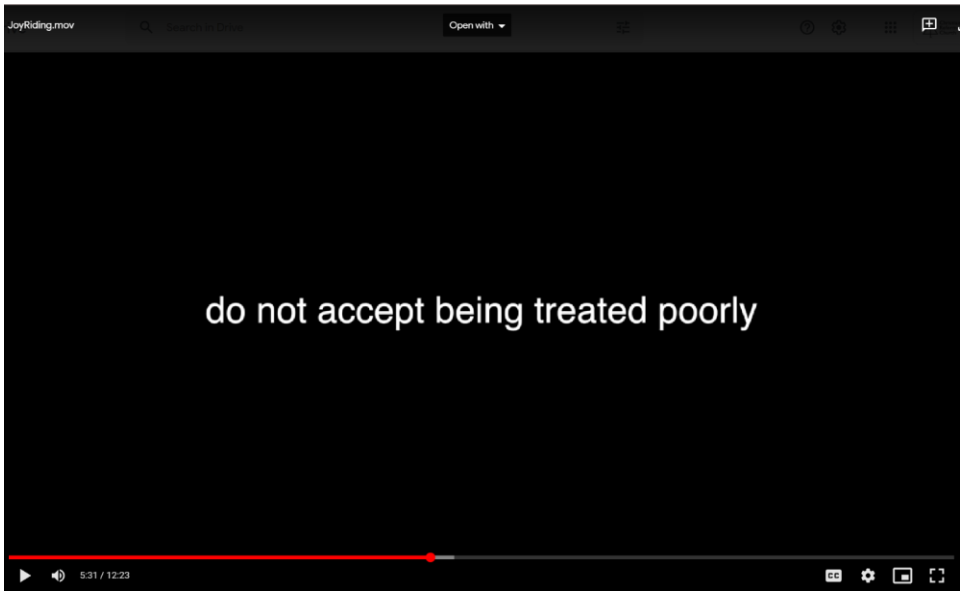
Introduction

Figure 1

Still from JoyRiding



Come down off your cross. You're the one who wants to control everything. You are a rat. You have no soul. You're the final blow. You're the one who's crazy. You're the one with all the issues. I'm taking medication because of you. You made me do it. And now look at me. You're always the problem. You always have been. I hope someday that when your son's wife asks him to choose between her and you...he chooses her. You are impossible. You are a quitter. You are a child. You've stabbed me in the back. Vows mean nothing to you. You just want to be a victim. It's easier that way, isn't it? Come down off your cross. You're so fucking spoiled. Just a princess in the tower.

Audio excerpt from (JoyRiding, 2020)

Figure 1 is a still from my short film that I created and produced, JoyRiding, that preceded the audio excerpt below it. It is an auto-ethnographic, visual, and narrative storytelling, film that explores my perspective of discovering resilience and joy after years of domestic abuse. In 2019, I won a media art scholarship with the Center for the Art Tapes in Halifax and chose digital storytelling as my focus. Through creating JoyRiding, I found courage and healing to speak about this experience as a Goan-Canadian woman resisting familial cultural norms of silence on this topic. As a way of coping with the confusion and pain, I journalled and the audio excerpt in Figure 1 was one of the many stories I carried in my body. The film depicts footage from my long-distance cycling trips through Nova Scotia where I physically processed the trauma after I left him and became a single parent and survivor. Cycling along the coasts of Nova Scotia reminded me of how beautiful life is outside my inner turmoil and this gave me hope. Long-distance cycling requires determination, ability, health, patience, trust, and comfort with oneself. When you can do all that, you can find a different dimension of yourself; one that is so peaceful, invigorating, and fertile. Discovering my physical potential to endure hours of cycling strengthened my ability to be patient with healing my deep and unseen wounds. I started cycling in 2016, the year before Canada 150, and part of my healing was reclaiming my identity from being a victim while being open to whom I was becoming. The socio-political tension of Canada 150 centered Indigenous voices taking a stand against Confederation marking one hundred and fifty years (only) since ‘birth’ of Canada. They argued for recognition of their occupancy of most of this unceded land of Canada of a place that belonged to them and that was their home tens of thousands of years before Confederation. This dialogue influenced my reflections on the implications of being an immigrant Canadian. I knew that one dimension was having the choice to not accept being treated poorly, choose divorce, and have opportunities to rebuild my life.

JoyRiding, in part, was a journey through the privilege of having access to the resources and locating my faith that propelled me into leaving that old life. I created this film under the tender guidance of my mentor, Becka Barker who led me into an intimate process of relocating all my pain and experiences to parse and weave them into creative story telling techniques. The scholarship was an eight-month intensive film production, animation, digital media/story workshops with a small community cohort. Learning how to create and think about digital stories re-opened deep wounds inside me but it was with the tool of creativity. The storytelling and film devices were a new way of holding the painful memories and shaping them into something meaningful. They also offered a personal and collective way of reforming the impact of the memories that live within me. When I started the research for this thesis, centering Indigenous digital stories were a priority. I will dive deeper into this subject in the section, "Why am I here?". I will begin by presenting my understanding of who I am and who I am becoming because of where and what I came from first. My past has shaped where I am now and where I will be going. Understanding my new settler responsibility shaped imagining a term for this reflective process and praxis. 'SpaceMaker' is a term I created as a new settler who creatively seeks everyday ways to engage in reconciliation as a condition of being a Canadian citizen. Before I share my ideas and theoretical and technical knowledge on this topic, I would like to begin with how other stories have influenced my life. Honorable justice Murray Sinclair has shared so much wisdom through his contributions in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada (Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). He said that education is what got us into this mess and that education is the way out. He also proposed that a good place to begin was with every child being able to answer four key questions about identity and belonging; Who am I? Where do I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going?

In the next section, I will answer Justice Sinclair's questions to introduce myself and the connection to the research topics.

Where do I come from?

I am Indo-Canadian who immigrated to Mississauga in 1997 with my family as part of a large diaspora of Indians from Dubai, U.A.E. Since 2016, I have been reflecting on my identity as an immigrant Canadian and needed to slowly confront my shame-filled upbringing in childhood passed on from my maternal side of my family's intergenerational trauma because of their refugee experiences. My mum who is ethnically Goan-Indian grew up in Kampala, Uganda to Indian parents. At the time of authoring this paper, it has been just over 50 years since all the Asians were expelled from the country. In 1972 when the president, Idi Amin, ordered the expulsion of the Indians in his country, my mum, her three siblings, and my grandmother were separated from my grandfather and became refugees in London, England. My Swahili and Konkani-only speaking grandmother endured the voyage from Africa to Europe with four young children and began the resettlement process alone. In those few months apart, my grandfather witnessed Uganda descend into chaos and shared some of the tension and horrors he witnessed with me. He was working in a bank in Kampala which positioned him as an important economic asset which permitted him to remain in the country by the Ugandan government. However, with the unstable volatile leadership, that safety net did not last long, and he was eventually expelled too and miraculously reunited with his family in London. Assimilation into suburban London happened rapidly for everyone with each tolerating various racist encounters, workplace discrimination, and school bullying. They met each incident with the protective practice of ignoring the harm and maintaining a stiff upper lip. Unfortunately, integration support from the community was not robust and resettlement priorities involved acquiring family accommodations

and securing employment. Counselling and collectively acknowledging feelings and experiences was trumped by rapid assimilation. The result was the embodiment of trauma. Becoming as British as one could in their dark skin was the safest way to survive and thrive. This overlooked trauma manifested in my mum self-shaming for being Indian and othering herself. She was married at 19 years old, and my dad brought her to Dubai, U.A.E and the racism-based trauma continued from being classified as second-class citizens because they were expat Indians living in the Middle East. As a coping mechanism, my mum would leverage her British citizenship and identify herself with it because of her assimilated acceptance that being white was better. Another layer to my British-identifying mother was her challenging experience of integrating into my dad's culturally rooted Indian/Goan family. She was often mocked and shunned by them. Firsthand experiences like this are labelled as the transgenerational transmission of group traumas (Crawford, 2020). I grew up hating my brown skin and identity as an Indian/Goan person and was always boasting to my friends about my British-raised mother to emphasize my proximity to whiteness. I thought a white identity was infinitely better than being Indian and I was partially closer to it because of my mum's history. Another loss was language. My parents chose to not pass on any of the three languages they spoke in addition to English. In most Indian households back then, mothers raised the children and were responsible for managing after school education, cultural transmission, and social circles while fathers quietly supported financially from the sidelines. Since my mum identified with her European experience, Indian cultural practices were restricted and always dismissed as, "we don't do that, we're not that type of Indian." I grew up othering myself and believing that this was the truth of who I was. The tension within and around me was always palpable and immigrating to Canada where I became the minority rattled up my false almost-white self-perceptions. This may seem like the obvious

place for attempting to answer the next question, *who am I* then? But that is a hard one to answer because it keeps changing. It is also not completely relevant to drafting this thesis, but I think you, the reader, can assemble your version of me as you read about my thoughts in this paper. In the next section, I will write about why I am called to understand a part of myself through research and how the stories I just mentioned brought me to the topic I will discuss in this paper.

Why am I here?

After leaving my husband and choosing to rebuild myself and my life, I started to think about who I had become and who I wanted to be. As mentioned previously, promotion for and against Canada150 was occurring simultaneously. The country's identity in the context of its relationship to Indigenous people was being highlighted again post TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission). Canada 150 was the 150th anniversary of confederation where Canadians came together to celebrate what it means to be Canadian. This was an intriguing concept, and it was timely because it affected my reforming identity as an Indo-Canadian woman. I had already started to prioritize re- building my personal life, and this intersected with the social discourse of all Canadians being prompted by the Canada 150 advertising to consider getting to know who our Indigenous neighbors are. I did not have an answer to this question, nor did I embody the meaning of my citizenship. A catalyzer was the long-distance cycling on the beautiful coastlines of Nova Scotia that I had begun. Reflecting on whose 'stolen land' I was riding on and becoming healed by, became a preoccupation. To begin my informal research in this area, I began with art. I turned my ears and eyes towards the messaging in Indigenous communities to guide me starting with an exhibition I had seen recently that had made a deep impression on me. In 2017, Kent Monkman, also known by his time-travelling, trickster, alter-ego, Miss Chief, began a new conversation about Canada's colonial history with his exhibition,

'Shame and Prejudice: A Story of Resilience'. This exhibition was a direct response to Canada 150 and through art, humor, and complexly layered historic and artistic narratives, Monkman re-storied the focus of the 'Canadian memory'. He explained the premise of the show,

> Canada's 150 years old—what does that mean for the First People? When I thought about it, I thought it includes the worst period, because it goes all the way back to the signing of the treaties, the beginning of the reserve system, this legacy of incarceration, residential schools, sickness, the removal of children in the '60s [*sic*], missing and murdered women (Canadian Art, 2017).

Monkman (2017) refers to the removal of Indigenous children from their families and communities that occurred over the span of a few decades and was not confined to the 1960's decade but was later termed the 'sixties scoop'. The next image in Figure 2 is of one of Monkman's paintings I saw at a show in Halifax, Nova Scotia a few years ago.

Figure 2

Kent Monkman, The Scream, 2016

Source of image: Canadian Art, 2017

After I saw his painting, *The Scream,* which shook me to the core, my ignorance and self-centeredness were overwhelmed with curiosity to understand truths that I could not un-see. I had to learn why standing in front of that powerful painting in the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia made me feel suddenly revolted about my Canadian identity. These are some of the experiences that led me to commence my journey on answering the next questions of who I am and where I am going. In the next section, I formally begin to introduce the topic of this paper and through the next three sections, I will answer the question, "where am I going?"

Where am I going?

"If research doesn't change you as a person, then you haven't done it right." (Wilson, 2008, p. 135). When I began this degree, I started with the question most researchers enter with, 'What will I contribute to the research on the topic of *this* social issue?' As I reflect on my answers to this question, I write from a position of being humbled by watching, listening, and learning from Indigenous digital stories. It evolved from what can *I* contribute and what will

research contribute to *me*? I also chose some of these stories as my 'data collection' for this paper which contributes to research. However, I feel that engaging with these films contributed significantly to my personal development. Research is all about unanswered questions, but it also reveals our unquestioned answers (Wilson, 2008). Indigenous scholar, Shawn Wilson, encourages researchers to be self-reflexive about their own practices to find alternative ways of conducting and presenting their research. My interest in Indigenous-Settler history and citizen responsibility begins with being an immigrant to Canada and realizing only after two decades of living here how deeply implicated I was in Canada's history. As I began listen intentionally to Indigenous-led stories, it became evident I did not know how to listen. I was always centering myself in someone else's story or trying to figure out how to solve the issues in it (which is another form of centering oneself). When I chose to question my intentions, I began to realize that research can just be about embodying understanding of what is learned, heard, and seen. In this next section, I ruminate on how stories make impact and why I chose them as my data to listen and learn from.

The Power of Story

Stories illuminate and illustrate humanity and their relationship to creation, time and place situating us all in an invisible web of interconnectedness. Hannah Arendt valued story telling as a means for complexifying ordinary patterns of thinking and encouraging social justice in public spaces (Berger, 2015). Storytelling is not just a passive dissemination of unique subjective experiences to the public, but instead is a type of sharing that exposes the nuances in human relationships and reveals our interdependence and interconnectedness as a society. Listening to stories creates a noetic space where a new way of being can emerge (Theunissen, 2020). It is the manifestation of Arendt's, "thinking without a banister" (Berger, 2015). It is

where who we have become can be willing to be changed. The noetic space is structureless, or banister-less. The frameworks and structures around us exist to remind us that there is so much we do not and cannot know. Cultivating a noetic space within systems encourages us to embrace our ignorance. It is being in a space to become. Embracing ignorance is submitting to trusting the process. To connect it to leadership, it is a way to become reflexive and value surprise. The unknown becomes a territory of wonder about what can emerge and how meaning can be co-constructed. Digital storytelling and auto-ethnographic media art reflects the filmmaker, who they are, why they are, where they have been and a placeholder for where they are going. As child and youth practitioners, we are challenged with practicing listening in creative ways. Listening is a choice. Now that we have heard the story, how are we going to live our lives differently? Digital storytelling presents a provocative noetic space. It interrupts our 'habits of thoughtlessness' (Berger, 2015), coined by Hannah Arendt to refer to the static routines we are all prone to fall into. In a noetic space, there is room to fail better (Theunissen, 2020). Stories disrupt auto-pilot engagements with thinking and digital storytelling provokes our consciousness in a noetic way.

Reflexivity

As practitioners, we are expected to reimagine current situations into improvement and ask the uncomfortable and challenging questions about "what's not working and why." Reflexivity is an important posture of destabilizing professional routine ways of thinking and knowing (Taylor & White, 2000, as cited in White, 2007). This implicates practitioners to be aware of their history, implicit biases, and explicit assumptions that are brought into professions. It's these unseen parts of ourselves that influence decision making and penetrate all our choices and ideas both in our personal and professional lives. Being reflexive is a reminder that working

with people is something that we do *with* them and not *to* them. It calls us to go deeper than just being mindful of actions or thoughts; it is facing our own assumptions and finding comfort in the discomfort of that tension. Reflexive posturing can lead to praxis. I remember reading a profound thought by Skott-Myhre & Skott-Myhre (2011) which expressed a reason for why we work with kids; not because they need to change or because we need to change them but because the world needs to change, and we need to join with young people to change it. One of the ways to join children is to listen to their voices through the art they produce. In the next section, I discuss theories on the practice of listening and the impact it carries in revealing truths about stories.

Relational Listening

Believing in our interconnectedness as a society places responsibility on everyone to assume a role in creating healthy communities. At the core of developing relationships is an unconscious belief that each person has something to share and receive. This is how listening is practiced in regular daily life. It is often a practice that has been taken for granted if at all even considered. The Merriam-Webster dictionary describes 'listening' as "to hear something with thoughtful attention: give consideration" (Merriam-Webster, 2022). This implies that it is transactional. Nancy (2007) in his inquiry about listening says that it is to 'stretch the ear' towards the other which creates a connection of curiosity and attention (Low, Salvio, & Brushwood Rose, 2016). This engagement is a natural process for listening. However, a simultaneously natural process that occurs is centering oneself in identifying with what they are listening to. What role does the listener have in extending this natural self-centering to become more dialogic and interconnected? In Freire's 'banking concept of education,' the student who is also the listener is viewed as an empty receptacle to be filled with knowledge from a teacher. It creates a linear and transactional interaction where the teacher is assumed to be the sole

possessor of knowledge ‘depositing’ to the listener. He expands on this saying that stifling a listener’s critical consciousness controls and limits, “...their intervention in the world as transformers of that world” (Freire, 1993, p. 46). The antidote, “authentic liberation” (p.52) is presented as a praxis defined as people reflecting upon their world with the desire to transform it. In this thesis, my choice to be a relationally listening researcher is an inquiry into the responsibility that comes with listening to become the transformative agent Freire refers to. Praxis is reflection and action. Freire discusses that dialogue is an essential component of praxis and that it is an encounter about creatively naming the world. In the previous sections, I outlined an introduction to who I am and where my stories come from. I also presented my dilemma of becoming a Canadian citizen and being challenged to consider my relational responsibility to the Indigenous stewards who I am now drinking downstream from. In the upcoming ‘Literature Review’ section of the thesis, I will go into detail about the colonial history impacting all Indigenous people and implicating settlers as well as new settlers in Canada. Historically, there has been a tyranny of colonialism and the antidote to it has been telling, listening, and retelling alternative stories. Alternative stories that disrupt hegemonic colonial norms and invite a negotiation of collectively defining the world. This is the praxis that Freire is referring to; dialogue is required to creatively name the world together. The relationship in the dialogue requires listening as an interpretive act which inevitably contains contradictory meanings, unclear feelings, conflict, misunderstanding and the potential for intersubjective agency (Low, Brushwood Rose, Salvio, 2017). This means the speaker and the listener form either a direct or indirect relationship in which they are making meaning about themselves and the world. In this paper, I consider the data as the ‘speaker’ source and myself as the ‘listener.’ I value the process and outcomes of learning and embrace the possibility of its disruption with humility rooted in

love. Khan (2004) offers that, “love is the experience of power through the creation/discovery of meaning. This combination of creation and discovery links us to others through love” (p. 223 as cited in Theunissen, 2017). The project of authoring a thesis is my creative choice of entering the dialogue that Freire refers to as a necessary action to reach praxis. I am searching for the link to understanding the intersection of the stories of my past with the meaning of my Canadian citizenship and chose to do this listening by drafting this paper. Grounded in love for myself, my country of origin and my country of citizenship, I understand the practice of relational listening as uniquely transformative because it combines unique voices hoping to understand and make space for each other with the hopeful collective desire to live better together. I hope for understanding and being understood and encouraging accountability among people towards caring about others in society whose stories are different from ours. Thomas King’s prompting into the urgency of hearing stories and bearing that responsibility to live our lives differently now that we have heard the story is the praxis of Freire’s authentic liberation to becoming healthier and socially responsible societies. In this next section, I will begin discussing my research purpose further.

Research Question

“The term “research” has a lot of colonial baggage attached to it” (Absolon, 2011, p. 21). It carries the memory of historic harms and othering that have been imposed onto Indigenous peoples by outside-of-the-community (and commonly) western, white researchers. Absolon (2011) reiterates that ‘suspicion and distrust’ is a common reaction towards more research being done on/to these affected communities. Thoughtfully entering this historically delicate space was tantamount to my posture as a researcher. Although I come with good intentions, I am acutely aware of the stigma I wear as a western-trained researcher fulfilling a thesis component for a

master's degree at a Canadian university. To address this tension, in my research, I aim to center Indigenous storytelling and visual ways of knowing as well as provide an invitation of space-making that others may utilize in their own pursuits of reconciliation. I am being guided by my committee member, Mr. Patrick Small Legs-Nagge who is a knowledge keeper and center Indigenous scholars as dominant voices in my research. My research question is, "How do I become a SpaceMaker by critically reflecting on Indigenous digital storytelling?" To begin, I acknowledge and reflect on my immigrant historical trauma as another foundation of experiencing a connection to Indigenous people's stories.

Acknowledging Collective Historical Trauma

I personally have experienced the effects of Portuguese and British colonization intergenerational trauma impacts on my people. Learning about Indigenous-Canadian history broadened my self-centered lens towards the shared experience of the manifestations of socio-political histories leading to group trauma. I am still holding an extremely uncomfortable space for these experiences' and unpacking their relevance and my responsiveness as a Canadian citizen. At the core of my tension, too, is a deeply connected shared humanity. This has been articulated and conceptualized by Persian Canadian professor and lawyer, Payam Akhavan, in his book and lecture series, In Search of a Better World. He delivered the 2017 CBC Massey lectures urging Canadians to understand that the welfare of all people is inextricably linked and how both our attitudes and institutions need to reflect the reality of our oneness (Akhavan, 2017). Violence is every citizen's problem. Trauma, in all its forms, reveals the intricate relationship violence has at all levels of society. Sociologist, C. Wright Mills coined the term, "sociological imagination" to bring people's attention away from the privatization and individualization of the prevalence and incidence of […] violence (Momirov & Duffy, 2011). Structural racism has

created deep implicit bias in Canadians and this indifference is transmitted to immigrants carrying their own trauma. India has been victim to centuries of colonization and the diverse nations within it still experience the intergenerational impact of trauma. Learning about Indigenous people's history reflected my upbringing back to me. The journey in reconciliation is so new to Canadians and even more foreign to newcomers. It is shocking to hear that this powerful nation was complicit in violent colonization and that now, we immigrants call this place home. We exchanged the economic corruption and lack of safety for children in Dubai and India for another nation guilty of the same crimes with the exception that now it is not being done against us. However, most immigrants do not acknowledge or wonder about how we are complicit in the structural racism in Canada against Indigenous people because of our own trauma. Racism based trauma can result in becoming emotionally numb and being in an altered arousal state (Crawford, 2020). This has been my experience living within diverse groups of South Asians in Canada. Despite the media inundation of Indigenous women and girls going missing, Indigenous men being incarcerated, youth dying by suicide, or conversely, that land acknowledgments are the norm now and self-determination in communities across Canada are gaining strength; my immigrant experience has been a practice of ‘othering’. Thinking about living and owning stolen land after being denied citizenship and land ownership in Dubai because of our ethnicity is not on our radar. Reconsidering creature comforts of wealth accumulation despite being undereducated, land ownership and social recognition is difficult after being denied those for a lifetime. Wondering about why there is a lack of visibility of Indigenous people living in the urban areas of Mississauga and what a ‘reserve’ means is not something that preoccupies my immigrant circles consciousness. Reflecting on Indigenous children being removed from their homes and placed in foster care at disproportionately higher

rates than Canadian kids in the system (Loppie, Reading, & de Leeuw, 2014) is not a concern because now we, their children, are safe. The ‘us’ vs. ‘them' is morphing uniquely in immigrant communities because of our own deep collective trauma and witnessing Canada’s historic indifference to the Indigenous population. Racial trauma begins even before we are born (Wilson, 2020). My family’s experience of and witness to deep racism has fostered numbness to the point of complacency. As their children, we are already carrying that stress but have access to safer spaces here in Canada to talk about mental health. Additionally, and most importantly, as immigrants we have safety here to acknowledge and wonder about our privilege if we choose. My sociological imagination has and continues to be challenged. I have realized that even though our location and stories have changed by coming to Canada, our biography as Goan-Indian people is now being influenced by the Indigenous peoples land we coveted. Just as the oppressed must be made whole, so, too, must the complacent” (Akhavan, 2017, p. 333). My hope is through my research that I can avoid becoming complacent and reform my actions to mirror my evolving identity as a Goan who was raised in multiple cultures and now calls herself, Canadian.

Research Introduction

“But don’t say in the years to come you would have lived your life differently only if you had heard this story. You've heard it now” (King, 2003, p. 29). What do we do when we have heard stories? Stories can become weapons for our selfish posturing of knowing in allyship. It can be a shallow surface level comprehension of morality where we know that for example, taking Indigenous children from their homes and putting them in residentials schools is wrong but we do not do anything more with that information. Everyone and every culture has a story. The stories are good, bad, and ugly and have the potential to transform us. If they transform us, what are we being invited into? Relationship. Relationships are the cornerstone of an

intersection. A meeting of journeys. I wonder about what society and life could be transformed into if we told more stories? There would not be much change if we do not know how to listen and identify why we need to practice that. Without reflection on the power in stories and the necessity of them in our lives, stories become fleeting space-fillers disappearing into the ether. Thomas King's quote challenges us to dig deeper. In Justice Murray Sinclair's (HeartSpeakTV, 2014) speech, *Reconciliation and the Path Forward,* he reminds non-Indigenous citizens that one of the tasks we are responsible for is helping children become whole humans by answering the 4 big questions of life I mentioned earlier in the introduction, Where do I come from?, Where am I going?, Why am I here?, Who am I? As a nation, we are all invited into participating in this relationship with Indigenous children and communities. Listening to their stories is the way we can participate, and I propose that watching films is how we can practice that.

Community-based media film narratives such as those created by Indigenous youth through *Our World Language* (Our World, 2022) offer a new way of community engagement. People are the combination of stories and histories. These stories shape worldviews and define the varied ways of being. "Indigenous cultural histories are rich and have been passed from one generation to the next since time immemorial. Our lived experiences are records of these histories" (Absolon, 2011, p. 26). This is also known as embodied knowledge which is found within a person. Reclaiming this subjectivity is a form of resistance to colonial oppression and "wide ranging encompassing all areas of social meaning" (Weedon, 1987, p. 87 as cited in Graveline, 1998, p. 40). An understanding of these films activates our imaginations and helps us listen to and empower the youth's answers to the 4 big questions in life. Relational listening is listening for what emerges when biases and expectations are set aside. It is a prerequisite for storytelling and then praxis; action. Before discussing how I will view and listen to these films in

the methodology section, I will explore the literature on the historical circumstances in the Canadian context that has prompted this research, the importance of Indigenous epistemology and visual and media art as languages that are critical to research.

Literature Review

Decolonizing research requires an epistemological shift in what defines knowledge, who is conducting and controlling it, for whom it's being done, and how knowledge is gained, interpreted, and shared (Niomiya, Hurley & Penashue, 2020). These important parameters summarize my guiding posts for beginning to conceptualize this thesis. As an immigrant Canadian, I have learned that my citizenship identity in is deeply tied to actively engaging in reconciliation and discovering my role in contributing to mending our social fabric. To begin the demonstrations of my new understandings in this component of the paper, I begin with settler narratives which were the beginning of a collective toxic history. This literature review traces back to how a singular worldview corrupted Indigenous[1] societies and rewrote histories for these once flourishing nations. My attempt is to reveal how dismantling entrenched colonial structures is imperative in advancing settler-led reconciliation efforts because of the immensely pervasive damage to Indigenous communities. This section outlines the journey of western hegemony, historical and contemporary Indigenous resilience. The review ends with an exploration of various Indigenous communities' cultural reclamation and autonomous preservation through digital storytelling.

Colonization: The Doctrine of Discovery

The European sanctioning domination of colonizing, declaring war against non-Christian nations and the articulated Christian entitlement to 'discovered lands' is called the Doctrine of Discovery (Greenburg, 2016). This collective proclamation was born out of the papal bulls

which were first issued in 1452. Pope Nichloas V created a bull titled, *Dum Diversas* which commanded the Portuguese king "to invade, search out, capture, vanquish and subdue all Saracens (Arabs or Muslim people) and pagans...reduce their persons to perpetual slavery, and to apply and appropriate to himself and his successors...and to convert them to his and their use and profit" (Davenport, 1917). These words infested the colonizer's social imaginations permitting and commissioning the slavery of African people. This same Pope three years later authored the bull *Romanus Pontifex* which named three targeted people; The Sarceans, pagans and Indians. This bull was prefaced with his moral desire to be "seeking and desiring the salvation of all" (Rah, 2021). The following presiding Popes through the 15th and 16th centuries continued the evangelical missions that enacted the violent and oppressive subjugation of several groups of Indigenous peoples worldwide based on the papal bulls elevating European cultural and moral superiority. The Doctrine of Discovery is a doctrine that emerged from the papal bulls and granted Christian explorers the power to dispossess non-Christian people of their "dominium, their governmental sovereignty and their property" (Miller, 2019, p. 9). The 'discovered lands' previously mentioned were deemed to be *terra nullius* which translates to "empty and free to be discovered" (Nunn, 2018, p. 1337). The mythologies that we are still untangling today in the structured racism against Indigenous people began with this Eurocentric worldview. Backed by the theological buttress of social power and conducting business in the name of God, North America's social imagination about the less-than-human image of Indigenous people was shaped. The Doctrine of Discovery had a dual function. It was a political manifesto for conquest and exploitation and theological way to establish and protect white supremacy and promote the expansion of western Christianity (Rah, 2021; National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls [MMIWG], 2019). The fear of differences in skin color and ways

of being saturated the unconscious imagination of the white conquerors. “Whiteness was elevated to the level of godliness. The person of color became the opposite of what was closest to God” (Rah, 2021, p. 29). This warped worldview began to be embedded into European consciousness and Christian mission which informed first encounters, treaty-making, the Indian Act, and the Indian residential school system.

Sui Genris before Confederation in Canada

‘Sui Genris’ is a Latin expression that translates to “of its own kind.” John Borrow’s *‘Recovering Canada: The Resurgence of Indigenous Law’* explores the issues of treaty-making and asserts that Aboriginal law reflects Canada’s long history of unique treaty-making processes between the Crown and First Nations (Kenichi, 2018). The Aboriginal perspective of making treaties was not restricted to just the land they were sharing with the settlers. The land, water, air, and fire were considered sacred elements that were meant to be respected and treated with relationship (Patrick Small Legs-Nagge, Piikani First Nation, lives in Waverly, Nova Scotia, personal communication, October 3rd, 2022). Treaties which were part of Aboriginal law were Sui Genris and uncontestably valuable. Aboriginal nations did not require validation for their traditions. The treaties were established orally and enforced peace, land agreements and friendship between European and Indigenous nations. One of the earliest recorded treaties was before 1450 and called ‘The Great Law of Peace’ which was shared between the Cayuga, Mohawk, and Seneca nations. All 117 articles of this treaty were passed down orally through the generations for the next 400 years (LeMay, 2016). This tradition was an expression of Indigenous ways of knowing and understanding their relational obligations and promises. The treaty of Alberni of 1701 was a formal agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy and the British where they agreed to sell that land of the Great Lakes in exchange for protection from the

French and unrestricted access to hunting and fishing on their territory regardless of the terms of the sale. The Atlantic Peace and Friendship treaties from 1725-1779 never ceded the land (Patrick Small Legs-Nagge, Piikani First Nation, lives in Waverly, Nova Scotia, personal communication, October 3rd, 2022). As the demand for resources grew in the European markets, the British and the French who controlled (pre-confederation) Canada engaged in a seven-year war that ended with the Royal Proclamation of 1763. This was a document that outlined the European settlement in current North America. Though this document was foundational early legislation setting the groundwork for the Indian Act, at first contact with Europeans, Aboriginal people wanted only to share their land. The next section outlines the colonial history of treaties.

Pre-Indian Act

Indigenous contact with Europeans during the 16th and 17th century was from a position of strength and allyship between Indigenous peoples and settlers. The settlers relied on the Indigenous communities to learn how to live on the land, hunt and survive the winters (Aquash, 2013). The fur trade relied heavily on Indigenous knowledge and ways of creating tools from the land. These early lessons and cultural transmission were strong examples of acculturation. "Acculturation is defined as a positive process that adds to existing knowledge as well as contributes to a balanced sense of identity and increased mental health" (Khanlou, 2010 as cited in Aquash, 2014, p. 123). This initial contact was positive, and the Aboriginal peoples freely shared their knowledge with the settlers. At this time, the first efforts to convert Indigenous people to Christianity occurred and this was the early model for education that would soon become the Indian Residential School system. The war of 1812 was a significant turning point in Canada's history in colonialism. This conflict originated with the Royal Proclamation of 1763, which recognized First Nations land and addressed boundaries to control expansionism that

would impose on the sovereignty of First Nations (Abele & Prince, 2006 as cited in Aquash, 2013). This imposition continued to manifest in the long legacy of flawed policies in treaty-making. Aboriginal nations believed in honoring the solemnity of treaty alliances which defined reciprocity because they were sharing all the elements of their deep and experienced relationship of the land with the European settlers. However, after the war, the British allyship with the First Nations began to break down as they realized that it was no longer in their interest to maintain alliances with First Nations. The respectful acculturation relationship was slowly replaced with forced assimilationist policies that centered Eurocentric values to bring, "the benefits of civilization (a concept that was intertwined with Christianity) to the 'heathen'" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 46). The next step in European dominion was to control education. Egerton Ryerson was appointed as the chief superintendent of education for Ontario from 1846-1876. His directives were to focus on citizenship, academics, and generic religion. Ryerson was influential in constructing the vision and blueprints for the Indian Residential School system. In 1844 the Bagot Commission created assimilationist policies to control Indigenous communities and instill European values in them. Some of the recommendations became the foundation for the Indian Act of 1876 which legally controlled Indigenous people from birth to death,

> The recommendations included a centralized policy for control over all First Nation matters, resulting in the introduction of attendance policies at residential schools, individual ownership to parcels of land, and proper surveys concerning land management. One of the major objectives of this report was to discontinue treaty gifts and payments and to distribute individually owned parcels of land to First Nation citizens (RCAP, 1996 as cited in Aquash, 2014, p. 126).

Parceling the land deeply fractured the foundational cultural and physical landscape of these timeless practices resulting in the physical, emotional, and mental displacement of collective masses of Indigenous people. Residential schools were created in the shadow of global policies that enacted the 'civilizing mission' which upheld the belief of racial and cultural European superiority over lesser peoples (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 47). The foundation of Indigenous identity is rooted in the relationship with the land, and it is honored through ceremonies and an integral part of Indigenous lives. The absence of these practices was devastating to the Indigenous nations. This control of Indigenous lands and bodies was systemically rooted and ratified in the Indian Act. In this following section, the construction of the tool of structural racism in the Indian Act will be explored.

The Indian Act

The Indian Act purported to protect Indigenous people's rights but resulted in a government sanctioned tool to implement covert and overt systemic racism for over a century. One of the many recommendations that contributed to the structure of the Indian Act was the infamous words of an individual, Duncan Scott, desiring to "...get rid of the Indian problem" (Loppie, Reading, & de Leeuw, 2014). The Indian Act became the institutional manifestation of racism allowing the control of First Nation's language, cultural practices, land, and access to resources (Long, Bear, & Bolt, 1982 as cited in Loppie et al., 2014). It was detailed, stringent, and controlled the definition of who was or is not considered 'an Indian' and laid out the parameters of their social and economic entitlement. The legacy culturally impacted the Canadian public to develop stereotypes and collectively build a structurally racist society against Indigenous peoples. This ideology was gradually developed through pieces of colonial legislation in the Indian Act beginning with the Gradual Enfranchisement Act of 1876. This act

attempted to assimilate Aboriginal people into Canadian society with enfranchisement. "Enfranchisement is a legal process for terminating a person's Indian status and conferring full Canadian citizenship" (Hanson, n.d.). The Enfranchisement governance policy soon expanded into banning cultural practices. For Example, Potlaches (Haida-Gwaii) and Sundance (Blackfoot-Sioux), which are culturally specific ceremonies celebrated for (but not restricted to) births, weddings, wealth distribution etc. were banned from 1884-1951. These practices though integral mostly to coastal First Nations were described as, ""debauchery of the worst kind" and were considered to have "pernicious effects" upon Indians" (Indigenous Corporate Training Inc., 2012). These bans, in a broad sense, strengthened the government's control over these societies and inspired a structural system of inequality and an ongoing colonization of and decline in Indigenous cultural beings. After Enfranchisement, the government established the elected band council system that currently remains active and was different than traditional governance. Through this system and the enfranchisement, the superintendents of Indian Affairs also known as the 'Indian agents', had full authority to control Indigenous peoples determining their rights and treaty benefits based on "good moral character". They were viewed and treated as wards of the state (Hanson, n.d.; Parrot, 2006; Patrick Small Legs-Nagge, Piikani First Nation, lives in Waverly, Nova Scotia, personal communication, January 10th, 2023). The judgement imposed on Indigenous people was most felt in the extension of defining what social factors constituted an 'Indian woman.' In the Indian Act of 1876, chapter 18, section 3 details how an Indigenous woman would lose her status as an Indian and financial band membership entitlements if she marries a non-Indian (Venne, 1981, p. 25). It also stipulates that if she marries an Indian, she must take on the band membership of husband and revoke hers. The racist and sexist structures which were constructed around women's bodies and identities practiced through the Indian Act

created deep shame and permission for society to enact another colonial project – violence against indigenous women and girls.

Gendered Colonization

The final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girl's (hereafter referred to MMIWG) states that, "the history of colonization is gendered" (National Inquiry into MMIWG, 2019, p. 233). It expands with details about the dehumanization of Indigenous women tracing back to European Christian-centric principles about women being seen as property of the men in their families. It accounts that there is evidence of the Jesuit missionaries teaching Indigenous men how to beat Indigenous women and children. Indigenous women were central to the operation of community life and maintaining civil order and resultantly usurped the colonial agenda of male dominion. In this prolific report, the writers also call attention to the normalization of physical and sexualized violence to women, girls, two-spirit, and transgendered Indigenous bodies.

Structural violence is longstanding, and Indigenous women and girls were targeted since colonization. Pre-settler contact, the women had prominent status in their communities, but gender equality was foreign to the early settlers and this thought led to a decline in Indigenous women's intrinsic value (Ficklin, Tehee, Killgore, Isaacs, Mack, & Ellington, 2022). Their unworthiness manifested in acceptable sexual violence by European men towards Indigenous women and their reputation within their communities shifted from leading in egalitarian values to being subject to patriarchal control (Hansen & Dim, 2019). The gradual cultural erasure and subjection to male dominion evolved into policies that were entrenched in the Indian act defining women's cultural status based on marriage as detailed in the previous section of this paper. These harmful and violent historical narratives evolved into widespread neglect, abuse, and deaths of

children in residential schools. This horrific legacy further imposed the colonial tool of ‘categorization’ where brothers and sisters were separated. Boy’s hair was cut short, and girls were given bob cuts with bangs to distinguish them from the males. They resided in segregated dorms to ingrain distinct categorizations of gendered norms perpetuating the manifestations of the civilizing agenda of the Indian act (Hunt, 2015 as cited in Greenwood et al., 2015). The horrors of the malnourishment, rape, denial, beatings, and torture in the schools is beyond the scope of this thesis but it is worthy to note that these realities exist and are documented in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Summary Report. This dehumanization of indigenous children in the residential schools became a deep intricate web of intergenerational trauma through families, individuals, survivors, and communities that also became woven into the Canadian consciousness. This is an important consideration to note because this history has informed the continued violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA people. The physical removal of a woman’s identity in the Indian act and the physical violence of the residential schools as discussed in the previous paragraphs laid the foundation for the disposability of Indigenous women and girls. “In colonial narratives, Native women are viewed as dispensable, and crimes committed against them are easy to dismiss and rarely acknowledged” (Ficklin et al., 2022, p. 62). Irrational policing of women began as early as the 1880’s because of the influx of settlers and the simultaneous government agenda to build an agricultural hub in the Prairies. The women were targeted and labelled as, “a distinct threat to the property and lives of white settlers” (Reclaiming Power and Place, 2021, p. 253). To control this a pass system was implemented to restrict everyone’s movements off reserve, especially the women. If a person wanted to leave the reserve, they needed to obtain a pass from their farm instructor or Indian agent (p. 254). Soon, the objectification of the women began to be recorded in the House of

Commons Sessional Papers. The stereotypes that were forming included that every woman on reserve is a, “hinderance to the advancement of men...the majority of (the women) are discontented, dirty, lazy and slovenly" (p.256). These biased stereotypes extended into the consciousness of law enforcers as racism towards ‘squaws’ (a derogatory term used to identify Indigenous women and girls) justifying their mistreatment. The belief system that began to evolve was that women and girls were undignified, a hinderance to societal progression and subsequently disposable. These beliefs affected their human dignity which was slowly eroded and erased, “...through slow, nonexistent or violent police responses, lack of public outcry, prevalent child apprehension and many other supposed responses to violence which themselves constitute violence” (Holmes, Hunt, and Piedalue, 2014 as cited in Saramo, 2016, p. 543). This mindset/perspective has been instrumental in the lack of social support and construction of a society that perpetuates neglect and systemic oppression and acceptance of violence against Indigenous women and girls. This tragedy manifested in deep intergenerational trauma passed on in families contributing to the deep sociological fractures in Indigenous societies. The legacy of the horrors of colonization began with the Indian Act and continued well into the 21st century. The introduction of amendments to the Indian Act slowly began to awaken Canada to the long fight for constitutional justice in the Indian Act.

Self-determination Indian Act Amendments

In 1969, the federal government announced its *Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy* which became known as ‘The White Paper’ (Bear, 2015). It purported to abolish discrimination against Aboriginals by abolishing all legal recognition of registered Indians within federal legislation. This meant the government would be absolved of all legal responsibility of the treaties of Aboriginal peoples and the crown resulting in the treaties ceasing

to be living documents. Land claim was also treated in this document and would become privatized under a land transfer plan to the provincial governments. However, the individual ownership of reserve lands would be governed by the 'Lands Act' which meant that the federal government and its policies would still be governing and policing who benefits and qualifies for reserve land ownership. The eradication of the Indian Act and proposed freedom to Aboriginal people was under the guise of absolving the federal government of responsibility. Native and non-native local, national, and international pressure rallying against this proposed White Paper forced Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau to withdraw it in 1971. Before Trudeau's withdrawal of the *White Paper,* Harold Cardinal, president of the Indian Association of Alberta (hereafter referred to as the IAA) co-produced a significant counterproposal called the *Red Paper* of 1970. This powerful counter-response to the Canadian government advocated the importance of treaties to First Nations people and the foundational relationship between them and the crown. Of the six sections in this document, "Unique Indian Culture and Contribution" examined how Indian people contributed to history through the treaties (Indigenous Corporate Training, 2020). It argued that Indian history was absent from history books and that the treaties had not been accepted as part of collective Canadian history. Further to the indiscriminate ignorance of the rights of Indigenous peoples was the section in the *Red Paper* that addressed the legal status of the Indian. The Canadian government had proposed that section 91 (24) from the *Constitution Act* be removed as an attempt to sever the discrimination against Indigenous peoples having an exclusive status from other Canadians. However, the IAA argued that while it was crucial that the Indian Act be reviewed and amended, it provided a legal framework for Indigenous peoples like the constitutions in place for Canadians. The *Red Paper* awakened Indigenous people to protect their own rights and self-advocate (Patrick Small Legs-Nagge, Piikani First Nation, lives

in Waverly, Nova Scotia, personal communication, October 19th, 2022). In 1982, section 25 and 35 were added to the Canadian Constitution addressing Aboriginal treaty rights. The next section explores the significance of these additions and contemporary impacts of upholding treaties in modern day Canada.

Contemporary Treaty: Section 35 in the 1982 Constitution

In a conversation with Mr. Small-Legs Nagge about his opinion when decolonization in Canda began, he shared that it was when section 35 of the 1982 constitution was amended. He continued to explain how the constitution is the supreme law of Canada and historically was used as a weapon to legitimize the control, destruction, and oppression of Indigenous peoples. Upon further probing he revealed that from a First Nations perspective, this amendment demonstrated that Aboriginal treaty rights were, for the first time through a distinct political act, going to be protected. He expounded on the importance of learning about treaty,

> It was the beginning of new relationships with the Crown and new settlers to this land, Canada – we thought it was sharing the land and not taking the land. They are the foundation for our relationships with this country from our perspectives (Patrick Small Legs-Nagge, Piikani First Nation, lives in Waverly, Nova Scotia, personal communication, February 2023).

Section 25 of the Constitution Act, 1982 protects the Aboriginal and section 35 ensures that they cannot be taken away or superseded. These rights are recognized and affirmed in Section 35.

> *Section 25 of the Constitution Act, 1982 reads as follows:*
> 25. The guarantee in this Charter of certain rights and freedoms shall not be construed so as to abrogate or derogate from any aboriginal, treaty or other rights or freedoms that pertain to the aboriginal peoples of Canada including

> (a) any rights or freedoms that have been recognized by the Royal Proclamation of October 7, 1763; and
>
> (b) any rights or freedoms that now exist by way of land claims agreements or may be so acquired.
>
> *Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982 reads as follows:*
> 35. (1) The existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed.
>
> Definition of "aboriginal peoples of Canada"
>
> (2) In this Act, "aboriginal peoples of Canada" includes the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada.
>
> Land claims agreements
>
> (3) For greater certainty, in subsection (1) "treaty rights" includes rights that now exist by way of land claims agreements or may be so acquired.

After this affirmation, Indigenous people realized they could remove themselves from the Indian Act by the creation of self-government agreements which would require extensive and intensive organization. However, communities could begin with sectoral self-government agreements. First Nations were not obligated to wait for a possible twenty-year process of self-government, they moved to sectoral self-government which includes the social determinants of health inclusive of economic development, social services, housing, education etc. to be addressed before implementation. Nova Scotia is a national example of actioning sectoral government where they focused on education first and created Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey, also affectionately known as 'MK'. This program serves 12 out of the 13 Mi'kmaq communities throughout Nova Scotia. The MK mission is to, "actively promote excellence in Mi'kmaq education, interests and rights for our communities and to facilitate the development of lifelong learning" (Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey, n.d.). Currently, 83% of First Nations students are educated in MK schools, more than 600 First Nation students are enrolled in post-secondary education and numeracy and literacy rates in elementary and high school have increased. These are a few of the most recent

achievements of the positive and rich impact of a sectoral self-government heralded by the Mi'kmaq people of Nova Scotia. In most conversations I have with L'nu (this term means, "the people" to refer to Indigenous peoples and is dominated in referring/being referred to the Mi'kmaq) people, settler and new settler communities learning about the meaning of citizenship is a high priority. In the next section I will begin taking you through the journey of participating in reconciliation.

Participating in Reconciliation: Reflexivity

White's (2007) questions to practitioners about entering Indigenous communities and issues resonates with my immigrant settler status confronting my responsibility in reconciliation work. *Reflexivity* and *Questions* are the titles of the first two sections. Reflexivity is a process of destabilizing professional routine ways of thinking and knowing (Taylor & White, 2000, as cited in White, 2007). It suggests that the practitioner needs to be aware of their own history, biases, and assumptions that they are bringing with them into the Indigenous communities. The researcher challenges her audience to shift their perspectives into a metacognitive approach from knowing to becoming curious. Knowing can be a posture of certainty and reified thoughts are not open to iterative processes such as being in relationship with someone or a group of people. Curiosity, however, fosters willingness to listen and dependency on others to shape that experience. White elaborates on the collaborative meaning making and joint knowledge construction as ethical and potential ways forward in this field. "How might ideas from Western-based empirically supported approaches co-exist with Indigenous practices (i.e., involvement of Elders, traditional ceremonies, spiritual practices)?" (p. 9). She asks that attention is given to Indigenous worldviews and that these are taken into consideration in clinical and community practices. She consistently asks questions throughout the article prompting the reader to become

curious which is her primary orientation as a researcher and author. White concludes the article by emphasizing the ethical duty that researchers bear to constantly examine themselves and their practice. She summarizes her invitational questioning in the entire article with a quote from Giroux which reminds us of the advantages of a heuristic way of thinking where people are invited through opportunities and provocations to discover or learn something for themselves. This process can lead us to the edges of our work and that it is in these fringes of intersectionality that innovation can flourish (White, 2007). This creates a noetic space for 'supercomplexity' (Barnett, 2002, 2012 as cited in White, 2015). Supercomplexity is accepting that there is a fragility in the way we understand the world, how we situate ourselves in it and how we carry ourselves through it. White continues to expand on Barnett's definition encouraging practitioners to develop capacity to live with uncertainty and still flourish. White (2015) positively views a rapidly changing world as encouragement for the Child and Youth Care (hereafter referred to as CYC) industry to be fluid in its responses. She comments on the CYC spaces as being hybrid and by their very nature of serving children and families who need help means we operate in tension. She prompts us to unfold into this tension. She invites us to reflect on, "What new stories can we co-create together?" and whether there are any that need to be retired. Transformation begins with wonder. Accepting tension, fluidity and responsiveness in solutions and agility with uncertain times reveals our collective potential at all levels of society.

Adopting a reflexive practice broadens learning and practical spaces for the inclusivity of multiple ways of knowing and being. Accepting the notion of 'supercomplexity' destabilizes hegemonic thinking and disrupts entrenched processes. It uplifts a person's agency and rootedness in themselves and implicates them as a co-creator in their life. They also become contributors to ours. In our work with and for children, regardless of the context, continually

assessing our expertise and privilege of power in the relationship is a reflexive practice. Then, an outcome of this sustained effort is commitment to listening and action. As an artist and researcher using children's and youth's films, I have learned that knowledge of the history of colonization in Canada, treaty-making, and the social determinants of Indigenous people's health are pertinent factors in practicing reflexivity as a researcher. In this next section, I explore the literature on the social determinants of health of Indigenous peoples. I seek to better understand the personal narratives in the Our World films and seek ways to activate reconciliation as, "...and affective response in the national community" (Rymhs, 2006, p.119).

Social Determinants of Indigenous People's Health

Participating in the construction of healthy Canadian societies requires an analysis of, "the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age —conditions that together provide the freedom people need to live lives they value" (World Health Organization, 2008, p. 26 as cited in Greenwood & de Leeuw, 2012). This is the definition of the social determinants of health as defined by the World Health Organization. This framework extends our understanding of a person's health as something that is beyond solely individualistic, biomedical explanations (Lines, Yellowknife Dene First Nation Wellness Division & Jardine, 2019; Greenwood & de Leeuw, 2012; Battiste 1998; Greenwood, de Leeuw, Lindsay & Reading, 2015) and implicates everyone at all levels of society to consider their influence, privilege, and power. The social determinants of health influence the health status of individuals and groups. The inclusion, empowerment and health of Indigenous children and youth are still threatened gaps in Canada because of the underlying cause of the deficits of the social determinants of health among this population. This gap must be addressed in all areas of social research because 46% of Canadian Indigenous people are under the age of 25. They are the fastest growing population of youth in

Canada. Just being Indigenous is a significant social determinant of health in which as a population they rank lower in every determinant compared to non-Indigenous Canadians (Lines et al., 2019). Research and statistics illustrate that Indigenous children experience several health and life-structure inequities that stem from colonialism (Greenwood & de Leeuw, 2012). "…colonialism is indeed the broadest and most fundamental determinant of Indigenous health and well-being in countries where settler-colonial power continues to dominate" (Greenwood, de Leeuw, Lindsay & Reading, 2015, p. xii). The literature is commonly focused on measuring health inequities in Indigenous children by focusing on the lack of social determinants but increasingly is being defined as being beyond the social (Greenwood et al., 2015; Schwan & Lightman, 2015; Kirmayer, Brass, & Tait, 2000; Gone & Moses, 2014). If almost half of Indigenous people are youth aged and suicide is the highest among this population, suicide, too, must be a 'beyond the social' and beyond just a mental health issue. Yet, rates of suicide for Aboriginal youth are the highest compared to any other population in the world (National Aboriginal Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy, [NAYSPS], 2013, p.3). With a sizable portion of the population dying by suicide, two things are being demanded; there is an expression of collective trauma, and the safe and successful growth of Indigenous people is threatened. These two catastrophic conclusions reveal that the determinants of Indigenous people's health have been systemically affected by colonial processes. With these divisive and destructive realities in mind, Talaga (2018) highlights advice from Justice Murray Sinclair, the chairperson of the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission, who offered four fundamental questions for Indigenous people; Where do I come from? Where am I going? What is my purpose? Who am I? She uses these questions as a framework to inform readers how history was altered for Indigenous people because of the doxa of the time. According to Corsaro (2018), in

the deterministic model of socialization, a child's role is passive, and society sculpts them to fit the current doxa. Duncan Cambell Scott, the architect of the Indian Residential School system elaborates on Canada's deterministic goals, "our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic" (Talaga, 2018, p. 18). The Canadian government implemented a variety of violently oppressive tools in reaction to the ingrained doxa of the Doctrine of Discovery and the Indian Act and subsequent establishment of reserves. This traditional theory of veiled racism also resulted in the Sixties Scoop where thousands of children were removed from their birth families and placed in non-Indigenous environments between the period of 1960's to the mid 1980's (Sinclair, 2007). This violent practice altered the cultural landscape for families and communities resulting in widespread disruption of cultural continuity which is a determinant of health for indigenous peoples. This will be discussed further in the next section.

Culture as a Determinant of Health

The element of culture is a determinant of health because culture produces self-identity and self-esteem, and this comes from within the community with knowledge and traditions transmission (Hatala, 2020; Redvers, 2020; Auger 2016). As noted by Kirmayer et al. (2011), "Aboriginal notions of personhood root identity in a person's connections to the land and environment" (p. 88); therefore, "the natural environment provides not only sustenance but also sources of soothing, emotion regulation, guidance, and healing" (Walsh, 2020, p. 89). Culture and the land of their home communities are teachers and healers for Indigenous people so eating traditional food and learning about historic traditions and medicines from Elders is a cultural response to healing when a person is in crisis. "Throughout the world, land is central to Indigenous being and it contains the power to heal humanity" (Settee, 2013, p.10). Indigenous

ways of knowing and being are tied to cultural connectivity. Crisis is not the only invitation to living well and centering culture. Culture contains the teachings and direction on "how to walk in this world" and includes, but is not limited to, traditions, values, knowledge, hunting, and trapping, living off the land, traditional food, medicines, games, sweats, spirituality, ceremonies, celebrations, praying, and language (Oster et al., 2014, p. 3). Creating opportunities to develop intentional relationship with the land and make this a daily practice is essential to Indigenous overall well-being. Land based programs specific to local communities are heeding the call for "strengthening ethnocultural identity [and] community integration" (Walsh, 2020, p. 15) to improve the mental health of Indigenous communities. Culture is inseparable from a relationship to the land and support for cultural continuity as a critical factor in the self-determination of Indigenous communities. The term cultural continuity was described by Kirmayer et al. (2007) as "culture as something that is potentially enduring or continuously linked through processes of historical transformation with an identifiable past of tradition" (Oster, Grier, Mayan, Toth, 2014, p. 1). Contemporary Indigenous identities have been shaped by colonization and intergenerational trauma perpetuated by systems such as the Indian residential school system. 'Treatments' to these issues are being increasingly defined and self-determined by Indigenous communities in response to traditional western health practices being incongruous to Indigenous cultural continuity (Greenwood & de Leeuw, 2012; Auger, 2016). Indigenous identities are formed by and through place and focusing on their relationship with the land gives access to traditional and spiritual knowledge about "surviving, thriving, and just being" (Salusky, Kral, Amarok, & Wexler, 2022, p. 171). In a scan conducted by the First Nations health authority, they affirmed the continued value of traditional practices and medicine in Indigenous communities (Hyman, Stacy, Atkinson, Novak Lauscher, Rabeneck, Oleman, Cooper, Young, Kellman, Ho,

2020). Chandler, Lalonde, Sokol & Hallett, (2003) conducted an in-depth study of British Colombia's west coast 196 First Nations communities to understand the correlation of cultural continuity as a hedge against youth suicides which has plagued First Nations and Inuit communities in Canada (Kral, 2016; 2012; Chachamovich, Kirmayer, Haggarty, Cargo, McCormick, & Turecki, 2015). In their seminal work which has been ongoing, they found that high scoring communities on the cultural continuity markers (land claim, self-government, education, police and fire services, health services and cultural facilities) had low to vanishing youth suicide rates (Chandler et al., 2003). These results indicate the need for communal care and concern for a shared past and collective future not only in mitigating crisis such as suicide but also rebuilding and healing the Indigenous nations in Canada. Another marker of cultural persistence is the use of Indigenous languages which has been studied to be a strong predictor of wellbeing among Indigenous populations in Canada (Hallett, Chandler, & Lalonde, 2007). An expression of these aspects of cultural continuity can be found in storytelling which encourages relationships between languages, land and formal and informal education and their intersection with life experiences. The traditional practice of storytelling and Indigenous people's agency in that is crucial to the task of enabling the expression of authentic voice and breaking through the confines of restrictive colonial boundaries (Poitras Pratt, 2020). King (2003) opens his book with a poignant statement about stories asserting, "the truth about stories is that that's all we are" (p. 2). To illustrate this Indigenous practice, Yuen et al. (2021) discuss and present findings on Indigenous youths' perspectives on wellness through storytelling in a Saskatchewan based research project. Their results show that storytelling is viewed as, "a way of understanding the self is a traditional method of looking back and passing forward" (p. 99). It is congruent with artmaking and reveals the complexity and simplicity of stories. The abstract and ancient tradition

of storytelling reclaims and centers a way of knowing that is supported by media art. In this next section, I present the foundation for the choice of the data set, the Our World films, discussing how media art and digital storytelling aligns with Indigenous epistemologies.

Media art as a way of Knowing

"Precisely because images matter, because they are powerful and seductive, it is necessary to consider them critically" (Rose, 2012, p. 350). New media art production and digital technology are deeply embedded in our lives. They were tools for survival during the pandemic and have contributed to altering collective ways of being in societies. The *digital* became the human crutch of fostering semblances of interconnectedness when face-to-face interactions were restricted in an unprecedented global crisis. What if this reliance on the medium expanded into a post-pandemic era where mainstream society reflected on the necessity of listening and speaking to each other in a new and creative way? Barnett's (2002) notion of practicing 'supercomplexity' aligns with a post-pandemic world that is increasingly demanding new understanding of human needs after the introduction of social isolation and social distancing. Accepting 'supercomplex' ways of being and understanding human experience invites broader discussions of communication and listening. The combination of art and storytelling creates fertile ground for a new supercomplexity to emerge. Storytelling in varied forms is all around us whether people are conscious of the continuous visual discourse visible through social media or advertising. In his seminal co-authored book, *Ways of Seeing*, Berger (1972) invites us to consider that our way of seeing is always looking at the relation between the images and ourselves,

> The reciprocal nature of vision is more fundamental than that of spoken dialogue. And often dialogue is an attempt to verbalize this - an attempt to explain how, either

> metaphorically or literally, 'you see things,' and an attempt to discover how 'he sees things' (p. 9).

Berger argues that the visual product that society encounters is always an embodiment of a way of seeing (led by the artist). The social practice of seeing has effects on the articulation of meaning about our world, how social conflict is engaged and from whose perspective; is it the audience or is it the artist? (Pollock, 1988 as cited in Rose, 2012, p.17). This interpretation situates the artist and viewer in an intangible and imaginative relationship negotiating and co-constructing meaning-making. Several relationships are activated in 'seeing' media art; self-reflection in the artist, the artist's relationships with their community, the artist sharing a message to the viewers, the aesthetics of the media piece and the viewers and the viewers self-reflection/being affected after the experience of seeing the media piece. Assuming a critical approach to images elevates these relationships and centers human beings at the core of them. This approach to critically interacting with media art and digital storytelling resonates with Wilson's (2008) concept of 'relational accountability' where he discusses how the analysis section of research (in this case, the understanding of the films I am watching) must "be true to the voices of all the participants and reflect an understanding of the topic that is shared by researcher and participants alike" (Wilson, 2008, p. 101). This prompts a critical reflection on the relational accountability we have towards hearing and seeing Indigenous digital storytelling. Media art and digital storytelling are forms of technology that mediate self-understanding and visual methods mediate the construction of meaning of the visual data (Brushwood Rose & Low, 2014). This medium creates an intersection between individual artists/storytellers with their communities and situates their expression of those experiences in digital storytelling which then connects us, the viewers, to it. Using media art as form of storytelling highlights Indigenous

worldviews and connects the artist to their communities centering it as a site of power. Media art liberates Indigenous youth voices encouraging democratization for their communities and practicing relational accountability with settler viewer audiences.

Digital Storytelling

Indigenous methodologies value self-knowledge and subjective experience (Absolon, 2011; Denzin, Lincoln, &Smith, 2008; Smith, 2012). These are valuable sources of knowledge and knowing in Indigenous lives. The denigration of Indigenous ways of knowing through colonization was a primary means of establishing the universality of western knowledge. In response to embracing 'supercomplexity' which has been discussed in earlier sections, the practice and production of digital storytelling disrupt hegemonic epistemologies and emphasize Indigenous ways of knowing. Storytelling and sharing circles emphasize relationality and subjective experience (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2009) which are reflected in digital storytelling as, "the latest manifestation of a long tradition that stretches back thousands of years" (Powell, Weems, & Owle, 2007, p. 12). Wilson (2008) promoted storytelling because it conveys the importance of relationship-building with a reader. Stories create space for listening and expanding or stretching thoughts. Stories without relationships often lack the generative quality of healing where new meaning is made, and where learning is shared. They are expressions of "lived values" necessary for regeneration and renewal of Indigenous communities where there can be great healing in the (re)storying and shifting of harmful narratives about indigeneity (Corntassel, 2009). "The crafting of the multimedia story is both motivated by the emotional and personal terrain of each participant, but also by the political dynamics of representing their social worlds" (Brushwood Rose & Low, 2014). Engaging and uplifting media art as critical data liberates the crafting of personal narratives, empirical knowledge and inspires creative grappling

with stories that are unrepresentable by words alone. Digital storytelling creates access to intimate parts of the creator's thoughts, feelings and life experiences that may be too complex for a textual narrative. It also is a process where the storyteller investigates their identities and self-understanding intersecting reflection with visuals, audio, and text to capture the complexity that often is hard to 'explain'. Digital storytelling promotes creator control over the story's structure and content, and consequently, digital stories created by, with, and for Indigenous communities challenge stereotypical representations of Indigenous people and provide an authentic reflection of traditional ways of knowing and being (Iseke & Moore, 2011) They are a rich source of data that emphasizes process and product. Indigenous digital storytelling emphasizes, "...the process of community relationships...and the development of digital products..." (Iseke & Moore, 2011). Filmmaking reaffirms the storytelling tradition and highlights Indigenous knowledge and perspectives of the community (Iseke & Moore, 2011; Cueva, Kuhnley, Lanier, Dignan, Revels, Schoenberg, Cueva, 2016). In digital media production, a new relationship is created between the crafted latent and explicit visual/aural stories and the viewer. The re-negotiation of meaning on the choices of images that are meant to "illustrate" or "complement" or "speak" for themselves become a reflexive practice for the filmmakers and animators (Luttrell & Chalfen, 2010, p. 198). Viewers are engaged as deep and attentive listeners where we become witnesses (Iseke, 2011) and allow someone's life to interrupt ours. This engagement creates space for the multiplicity of voices and perspectives interlacing our interconnectedness. In the next section, 'methodology,' I theorize and explain my rationale for connecting several methods to view and listen to the media art texts.

Methodology

This section of the paper focuses on and discusses epistemology which is the theory of how we 'know' what we know. Explaining the methods that I will be using to understand and listen to digital stories is the critical process of 'knowing.' Even though this section of the paper will define, '*how I will learn,'* my relationship with this process is a way of knowing and will be expanded on. 'Knowing *that*' is complementary to 'knowing *how'* to make something actionable (Duguid, 2005). This means that we can have explicit knowledge about something but not actually know *what* or *how* to do anything with it. Understanding *how* to use knowledge and in the context of this paper, how to engage with stories, requires a community of practice (Lave & Wegner, 1991). I encourage children in grade 6 public school to start becoming SpaceMakers and classrooms to become communities of practice. An example of what this could resemble has been expanded on in the 'praxis' section of this paper. Through engagement with others, we are learning how to transfer 'knowing *that*' into 'knowing *how*' to use/do something. The aim in this paper is to inspire and create spaces for creativity and innovation in embodying reconciliation as (new) settlers and to do it collectively. In this section of the paper, I offer some practical tools to use in learning communities and will demonstrate how to use them in the 'Listening' section. Previously, in the literature review, I ended with a discussion of how media art and digital stories are a way of knowing because of its relation to self and the social context. In the 'Theoretical Framework' of the section, I will discuss how Wilson (2008) differentiates Indigenous knowledge from western paradigms as being relational. This builds on the literature scan that using media art and digital stories as a way of participating in reconciliation conveys an articulation of Indigenous cultures and, "...presents an Aboriginal perspective for all those who will listen" (Igloliorte, Nagam & Taunton, 2016, p. 5). In the next section, I discuss an

alternative complementary process of responding to the research question I posed in the introduction section of this paper about how to critically reflect on Indigenous digital stories.

Data Set

The data that were selected for this research is created by Indigenous youth's first voice and presents a way of listening to and thinking about the importance and connection between storytelling and media art documentation. 'Our World Language' is a media training program by filmmakers of diverse backgrounds approaching reconciliation creatively in Canada. They deliver free media training to schools in remote communities to develop capacity to create films on language, life, and cultures within their community. Providing this access is premised on integrating, "First Nation, Métis and Inuit languages and culture into films as a way to heal the past, claim the present and move forward into the future with pride of identity" (Our World, 2022). The youth are encouraged to make their unique films on themes of their choosing and the general themes such as, "traditional stories, community advocates, community strength, living in two worlds, multi-generational voices, lessons from the past, residential school impact, moving beyond stereotypes, and celebration of culture".

The data/short films presented in Our World are illustrative of Thomas King's assertion that we need to pay attention to stories, and in this instance the stories of children and youth. These stories constitute a rich data set because of their 'thick description' (Tracy, 2010, p. 840). Thick description is one of the four criteria that define credibility which reveals how collected data shows nuance and complexity and information 'gets bigger'. Data 'getting bigger' refers to the revelation of the volume of information within the data to understand. Consequently, rich data increases credibility which facilitates increased understanding. Media are a rich data set of

audio, visual and artistic storytelling. These data offer stories on major research topics such as the importance of land and positive impacts of cultural continuity in Indigenous communities in Canada. When I first found these films online, I watched them as evidence to support what I already knew about Indigenous stories. However, as I checked off the boxes hearing and seeing what I *expected* to see because of the literature review, I was surprised in this process. As eager as I was to resist and attempt to decolonize the research process, it took restraint of my preconceived ideas to just listen and watch the films. These data became 'worthy topic' (Tracy, 2010, p.840) material for me because I remembered I was an artist, a teacher and a mother before I chose to do research. This prompted me to focus on the visual creativity of the films, consider the potential use of them in a classroom to share worldviews, and I listened differently because a child was speaking. Resonance is also an important criterion that convinced me to select these data. It's defined as a study possessing 'aesthetic merit' and 'transferability'. Aesthetic merit means that the text is presented in an evocative way to stimulate the reader to "feel, think, interpret, react, or change". These films (also referred to as 'texts'), provoked me. The stories I listened to resonated with my personal experiences of the negative effects of colonization as well as the necessity of cultural continuity to feel secure, heal and grow. The films also reminded me of how large Canada is geographically and how diverse Indigenous cultures are. The deepest and most meaningful aspect of the films that resonated was the bountiful creativity and honesty of children. To know that each of the films was conceived, directed and shot by youths with the guidance and inspiration of the communities that they live in resonated with my belief in the interdependence of humanity. I wondered about how these films would resonate with Canadian children in the public school system and how they could be inspired to become SpaceMakers. I

will offer a response to these questions in the 'praxis' section of this paper. In the next section, I will explain how I will select the data for this research.

Sample Design

For this research I will be listening to and watching three videos. Each video is approximately 5 minutes long. With the proposed frameworks for analysis, only 3 films have been selected to ensure that a comprehensive and in-depth understanding can be conducted. The three films reflect different genres of media storytelling; animation, and narrative. Each of these genres reflects the diversity of story-telling traditions and ways unique to individuals and non-homogenous First Nations communities. Using the framework of seeking the meta functions of meaning-making in film laid out by Jewitt & Oyama (2001), I will use the emerging responses to the questions of my analysis framework to establish a praxis of listening and space-making.

Video Selection

On the Our World site, one of the ways the films are categorized is by the year they were produced. Within this category, the films are displayed with a thumbnail still from the video accompanied by a short (less than 100 words) synopsis of the film. The nation where the filmmaker resides and the province is also included in these details. I will look for the following keywords in the descriptions to narrow down my film choices since there are over a hundred films available on the website. These key words reflect the three main themes that emerged from the literature review; cultural continuity, knowing the past and social determinant of Indigenous People's health in Indigenous epistemology.

Keywords: ‘land’, ‘get(s) help’, ‘solution’, ‘overcome’, ‘change’, (seek) guidance/guide’, ‘(find) hope’, ‘learn (from), ‘tradition(s)/traditional’, ’ceremony (ies)’, ‘knowledge/knowing’, ‘oral tradition’, ‘story’.

I will begin at the 2022 category and move down in years until I find a synopsis that has one or two of the keywords in the thumbnail descriptions. My desired film length will be at 05:00 minutes or less in length to ensure a robust listening analysis is possible. In the next section, I reflect on my responsibility as a researcher in choosing my methods wisely based on the data I am using.

Data Analysis Methods

> “My concern is and continues to be that analysis often becomes a mode for saying what we want to say and not really listening to what is being said. As researchers we often bring our preconceived notions and understandings and want our data to fit what we already know and want to believe (Hendry, 2007, p. 493)”.

In his paper, *The future of narrative*, Hendry (2007) questions the scientific use of people’s stories/narratives in research as data that needs to be legitimized through the processes of applying methodology and analysis. I am challenged as a researcher with how to handle the humanity and sacredness of the films I have chosen, which are first voice narratives, without reducing them into analytical objects. This tension is shaped by Smith’s (1999) contention with the word, *research* which she explains, “the word itself is probably one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world’s vocabulary...It is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism” (Denzin, Lincoln & Smith, 2008, p. 4). Personally, as a researcher fulfilling the requirements of a degree in a western institution

while using Indigenous generated content, I am bound to the responsibility of attempting to decolonize my research. Choosing and assembling my data analysis methods raised questions:

1. Which methods do I use that will help demonstrate learning instead of proving my assumptions correct?
2. How do I 'research' these data so that my interpretation and understanding intersects with praxis?
3. How do I become a SpaceMaker and 'bear witness' to these stories?

Researcher Posture

When I began engaging with these films, I watched them for a few reasons. The first one was the familiarity with the art of digital storytelling and how cathartic and impactful the experience was to produce a short film. I believe this language of communication can inspire even the busiest person to allow their lives to be briefly interrupted and momentarily care about the lives of others. Films invite intentional and active engagement from the audience. The short films I am engaging with for this research provided the space for indirect imaginative conversation and most importantly inspired the desire to listen and reflect on my actions going forward. These films narrated lived realities that were out of my realm of understanding and challenged my immigrant-settler privilege. The challenge I faced was to mindfully straddle the blurry boundary between being a listener and SpaceMaker; the latter being someone who is prompted into thoughtful action. The responsibility as an outsider attempting to understand a foreign-to-me paradigm requires reflexivity and careful consideration of the balance of power as a non-Indigenous researcher creating academic research out of Indigenous content. An additional responsibility is practicing listening well to the stories before acting and responding. I am guiding my research posture on answering these questions as the basis of accountability in this

context. Smith (1999) asks us non-Indigenous researchers to consider these questions when conducting research on or with Indigenous people/content, “Whose research is it? Who owns it? Whose interests does it serve? Who will benefit from it? Who will write it up? How will its results be disseminated?” (p. 5). I will answer these questions in the next section.

Reflections on Linda Smith’s (1999) Questions

Whose research is it? This research is for the non-Indigenous people who are looking for a way to reconcile with their complicity in participating in colonial desires which have perpetuated harm against Indigenous people. One example is immigrants drinking downstream from Indigenous people’s unceded land in Canada. My family came here to own land and have a home that they can call theirs. They also wanted to have job security and wealth and desired not to be treated as second-class citizens which was the practice in Dubai where we are from. As they learned about “Indigenous issues” they struggled to see their complicity because of their trauma of being colonized in the spaces that we collectively left. I have asked family and several close friends, “how can you participate in decolonization and reconciliation?” The answers usually range from time constraints in daily life to fear of being uncomfortable with listening to trauma-based stories to the lack of understanding about what those words mean. Educating children, who I believe are the gatekeepers to breaking this cycle of fear and excuses for adults, is a way forward in activating social justice as a researcher. Continuing to creatively change and influence public school curriculum to diversify learning about social issues can influence the sustainability of mitigating more harm against Indigenous people. To continue answering Smith’s (1999) question, *who owns the research?* and for the sake of brevity, I own the research because it is my personal response to my interpretation of fulfilling citizen responsibility. *Whose interests does it serve? Who will benefit from it?* This research is intended to serve as curriculum

inspiration for teachers and educators on the inclusion of first voice and collective community action in the elementary – high school education system in Nova Scotia. It can also serve community programs looking to engage the public about settler issues by prioritizing First Voice education and art as a method to listen. I hope that it motivates these institutions to keep amplifying marginalized and oppressed peoples so that they may learn of the bountiful beauty in storytelling through media art languages. I also hope that the engagement of these films emphasizes the ongoing need for decolonization, and active belief in community interdependence. *Who will write it up? How will the results be disseminated?* I, under my thesis committee's guidance, am authoring this research and the final text and visuals will be archived in the university library system. It will also be written and orally shared with the university community and invited members to the in-person and online defense. In this next section, I propose an extension of the researcher posture that I am taking in crafting this paper. In addition to documenting the results of my understanding in written form, I also capture it in illustrations. They are described in the following section.

Art as Knowing: The Imagery and Story of the Sperm Whale

Conceptual art is not about a form or material, it is about meanings and ideas. It is also about subverting the traditional idea of art being unique, collectable, or saleable and it can take a variety of forms including language (Godfrey, 1998). The process of conceptualizing this thesis and writing has partly been an artistic practice for me. I am aware I am part of an institution fulfilling the requirements for a degree, but it was important for me to use my identity as an artist in the creation of this work. I have been painting sperm whales for a few years now telling different stories and processing a variety of experiences. The mighty sperm whale looks nothing like any other whale. Its dark, cold grey wrinkled features on an enormous rectangular shaped

head is a third of their body length (Whale & Dolphin Conservation UK [WDC], 2023). Its length is up to 50 feet/16 meters (Oceana, 2023; WDC, 2023), it has powerful sonar and echolocation abilities to hunt in the light-deprived depths of the deep sea, and its mythical size boasts strength, power, and uniqueness. The Physeter Macrocephalus, also known as the sperm whale, hunts for squid, sharks, and large bony fishes (Oceana, 2023) and routinely conducts deep dives that reach up to 2,000 feet (National Geographic, 2023) and average about 45 minutes per dive. That means they are holding their breath while hunting viciously aggressive prey for an hour. These facts fascinate me and inspire artistic thoughts of symbolism, storytelling, and personal connection.

Symbolism

My opening story in this paper was about one of the darkest periods of my life when I had to wrestle many inner demons in the hope of disrupting the abuse victim narrative that had engulfed me. Healing is not linear nor is it short. It is an intentional ceremony with oneself to touch the pain, live daily life, suffocate with sorrow and trust that moving through every wave of it is necessary for healing. It is telling your stories repeatedly so you can hear how to find a new way through. It is about living with arms wide open and hoping for love to breathe into the suffocating darkness. It is about trust. For me, it was about seeking God in the vistas and shorelines of Nova Scotia on my bicycle to remember that I did not belong to the pain inside me but that I was part of something much bigger.

I see the repetitive action of the sperm whale holding its breath for a food hunt dive as a ceremonial practice of preparation and resilience. The cyclical practice of diving into the deep ocean waters and relying completely on its echolocation to move and locate prey is fascinating. I liken this to preparation in facing the challenges and battles that life will have; armoring against

the wounds that are inevitable; hoping that you will not hurt as much but knowing that you will; facing unseen challenges without fear; understanding that darkness is partners with the light; and accepting that some pain is a condition of existence. This mighty and physically powerful creature is dependent on wrestling the treacherous giant squid so that it may continue living. When I think about this relationship and a powerful whale requiring its necessary other, the giant squid; I imagine they are one being. The squid symbolically resembles the experiences and memories that we want to forget but they are a part of us. Acceptance and battling them but returning to the surface and the light is the ceremony with oneself. The whale returns to the surface to breathe and commune with the pod just as we need to trust that hope is tangible and relational. The actions of the sperm whale illuminate a variety of determined and courageous practices that have narrated stories of my life. In a broader way, they also symbolize trusting practices about being unafraid of the unknown and continuing to seek understanding. In the context of this project and paper, I once again turn to this mighty creature to illustrate the impact of the process and learning I have received from films.

The purpose of this paper is to understand how critically reflecting on Indigenous digital story telling will deepen my understanding of how to be a SpaceMaker. I liken my navigation in determining the methodologies to guide my understanding and responses to the films as moving through the darkness because I am not Indigenous. I am compelled to do it though because that journey is sustenance to informing my identity as a SpaceMaker. Using my natural lens, my echolocation, as an artist to view the films alongside Indigenous ways of knowing forms a new epistemological relationship with listening to digital stories. Relating with unknown-to-me worlds is a natural practice because of my insatiable curiosity. As I have shared in my introduction section to this paper, too, engaging in reconciliation is a personal commitment to

knowing my responsibilities in being Canadian. To do that I need to engage multiple perspectives to understand the multi-dimensionality of my identities. This paper is a personal and academic response to some of the films from 'Our World Language.' The methodological responses are an exploration of an embodied, relational and relational accountability lens to view the films. My personal response is drawing a series of a sperm whale from different perspectives for each of the films in pencil and color pencil. They are a visual response to the journey of conceptualizing and authoring this paper and learning multiple experiences of a shared history and occupancy on the land I occupy. The images can be found in the 'artistic responses' section of this paper.

Theoretical Framework

Indigenous Epistemology as a Methodology: Embodied Knowledge

"Indigenous re-search is often guided by the knowledge found within." (Absolon, 2011, p. 12). 'Within' refers to inside a person and in creation. The knowledge 'within' a person is defined by one's birth, and circumstances which coalesce into evolving worldviews. Who we are and who we are becoming is always re-forming. This iterative process according to Indigenous epistemology is a valued and valuable way of understanding one's relationship to life which begins with knowing oneself. Absolon (2011) refers to this process as 'restoring' and agrees that to begin defining an Indigenous methodology requires locating oneself because "positionality, storying, and re-storing ourselves comes first (Absolon and Willet, 2005; Graveline, 2004; Lather, 1991; Sinclair, 2003; Weber-Pillwax, 2001; Wilson 2003 as cited by Absolon, 2011, p. 13). The emphasis on the self is prioritized because it is a valid and integral location of knowledge. People are the combination of stories and histories. These stories encompass positive and negative generational legacies that define the varied ways of being. "Indigenous cultural

histories are rich and have been passed from one generation to the next since time immemorial. Our lived experiences are records of these histories" (Absolon, 2011, p. 26). Embodied knowledge distills the experiences of cultural histories and its effects on an individual. Re-storing oneself involves acknowledging that historical embodiment and attempting to access it. Knowledge is within each person. With this assumption, knowledge is found and created through the senses rather than the intellect (Cordero, 1995 as cited in Wilson, 2008). Experiences are embodied and can be revealed through storytelling, behavior, and actions. Weber-Pillwax (2001) discusses the strength of an Indigenous identity which is in the integrity of the Indigenous person remaining central to themselves even though it is invisible (p. 173). Knowledge from this perspective acknowledges that individual power has been stifled by colonial history but that the starting point to reclamation and self-determination is from within a person. Knowledge/knowing is subjective. Unlike western cannons of knowledge being acquired through the quest for intelligence, the Indigenous methodologies for knowledge begin with the self. People are living embodiments of their epistemologies,

> The foundation of Indigenous research lies within the reality of the lived indigenous experience. Indigenous researchers ground their research knowingly in the lives of real persons as individuals and social beings, not on the world of ideas (Wilson, 2008, p. 60).

Ways of knowing and understanding truths is not out there in the '…world of ideas,' it is within. However, Aboriginal ways of knowing have historically been invalidated by Western ways of knowing because of the emphasis on subjective knowledge (Absolon, 2011, pg. 27). Colonizing knowledge was a tool of oppression to disconnect Indigenous people from their oral traditions, communal spiritual practices, spiritual leaders, families, medicine, land etc. (Smith, 1999). Reclaiming subjectivity, however, is a form of resistance to colonial oppression and "wide

ranging encompassing all areas of social meaning" (Weedon, 1987 as cited in Graveline, 1998, p. 40). The social construction of how Indigenous people 'experience,' 'learn' and 'know' has been historically monopolized and institutionalized by western paradigms. The formalization of 'learning' and 'knowing' as practices that are meant to be found outside of and separated from oneself has dominated and as a result created a hierarchy of the validity of knowledge. 'Knowledge' has become commonly affirmed with the acquisition of formal education such as diplomas and degrees. Indigenous scholars have also documented how research has been colonized by Eurocentrism (Colorado & Collins, 1987; Hampton ,1995a, 1995b; Gilchrist, 1997; Bishop, 1998b, Rigney, 1999, Smith, 1999, Battiste & Henderson, 2000b; Cajete, 1994, 2000; Sinclair, 2003; Absolon & Willet, 2004; Kovach, 2009; and Hart, 2009 as cited in Absolon, 2011, p. 27). This purports the marginalization of Indigenous epistemologies. However, "Indigenous knowledge is as old as life" (Absolon, 2011, p. 31). When Indigenous ways of knowing are examined within an Indigenous paradigm, Indigenous people have access and autonomy in the research process. As a non-Indigenous researcher, my posture in examining and presenting Indigenous centered social issues is critical in centering Indigenous rights to self-determination of the meaning of knowledge. Martin (2000) as cited in Steinhauer (2002) supports this by saying that reframing research, "is to respect our ways and honor our rites and social mores as essential processes, through which we live, act and learn…and use our worldviews, and our realities as assertions of our existence and survival" (p. 70). In my social context as a researcher, I am committed to centering my data and its analysis in Indigenous understandings of knowledge as it is revealed in the films. Non-Indigenous researchers have been cautioned into rigidly defining indigenous methodologies because they inevitably will be compared to Eurocentric models of knowledge acquisition rather than on its own merit

(Steinhauer, 2002). In my research, I attempt to use Indigenous ways of knowing and being as a method to understanding and responding to the films. I will attempt to decolonize the research by decentering popular Eurocentric analytical methodologies and hybridize critical visual methods into the Indigenous methodology framework. In the next section, I will outline another Indigenous methodology integral to the data interpretation in the research I am conducting.

Knowledge is Relational

Knowledge, from an Indigenous paradigm, "is shared with all of Creation" (Wilson, 2001, p. 176 as cited in Absolon 2011, p. 30). This statement highlights that the practice of relationships is beyond just with humans. In 'Research is Ceremony', Wilson (2008) defines relationality through relationships with people, environment/land, the cosmos, and ideas. Valuing existing relationships with people can be the basis for forming new ones which increases one's community base. This connection helps strengthen identity and purpose. Knowing oneself, as stated in previous arguments, is part of an Indigenous epistemology that is elevated in Indigenous research methodologies. An Indigenous way of knowing is through this relationship to the self which connects the mind, body, spirit, and embodied knowledge. Knowledge does not only come from books, "but it is lived, experiential and enacted knowledge" (p. 31). Each person has developing stories within them reflecting their life experiences that are rooted in the past, present, and future. By valuing other ways of knowing besides western traditions, ancestral teachings in Indigenous epistemology can be accessed. This is a reminder that knowledge is also shaped by collective experiences and recognizing that this wisdom is within a person can be transformational despite colonial suppression. I explore this further in the 'listening' section of this paper when I engage the films and animation. The principle that knowledge is relational acknowledges that accessing self-knowledge occurs through relations outside oneself.

Relationality is not the only lens through which Indigenous paradigms exist, but Wilson (2008) argues that if we were to choose one that it would be that "all things are related and therefore relevant" (p. 58). This includes and centers Indigenous knowledge systems that are subjective and broader than human to human relationships. Martin (2002) adds that part of the ways of knowing are in the connections to land. She explains that,

> "Knowledge is part of the system that is our Ways of Knowing. It is more than just information or facts and it is taught and learned in certain contexts, in certain ways and it is purposeful only to the extent to which it is used…Our Ways of Knowing are embedded in our worldview and are an equal part of this system, not an artifact of this. They are socially refined and affirmed, giving definition, and meaning to our world. Without "knowing" we are unable to "be," hence our Ways of Knowing inform our Ways of Being" (p. 7 as cited in Steinhauer, 2002)

Fully 'being', according to an Indigenous paradigm, is inextricable from elevating connection to the land. The land is part of the system of Indigenous 'knowing' and it's relational even if it may be invisible. The land is a part of the whole Indigenous being. Wilson extends on these thoughts and highlights that Indigenous people's relationship with land, "reduces the space between things" and strengthen the shared relationships (Wilson, 2008, p. 87). This fundamental worldview connects to the relationship with the cosmos. Spirituality is weaved into indigenous identity and is not a separate choice of practice. He defines spirituality as, "one's internal sense of connection to the universe" (p. 91). This belief transcends individual knowing as something that is tangibly unattainable. It elevates the Indigenous epistemology of relationality being extended to ancestors. Another important connection is with ideas which are foundationally cultural. This is not unique to Indigenous people but is shared by people in general about how

they think and know. Respecting knowledge as a tandem conjoining of individual subjective knowledge within a collectively defined and exposed cultural context is the essence of relationality to people, environment/land, the cosmos, and ideas. In the section about the 'symbolism' of the sperm whale, I drew it from multiple perspectives to appreciate the different details that became visible with each angle. I was aware of the stories from the sea of the sperm whale battles with the giant squid and the deep scarring it would sustain. However, from certain angles, these are not clearly visible. My artistic practice of deliberately seeking a variety of angles to appreciate, understand and see the whale more fully stems from curiosity. The sperm whale holds experiences and stories in the scars that are visible to the human eye, and I am fascinated by the mysterious life it lives in the light starved parts of the ocean. Drawing these whales is a reflective process of connecting on paper what I do not have access to in the wilds of the ocean. I know our oceans are teeming with life that is possibly beyond our understanding. Making art and imagining some parts of it connects me to my environment and the stories it carries. Wilson refers to this relationship as the conjoining of individual knowledge to the land and respecting the interdependence of all relationships.

Relational Accountability

Wilson (2008) discusses the accountability of a researcher using Indigenous methods and teaches this lesson through *Research is Ceremony*. The Indigenous paradigm of relational accountability is a style of analysis that encourages the researcher to ask, "how the analysis of these ideas will help to further build relationships. What relationships help to hold the ideas together?" (Wilson, 2008, p. 119). This resonates with my research because as an Indo-Canadian researcher exploring the meaning of citizen relations, my aim in this paper is to inspire children to seek deeper understanding of their Canadian citizen relations to Indigenous communities and

knowledge. Next, Wilson discusses the difference in western paradigms of using linear logic in analysis versus intuitive logic in Indigenous paradigms. Using intuitive logic means looking at the whole data and inducing answers through analysis. In a western style of analysis, data is broken down and all the pieces are examined. According to Wilson, (2008), this process destroys relationships and interferes with understanding. As a non-Indigenous researcher who is also new to Indigenous paradigms, I understand that subjectivity is being promoted in research within the parameters of seeking and finding the patterns of relational connections in the data. Since I am new to these methods and learning and practicing them in this individual research paper, I will be combining my learning in an authentic way with critical visual methodology. As an artist, I am most familiar and comfortable using this lens of understanding and relating to content. In the next section, I will explore critical visual methodology as a complementary method which gives space for Indigenous ways of knowing to be revealed in media art analysis.

Critical Visual Methodology

Visuals offer another way of seeing the world and become, "a way of answering research questions" (Rose, 2012, p. 10). The criteria for a critical visual methodology are placing importance on visuals/images, considering the "social conditions and effects of visual objects" and establishing a reflexive approach to the images (Rose, 2012, pp. 16-17). This critical framework supports engaging visuals, and film which is the selected mode of visuals, as thought-provoking valid data sets. There are three sites: site of production - where an image is made; site of the image itself - the visual content; the audiencing - the site where the image encounters the spectators/users (p. 19). There are three modalities or methods for engaging visuals; technological, compositional and social. For this research, I am interested in the social modality of audiencing of films. The 'social' is a way of understanding who is viewing it and how they are

viewing it. In this method, the social identities of the viewers enter a relationship with the film to re-negotiate the meaning-making relationship (p. 32). This passive but immediate relationship between the filmmaker and the viewer becomes elevated to an important decolonizing activity; listening. The viewer is then called to the third criterion of a critical visual methodology which is reflexivity. White (2007) defined reflexivity as a process of destabilizing (professional) routine ways of thinking and knowing (Taylor & White, 2000, as cited in White, 2007, p. 4). In the context of viewing film and engaging visuals, the viewer needs to be aware of their own history, biases, and assumptions that they are bringing with them for viewing. Critical visual methodology offers the option to the viewer and researcher to critically engage with the films with a decolonizing lens. Yuen et al., (2021) assert that, "art as a method of inquiry and representation enables 'the fluidity of metaphor, symbolism, and interpretive communication (both verbal and non-verbal)' and ultimately privileges Indigenous ways of knowing" (p. 60). Critical visual methodology complements the Indigenous methodologies of knowledge being embodied and relational because critical visual methodology focuses on individual artistic expression as an important means of communication. It also centers on the relationality between the viewers and the films and implicates the viewers in a critical engagement.

Semiology & Social Semiotics

Semiology also known as semiotics traditionally translates to 'the study of signs' (Rose, 2012, p. 106). It is an approach to qualitative content analysis, but it focuses on how meaning is generated and conveyed in "texts/semiotic resources" which are the films in this research. Social semiotics is a branch of semiology which involves describing semiotic resources, interacting with visual means of communication and providing frameworks for interpretation (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001). It denies that there is a gap between the resource and the viewer. This type of

visual analysis complements the critical visual methodology theory that images are important, hold histories and meanings by their makers and that they are resources to learn from. Social semiotics positively affirms that the analyst's 'reading position' will guide the interpretation and it is upheld as a strength in the analysis because analysis has sociopolitical weight. My analysis is influenced by my ethnic, social, economic, gender and knowledge background. When I view and analyze films my social location will influence my writing. Social location is defined as the aspects and characteristics that make a person who they are and shapes who they are becoming. For example, my identity as Indo-Canadian immigrant woman will influence the outcomes of my analysis. Focusing on the goal of social semiotics to question how the film/text presents an aspect of social reality and provides space for me as the researcher to respond to it is a primary aim in this analysis. There are three main kinds of semiotic work which Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) have termed as 'representational', 'interactive', and 'compositional' (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001, p. 140). Within these, they have established methods of visual analysis that provide descriptive frameworks to bring out hidden meanings. For the purpose of this research, I will only be focusing on the interactive semiotic nature of the texts and will explore what that entails in the next section.

The Interactive Semiotic Text.

The interactive meaning of a text is created by, "the complex and subtle relations between the represented and the viewer" (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001, p. 145). Viewing a short film can be a relational task where the viewer is invited to a new conversation involving images, sound and text. This method affects how the viewer engages the resource to negotiate meaning making. Jewitt and Oyama (2001) propose detailed artistically analytical methods to extract and define the 'interactive' meaning of a resource. However, to honor Hendry's (2007) challenge to

researchers to not turn stories into dissectible objects, I propose a hybridization of a social semiotic tool of meaning-making and part of Low and Sonntag's (2013) interpretation of a pedagogy of listening. In the next section, I will detail how an analysis of meaning-making is conducted in social semiotics.

Social Semiotic Analysis of Meaning-Making.

There are three meta functions that govern meaning making: representation, orientation, and organization (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001). The authors of this framework have broken down each category to analyze and interpret the filmmakers' decisions and intentions. The detailed questions within the 'representation', 'orientation', and 'organization' categories that provide viewers with a framework of analysis are very detailed, minute and breakdown the entirety of the film into little parts. For this research, I will be adapting their framework and methodology to honor the Indigenous authorship. Wilson (2008) cautions researchers about dominant linear paradigms which breaks everything down to look at it. However, in the Indigenous concept of relational accountability which includes, "all these relationships, if you are breaking things down into their smallest pieces, you are destroying all of the relationships around it" (p. 119). It is important as a researcher that I consider the relationship between the methods and listening to the data. As a result, I have chosen to utilize only the meta functions of meaning making, representation, orientation, and organization to interpret and document my understanding because it allows from a wholistic approach to meaning making and engagement with the film texts. The three overarching meanings of the categories are as follows, Representation, considers meaning as it tells us something about the world. This interpretation is influenced by the researcher's personality, background, and experiences. Meanings can be discussed through the visual, verbal or audio in the resource. Orientation, analyzes how the main characters are

positioned in the resource to give us, the viewer, an impression. Specific issues in this category deal with camera angles in presenting the subject in the film to convey meaning about the character. Organization, considers how meanings are sequenced and integrated into a dynamic whole. The visual editing in the film creates a semiotic structure and rhythm that has a beginning, middle and ending. This reveals how meanings are linked and this defines the rhythm of the salient elements or messages in the film. In the next section, I describe how I will combine the semiotic meta function analysis of meaning making with a pedagogy of listening that respects Indigenous epistemology.

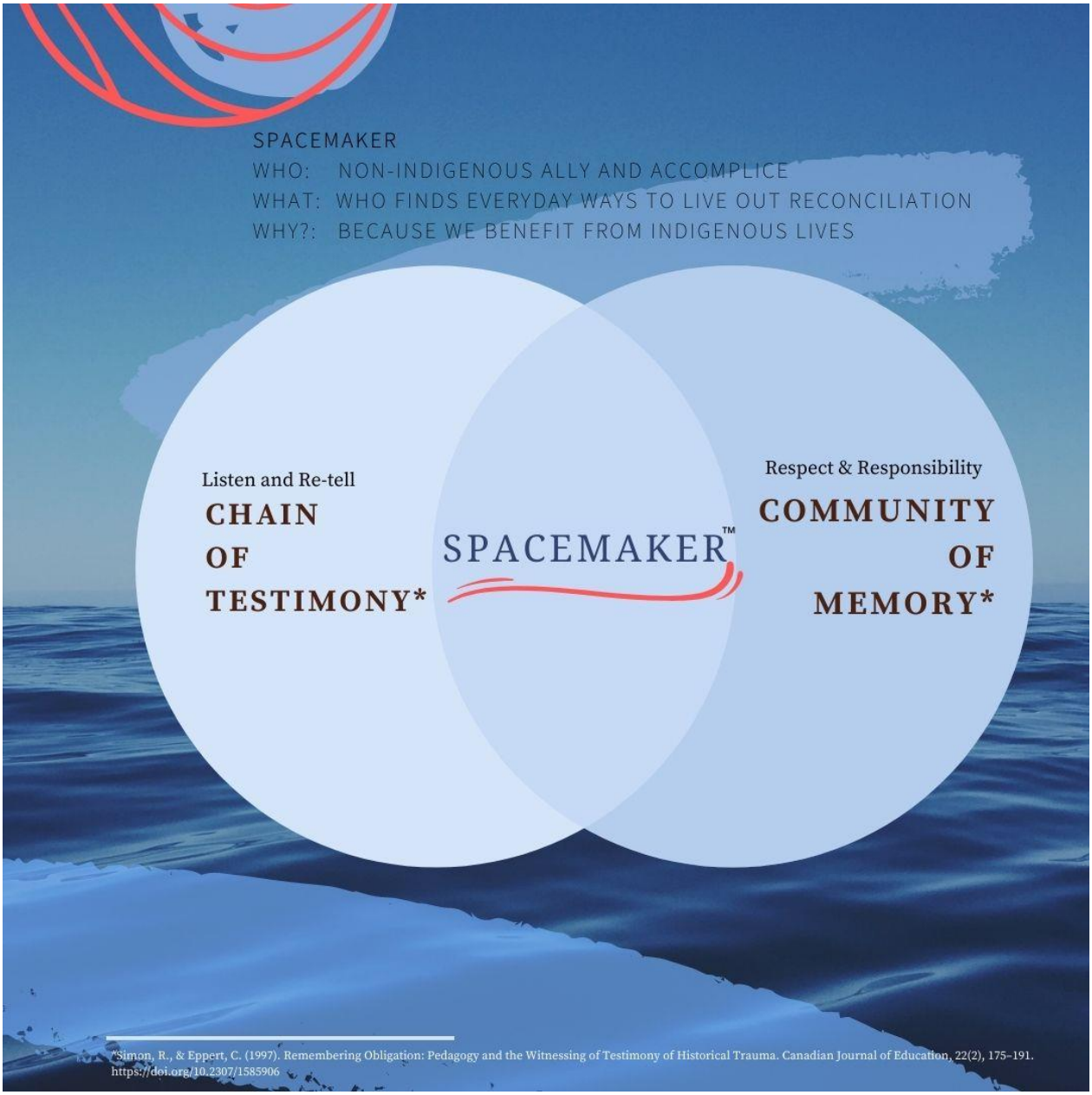
A Pedagogy of Listening

Low and Sonntag (2013) are curriculum designers who created their version of Rinaldi's (2006) 'pedagogy of listening' in Reggio Emilia and reshaped it in the context of engaging with ethnographic films of genocide survivors in Montreal. They designed their framework to fit the context of a high-school classroom and created a curriculum focused on the pedagogy of listening to difficult knowledge of the survivor stories. After they established the curriculum, they teamed up with Salvio (2017) and published an extension of the pedagogical themes into a book[1] exploring how community-based media can serve as philosophy for listening well in Canadian societies. I took this inspiration further to contextualize parts of their framework into an analytical framework for the community-based films that I am using from *Our World*. There are two salient concepts that inform a pedagogy of listening which were inspired by Simon and Eppert's (1997) discussion on the concept of the 'chain of testimony' (Low, Brushwood Rose, & Salvio, 2017, p. 104). The chain of testimony involves an audience including viewers to listen and participate in action after. They identify the listeners as being implicated in bearing witness to stories that they now need to interpret, re-tell, recreate and explore emphasis to generate

meaning from this experience. Second, because the author of the digital story is unknown, respect and responsibility towards the story needs to be cultivated into a ‘community of memory’ (p. 104). This activates our position as listeners and viewers to listen and possibly become ‘listening researchers’. The listening researcher (Low, Brushwood Rose, Salvio, 2017, p. 12) investigates their engagement with the media text asking questions, how does this make me feel? Why do I think it makes me feel this way? What aspects of this text surprise, or unsettle, or please me? What don't I understand? What seems to be missing? These questions and this approach in the pedagogy of listening aims to expand personal comfort levels and create space for relationality and accountability. Relational Accountability (Wilson, 2008) values the importance of doing research that benefits the community, is grounded in personal connection, experience, and integrity. A SpaceMaker values and practices relational accountability by becoming a listening researcher and uplifting Indigenous first voice as a source of learning engagement. The intersection of this way of being with the pedagogy of listening proposed in this section has been illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3

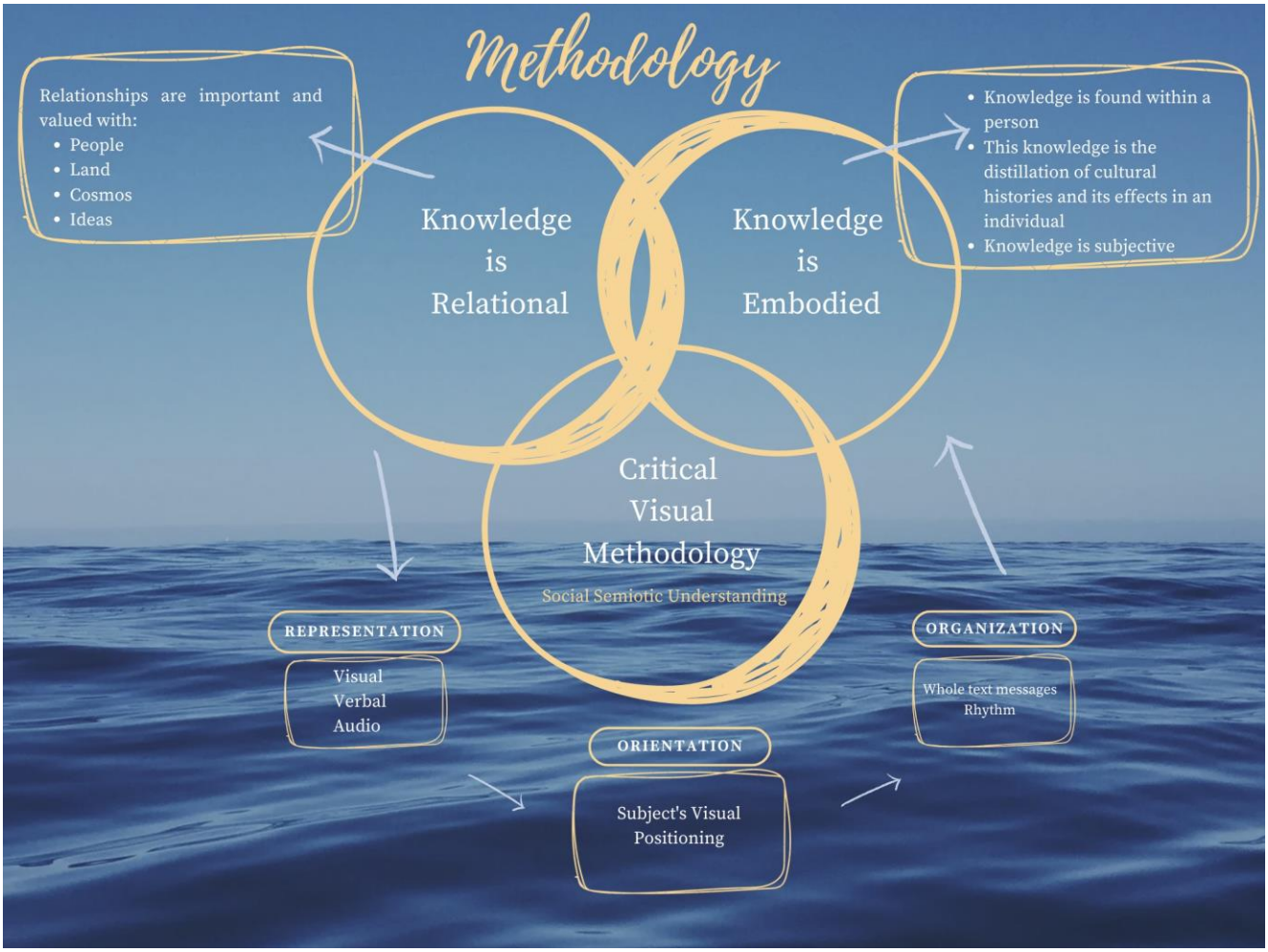
SpaceMaker + Pedagogy of Listening



The following image in Figure 4 is a visual methodology overview that I will be using in the following 'listening' section.

Figure 4

Methodology Overview



Listening

The listening section of this paper is separated into the dominant themes of cultural continuity with a focus on practicing customs and connecting to language, the social determinants of health which reveal the need for connection to land and place and lastly, looking to the past and ancestral history to understand the present. These themes shaped my literature review journey of understanding Indigenous history, resilience and witnessing their contemporary cultural reclamation. Each of these themes correspond to answering the questions that Justice Sinclair proposed that every Indigenous child should be able to answer to flourish as beautiful humans. I attribute that focusing on media pieces that reveal the theme of cultural continuity answer the questions, “where do I come from?” and “who am I?”. In the second section focused on the social determinants of health, I witness the answers to the question, “what’s my purpose?”. In the third theme of reflecting and knowing the past, I interpret the film text to reveal answers to the question, “where am I going?”. Exploring these themes deepened my reflexive questioning to wonder and contemplate how my accountability intersected with all these stories. In this ‘listening’ section of the paper, I answer my second research inquiry question, “how do I become a space-maker and ‘bear witness’ to these stories?”. To do this, I use my listening framework of an adapted social semiotic method and pedagogy of listening to making meaning and show my understanding of the media art/texts (see Figure 4 for an overview). Using a social semiotic method involves analyzing the representation, orientation and organization of signs in the media art. I show my understanding of 'representation’ through observing signs related to the visual, verbal and audio segments that stand out to me. For the ‘orientation’ part, I observe how the main characters are positioned in the film to give an impression. The ‘organization’ of the texts prompts observations of the visual/audio editing of

the text to define the rhythm of the salient messages in it. Table 1, film + thematic correspondence, below shows the thematic organization of this listening section, the questions from Sinclair (Talaga, 2018) that I propose are answered in the corresponding theme as well as the films/text that will be discussed.

Table 1

Film + Thematic Correspondence

Films	Questions Answered	Theme
Life is Spoken	Where do I come from? Who am I?	Cultural Continuity
The Past Affects the Future	Where am I going?	Knowing the Past
Finding Your Way	What's my purpose?	Social Determinants of Indigenous People's Health

Cultural Continuity Answers "Where do I Come From?" & "Who am I?"

Culture contains the teachings and traditions of how to walk in this world and being connected to language and oral traditions are two expressions of it. Cultural Continuity encompasses identity, social connectedness and cultural engagement which have diminished on a population level due to colonization but has shown to be transformational in the ongoing healing of Indigenous communities (Auger, 2016; Kirmayer, 1994; Greenwood et al., 2018; Currie, Copeland & Metz, 2019; Ratima, 2019). The expression of aspects of culture promotes health and strengthens community bonds. When people are brought together in a shared space to

practice or support each other with cultural freedom of expression, their way of connecting offers tools/ways of holding space together for young people. These moments of relationship are the basis for what Wilson (2008) refers to as 'relationality' that binds the group and not only connects people to each other, but also connects them to the land they share together. The interconnectedness of people between their social and physical environments is the expression of ceremony that Wilson argues for as inseparable from the Indigenous identity. This aspect of cultural continuity also reclaims power over structural inequities historically faced by Indigenous peoples (Ratima, 2019). In these next two sections, I explore two films that I listened to and observed as displaying the critical importance of cultural continuity in different Indigenous communities. The sections have been separated by the film. To listen to the films and write about them, I used the model discussed in the 'methodology' section of participating in the chain of testimony by providing my synopsis of the film. Throughout the exploration, I will connect the semiotic signs in the film to how the filmmaker reveals her embodied and relational knowledge. To tie it all up, I will show how this listening understanding frames a new contribution to an evolving community of memory.

Film: Life is Spoken

My Synopsis of the Film

The purpose of including a detailed description of the visual and aural organization of the film in this synopsis aligns with participating in digital accessibility specifications for making digital content explicit (Harvard, 2023) to provide access for people who would be visually impaired. I will be presenting a pedagogical framework of listening to films in the 'Praxis' section of this paper and the synopsis section serves as a model to guide young listeners in a

classroom/group setting to engage with the film. Focusing on specific parts of the film creates an engagement point practicing listening.

Life is Spoken is a 4 minute 59-second-long film by Shekina Munn who is from Tsulquate, BC which is commonly known in English as Port Hardy. In the first 32 seconds we hear the filmmaker introducing herself verbally. Before we see the title screen of the film, she connects the visual landscape scenes of Tsulquate, where she has grown up for the past sixteen years. The images in this time frame are a voice-over narration during a series of fast-moving shots of a female looking youth whom I assume is the filmmaker, taking the viewer through various scenes of her hometown. From 0:33 – 0:55, the same format of fast-moving clips and scenes continues as the narrator introduces the topic of 'oral tradition'. At 0:55, in a split screen close up visual of a female presenting youth (whom we assume is the filmmaker because she introduces the first question in the first person) sitting down and holding a book (in both screens), she poses the question, "...if oral tradition is part of our lifestyle, where do we see it every day and how is it evident?". From 0:55 – 01:23 we hear the narrator answering the question with accompanying relevant visuals until she lets the audience know that she's about to highlight other people to help her answer the question. The following scenes consist of the same frame which is a close-up of a flat surface (looks like a table). As the narrator speaks, a part of a forearm and hand place post-it size hand drawings of the narrator's main ideas on the surface. We do not see the narrator though. At 01:24 – 01:42, we hear the first person (Elijah Charlie) of two answer the narrator's question. This sequence is the first time the audience can hear some audio of what resembles a baby cooing as Elijah Charlie speaks about his understanding of oral tradition. At the end of each speaker's segment, a black title screen appears with the speaker's name and age. At 01:44 – 02:21 we hear the next speaker, Linda Paul Henderson, answering the

same question but like the other segments, we don't see the speaker. The image pans out in a water landscape with an audible background sound of birds squawking as Linda speaks. At 02:21, another black title screen appears, "who maintains oral tradition?" to change the topic. Until 03:02, without explicit visual or text identification, we hear Elijah Charlie again answering this question. His voice and the baby cooing sounds are audible together. The same pattern of visuals repeats as initially started in the film where a hand lays down small illustrations of things the speaker is narrating. The scene changes at 3:04 to the visual of someone's handwriting on a piece of lined paper on a flat surface. The narrator resembles the second voice in the previous segment who was identified as Linda. She shares her answers as the voice over as the hand writes a few words in a language that I am unfamiliar with. The scenes change as Linda is speaking and shows pan shots of outdoor waterscapes and forest-like landscapes. At 03:47 – 04:04 we see the same table-top like surface in the frame with many of materials that were used in the other shots. There is no audio. A person's hands and forearm are visible and begins writing in the spiral bound lined notebook that is at the center of the shot. The film ends with those hands tearing out what they wrote in the book and crumpling it up and then credits start rolling. At 4:14 – 4:21 a black title screen appears with, "...and Anton" and we hear the narrator and Elijah Charlie talking to infant Anton asking if there was anything he wanted to say. We hear a faint baby cooing before the advertisements for the film's production funding and support start to roll out. In the next section, I will use a social semiotic analysis tool of 'representation' to explore Munn's (2019) film and how specific selections of the visual and aural messages in it support my understanding of the importance of cultural continuity in Indigenous first voice narratives.

Representation: Visual, Verbal & Audio

The filmmaker informs the viewers within the first thirty seconds that the film is an exploration of her investigation of the meaning of 'oral tradition' and what it means to people in Munn's (2019) community of Tsulquate, B.C. Oral tradition is a learning process rooted in Indigenous knowledge systems (Battiste, 2000; Hare, 2011). Languages are also taught through social relationships and family and community are upheld as important sources of this practice and knowledge transmission (Dunn, 2001). There is an emphasis on telling stories and knowledge being embedded in cultural practices which can be revealed in day-to-day life. Munn frames her film around investigating two questions (mentioned in the synopsis section above) about oral tradition with her reflections and other people's stories. One aspect of cultural continuity is maintaining oral traditions through language. However, the prevalence of Indigenous language loss across communities in Canada is high. The violent ban enforced through the Indian Residential School legacy systematically destroyed Aboriginal culture and languages to assimilate Aboriginal peoples (Schneider & Norman, 2022). In 'Life is Spoken', there is a poignant sequence of shots from 01:46 – 02:21 that invite the viewer into relational listening exercise of creating a community of memory about Indigenous language loss. Listening relationally implicates viewers/listeners to deeply consider the intersections of the story they are hearing in the present to how it connects to a larger story. The larger story that we are connected to is Canada's history of forcefully assimilating Indigenous people. The story we are listening to in this part of Munn's film is Linda Paul Henderson's response to the question, "...if oral tradition is part of our lifestyle, where do we see it every day and how is it evident?".

The filmmaker uses a documentary style technique of presenting research questions that guide and frame the purpose of the film to explore the topic of oral tradition. Munn uses the technique of a black screen transition to show us the question before presenting the interviewees' responses. The section I have chosen to focus on is 60-year-old Linda Paul Henderson's story. She answers the question about where she experiences oral tradition, "Er, right now it isn't (pause) introduced more to the children. (pause) I know the few elders that go and help with er the (pause) language up at our, school up here". Her voice sustains a smooth and slow cadence with regular inflections and pauses throughout this shot. Between her spoken words, there is a sombre provocative link through the tone in her voice, the lament of language loss in her story and the visual scenery. We do not see Linda at all in the shot and I think this is a deliberate choice by the filmmaker to emphasize the importance of listening to stories. The visual backdrop is a close-up landscape shot of a large body of water against a wide and lush tree-lined horizon dotted with a couple of houses. There is a sense of wild desolate grandeur in this scene juxtaposed with the isolation and cultural disconnection theme of Linda's story. But the visual and the audio are connected. The monochromatic grey cloudless sky reflects Linda's monotone clear voice especially as she continues her story and speaks about the language loss she experienced because of her parents' relocation. She shares, "um, I don't know our language myself because it wasn't taught throughout the years. My parents spoke it fluently (pause) but we never (pause) carried on after we moved from our home homelands". The waterscape and Linda's reflection on the loss of language evokes a reflection on the interconnectedness of language, tradition and Indigenous peoples' integral connection to the land (Auger, 2016; Greenwood et al., 2016; Hatala et al., 2020; Kirmayer et al., 2000) for community health and healing.

The last sentence Linda shares in this scene is the significant invitation to the viewer into relational listening. The somber grey waterscape scenery abruptly transitions into a black screen and then a new landscape appears as a bright, sun filled scene of a very tight and close-up view of trees, grass and a shoulders-up view of young female-presenting person on the right-hand side of the camera frame. This stark change in scenery evokes a natural hopeful and positive feeling compared to the heaviness of the previous scene's imagery and lament-filled story. Linda's voice becomes audible again and she shares, "...so if um it isn't taught now that children now won't know it" and her speech ends with letting out a loud, deep sigh. Simultaneously, the person in the cups her ear with her hand and her partial facial view shows an attentive and wondering expression to signal she is listening to what is being shared. Her one visible eye moves from a downward gaze to the side where the trees are and then back down into a full nod of acknowledgement and showing agreement with the narrator. In the following section, 'orientation', the positioning of main characters are important symbols in conveying meanings in the story. The camera positioning on the characters and visual emphasis invites viewers into deep relationality by listening and meaning making. This poignant last scene begins to answer the questions from Justice Sinclair, "where do I come from?". Munn (2019) is investigating her connection to oral traditions and her interdependence on her community's experience of it. The orientation section continues to focus on her understanding of who she is, as a young person participating in oral tradition.

Orientation

The last frame in this scene discussion depicts a frontal zoom on one half of the young girl's face. Even though we see the filmmaker's face a few times throughout the film, this extremely up-close shot makes it hard to identify if it is her. The camera angle in this scene is at

eye level with the viewer. Kress and van Leewen (1996) describe the meaning potential of a point of view at eye-level suggesting a "relation of symbolic equality" (p. 135). This positioning entices the viewer to become involved in the action. In this intimate shot, the subject's eye, her ear which is cupped by her hand and her gentle gestures are all emphasized by the camera angle. Even though this subject shares the frame space with the greenery in the background, her eye movement, hand gesture and gentle nod draw our attention to her. The camera angle seems visually intentional because there is a correlation between these actions and the narrator's words at this moment. As mentioned in the previous argument the importance in this scene is the act of listening. The angle of the camera forces the viewer to also listen carefully to the message the young girl is receiving. There's a dichotomy of listening occurring, and it invites the question whether the subject is listening to the narrator and/or listening to the trees/nature/land. The narrator, Linda shared, "...so if um it isn't taught now that children now won't know it" is the audio clip in this scene. The young girl listens attentively by gesturing with her cupped ear. Her eye turns its gaze sideways to signal she's concentrating and when Linda says, "...that children...", the girl nods briefly in understanding and acceptance. The close-up camera angle allows the viewer to be privy to all these subtle and quick gestures and focuses our attention onto participating in listening to the message that the girl is waiting for. Though there isn't a direct actionable piece of advice, the listening gestures towards paying attention to Linda, an older community member, and to the land. Through the deliberate subject-visual positioning and the camera angles, the life-giving vitality of nature is highlighted. Lands hold stories and offers meaning making and comfort for the sorrows of life (Hatala, Morton, Njeze, Bird-Naytowhow, Pearl, 2019). Munn is concerned with understanding how oral tradition manifests in her community, and in seeking multiple perspectives, her film becomes an act of listening. As a

result of colonization and the varying factors involved with migration, the importance of finding ways to listen to stories which are tied to the land may possibly be the last tether of a cultural connection. The interdependent relationship of the motherland and learning language is only something that can be experienced and understood through oral tradition.

'Life is Spoken' reveals that the experience and practice of oral tradition can be varied and unique to a family and community. In the 'representation' and 'orientation' section, poignant parts of the film that display signs towards cultural continuity were explored. The documentary narrative style of the film creates openings for the viewer to engage with the filmmakers' questions, "...if oral tradition is part of our lifestyle, where do we see it every day and how is it evident?" and, "who maintains oral tradition?" in two ways; listening to the narrative stories and through the visuals of each scene. In the next section, I explore how the film has been put together as a semiotic construct and how the filmmaker's answer to Sinclair's question "who am I?" emerges. The 'organization' part of this 'Listening' section considers the film as a thematic whole text revealing the filmmaker's relational and embodied knowledge of oral tradition with narrative and semiotic imagery.

Organization

The film begins with the filmmaker situating herself in her identity through place and cultural location. She introduces Tsulquate reserve visually with a variety of scenes that ebb and flow from natural scenes to cityscapes denoted by concrete structures such as roads and tightknit houses in a neighborhood. Munn (2019) contextualizes her experience of living there as an introduction to the questions she will attempt to answer in the film. She says at 00:23, "...those who live here all have something in common. You may call it the thread of our quilt or the glue

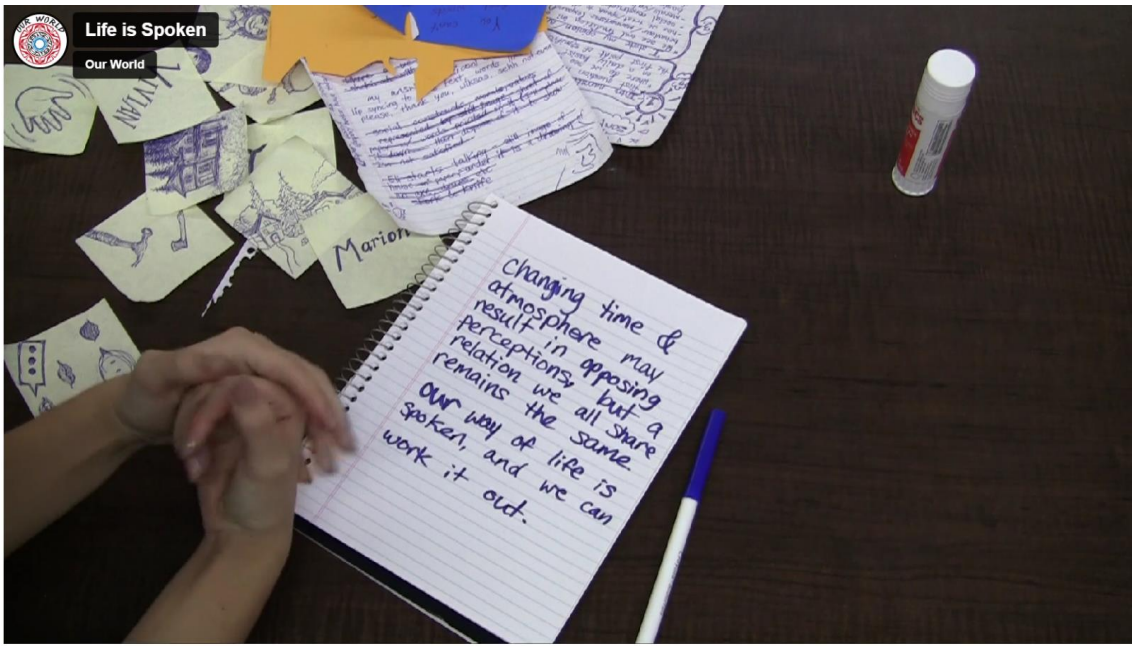
in our scrapbook, it's something we call oral tradition. It has shaped our brains to be who we are, to know what we do, and why we do it." The rest of the film is a community investigation of other people's perspectives on this statement which are punctuated by her reflections in between stories. In this short and quick introduction to the film, the viewers are invited into two main dimensions of the filmmaker's experience; the importance of the physical location of her home community and her visual artistic understanding of her culture.

The film continues into an exploration of two other people's responses to the two questions that she is investigating. The organizing technique for the film includes multi-generational, community-based collective understanding. The interplay of the two interviewees' varied experiences through narration and corresponding visual art or outdoor landscapes explicitly shapes this section of the film. Even though the synopsis of the film on the website states that this film is, "a personal exploration into oral tradition." (Our World, 2019), the stories that are shared reveal that the filmmaker's identity is shaped and understood through relationship and interdependence on others who are different from her. Identity is understood through relationship with a community which Wilson (2008) establishes as 'relationality'. "It's collective, it's a group, it's a community...it's built upon the interconnections, the interrelationships, and that binds the group...it's our relationship to the land" (Wilson, 2008, p. 80). Munn (2019) consistently invites us to explicitly wonder about the integral nature of these connections because she makes her thoughts visible throughout the film. She does this through visual techniques of showing frames of post-it notes and a lined spiral-bound notebook where she documents her thoughts about the meaning of oral tradition. The ongoing theme of the presentation of collective understanding of oral tradition is present in both final closing scenes. In Figure 5, Munn presents a written reflection on the tension of the different lived experiences

of oral tradition in her community. Through the text in the image still, her desire to make sense of "opposing perceptions" of oral tradition is documented and challenged. She acknowledges that in this tension, "...the relation we all share remains the same". Her final thought on the paper shows her hopeful path through the tension in the varied community perspectives because of the relational bond.

Figure 5

Still from Life is Spoken



© Life is spoken, Munn, 2019, ourworldlanguage.ca

However, the next two moments in the film are significant as the film ends. Soon after the writing is her notebook is complete, the writer rips and balls up the piece of paper and the credits begin to roll. Another black screen soon appears with the title, "...and Anton" and we only hear the narrator thanking and asking baby Anton if there was anything else he'd like to say. The film ends with only the audio of baby Anton cooing. The implicit message at the end of the film

circles back to the importance of children. One of the speakers, Linda, spoke about the significance of children and family being involved in language learning. Language is central to children's participation in their culture as a "tool for establishing...social and psychological realities" (Ochs, 1998, p. 210 as cited in Corsaro, 2018, p. 19). Language is a point of connection for children to their social worlds and could be considered as participation in the oral tradition that the filmmaker is exploring. The literature supports this topic of cultural continuity being embedded in language and hearing baby Anton completes this reminder that the responsibility of cultural transmission is as big as the responsibility of caring for an infant. Additionally, children are the carriers of this knowledge into the next generation. I think Munn explicitly understands that children and youth have an important role in taking ownership of their learning and participation in their culture. The film is a meditation on the 'who' and the 'how' oral tradition matters and is revealed in her community. The creativity of the filmmaker presenting her understanding of it invites the viewers into her personal life and contextualizes it within Tsulquate, B.C. where she lives. This film is an important reminder that experiences of culture are not pan-Indigenous and that participating in a community of memory (Simon & Eppert, 1997) is an intentional and important act of listening to stories as well as understanding their context of emergence.

Film: The past Affects the Future

My Synopsis of the Film

The title of this film is "The Past Affects the Future" and it was created in 2016. It is a 5 minute 43 second film created by Elle Brown and Latoya Windsor. The film opens with a loud and powerful solo singer and a black title screen that reads, "what do you know about residential school?". The next 46 seconds features an interview with a male in the center of the camera

frame sitting on a wide bench answering the question about his knowledge of residential school. He shares about the assimilationist agenda and how the Christian-Catholics, “wanted us to be exactly like them”. The screen fades out and another question appears, “what did it do to our culture?”. We continue to hear the singing which is now accompanied by drumming. The same male from the previous scene provides a response to this question, highlighting how all aspects of First Nations culture were, “wiped out...as our Elders knew it”. The next title screen rapidly appears with the question, “what did it do to our people?” and the same man shares his answer. He identifies himself as part of the Heiltsuk people, speaks about the intergenerational trauma among his First Nation and goes into detail about the different kinds of abuse that have manifested in his community. At 2:22, the scene abruptly changes into a photograph still of a residential school class. We hear a new narrator, a young girl sharing her family’s experience of attending residential school. As she shares her knowledge of what occurred there, we continue to hear the singers in the background while watching new photograph stills of children playing on contemporary playgrounds. She specifically documents the abuse in residential schools and how that learned behavior manifests in her community. At 2:49, the next title screen reads, “What do you think about abusive relationships when you see it?”. The interviewee for this short segment of the film is a young woman situated in a locker room who shares that she would, “...stop them” because she, “...has no choice”. After she has shared, we hear the narrator answering the same question as a voice-over to a slideshow of blurry photos. The photos are very blurry, but the viewer can discern that the content is stills from various angles of children playing on a playground. At 4:05, the title screen asks, “what would you do if it comes back?”. The interviewee in this segment returns to the first male who spoke at the beginning of the film. He reflects again on the Catholic colonizers but asserts that First Nations now are stronger and that

the colonizing effect wouldn't last because they are looking to, "...their ancestors and their ancestral way of life to protect everything." The film ends with this speaker and the same soundtrack of the singers and drum becomes louder as the credits roll.

In the 'representation' section, I will explore how specific segments of the film reveal semiotic connections to 'Truth'. Mr. Small Legs-Nagge and I always met in the Kinamasuti Aqq Apoganmasuti and on the wall behind us were the seven sacred teachings. He would often remind me that when teaching about Indigenous-settler history and responsibility, we had to start with telling the truth about it. Over half of the literature review section of this paper is dedicated to the colonization context before and after confederation to honor the 'truth' teaching as a basis for this research. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) heard from more than 6,000 witnesses, most of whom survived the experience of living in residential schools. "Children were abused, physically and sexually and they died in the schools in numbers that would not have been tolerated in any other school system anywhere in the country, or in the world" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015, p. vi). Naming these realities to shame or point wrongdoing was not the commissions mandate. It was the "focus on truth" so that the listeners are prompted to do something about it. This film deals with the truth about residential schools for surviving families. The Heiltsuk nation in Bella Bella, B.C. has been deeply affected and filmmakers, Windsor and Brown, capture personal narratives of some community members reflecting on and resisting colonial memories.

Representation: Visual, Verbal & Audio

In the representation section, I will explore one of two segments of the film and demonstrate how the visual images, the soundtrack and the narration reveal that reflecting on the

past is a way of knowing how to move ahead. The title of the film, “The past affects the future”, states that we need to understand the past and its implications on the present situation before knowing how to act in the future. In the literature review section of this paper, I address colonization in Canada from first contact with the Europeans, the socio-political situation before the Indian Act and after as well as the various colonial tools of oppression on Indigenous peoples. One of the major tools was the implementation of residential schools in the attempted cultural erasure of Indigenous cultures. The legacy of educational structural violence has persisted into deep intergenerational trauma within families (Bombay, Matheson, Anisman, 2014; Corrado & Cohen, 2003; Kirmayer et al., 2014; Reading & Elias, 1999). Families’ lives were shattered because they attended residential schools and the film, “The past affects the future” explores community thoughts on the manifestations of those experiences on the Heiltsuk people. The film is shot in a documentary style with questions appearing on the screen and then people answering with their stories. However, there are two significant mirrored semiotic techniques employed from 2:22-2:48 and then from 3:09-4:02 that are jarring and meditative illustrations of an embodied understanding of historical trauma. In this section, I will discuss the first segment.

In the first segment from 2:22-2:48, the narrator responds to the question on their knowledge of residential schools and the effect they had on her First Nation. Upon remembering a family member who had attended, she shares,

> I understand for what might have happened because kids at residential schools got raped, hit and some even died. At residential schools, the teachers tried to teach the kids to be

> like them, but mostly taught to abuse. After everyone came back, abusive relationships started with some people (Brown and Windor, 2016).

For the narrator, knowing and naming the reality of a traumatic past because of how it shapes and impacts the social fabric of her community is important. The attempted forced assimilation of Aboriginal children in residential schools have had profound impacts on communities despite the resilience of Indigenous peoples collectively (Kirmayer, Dandeneau, Marshall, Phillips, & Williamson, 2011). Although the consequences of attending residential schools were shocking to learn about in the TRC's work, listening to a youth reflect on the effect of those experiences in this film is jarring and disorienting. In this film, as the young girl is speaking about the violence children experienced in residential schools, her voiceover is accompanied by photograph stills from various angles of children on playgrounds (see Figure 6).

Figure 6

Still from The Past Affects the Future

© The past affects the future, Brown & Windsor, 2016, ourworldlanguage.ca

The photographs are in color and are contemporary playgrounds. Listening to the narrator speak about children enduring the painful atrocities of sexual, physical and psychological abuse on a regular basis while looking at recent images of kids at school evokes a shocked rage inside me. While I was listening, my eyes were imagining those horrors occurring in real time. Looking at the adult figures in the photos and listening to the narrator tell us that teachers in residential schools only taught kids how to abuse is so confusingly unimaginable. As my eyes gaze at the photos which resemble play structures in my neighborhood, I cannot fathom that those children in the photos would be manipulated, beaten and raped by the adults overseeing them nearby. I'm aware that contemporary society is aware of the high potential of child victimization because of their dependency on adults and their small stature (Corsaro, 2018). The overt racism and supremacy embedded in the residential school blueprint is the only answer that congeals while trying to process its existence. The children in the photos do not appear distressed or out of place with the surroundings. They look like regular kids on a regular school playground. However, the narrator informs us that the abuse did not stop in residential schools. The generational impact of the residential school legacy has manifested in issues perpetuating family violence and hindering peace and social support. The photograph stills share the narrator's understanding. Perhaps these are images of her community playgrounds where abuse in families is still occurring as she alludes to in her storytelling. The trauma response of abuse in the community is documented in the literature of an ongoing distressed community response of the deep psychological damage of the residential schools (Kirmayer, Gone, Moses, 2014). As viewers, we can only witness this story and absorb the memory of horrors in the photos but as we listen to this filmmaker's embodied understanding of her community's relationship to the past; I'm left asking myself, what do I do with this story? In this moment of listening and reflecting, I needed to understand more

of the story and how participating in the chain of testimony (Simon & Eppert, 1997) through writing about it in this paper is an expression of bearing witness and relational meaning-making. In the next section, 'Orientation', I explore a discussion of the semiotic symbolism used to tell the story and how it relates to this filmmaker answering Sinclair's (Talaga, 2018) question, "Where am I going?".

Orientation

"Storytelling is soul medicine" (Van Camp, 2015 as cited in Greenwood et al., 2015, p. 184). Brown & Windsor (2016) are parsing through a heavy, violent and dark part of their first nation's community history with the trauma of residential schools. Through part of their storytelling in the previous section, the use of the photograph stills were an effective visual and aural engagement tool to focus the listeners to connect the past atrocities into a contemporary context. In this section, I will listen and observe the second segment in that series from 3:09-4:02 that responds to the question, "what do you think of abusive relationships when you see it?". A voiceover answers,

> The people who do it, (pause) should stop. The abuser (pause) wants someone (pause) to feel the pain (pause) that they had to go through. What the person that's being abused does pause) is (pause) to love you (pause) so much that you want to hurt them (pause) when (pause) they did nothing to you (pause) when they helped you when they needed help, they loved you when you needed love, they hugged you (pause) when you needed a hug, they will be there for you if you need someone to talk to and they will love you when you won't do the same for them.

This story is accompanied by similar photograph stills from the ‘representation’ section except that this series of photos are all overexposed and washed out and blurry (See Figure 7).

Figure 7

Stills from The Past Affects the Future

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I was struck by the relationship between the narrator's discussion on understanding why abuse happens and how this story relates to the blurriness in the very busy school playground photos. There seems to be an apparent disconnection with the speaker‘s words about abuse, lack of reciprocity and these busy children playing on a playground. I watched and listened to this section repeatedly and what emerged was the concept of “listening in the commons” (Low et al., 2017). “The commons movement assumes that current processes of representative democracy are deeply flawed, repeatedly failing to protect the citizens they are supposed to serve...“ (p. 10). The Canadian government’s historic plan of residential schools and the Indian Act that governed it was to democratize the nation. The effects of violent assimilation are visually highlighted in this

section of the film. Residentials schools erased all aspects of Indigenous identities and assimilation blurred out their uniqueness. Children's lives should be centered on play, but they became absorbed with survival. Arlene Goldbard (2013) argues that people's stories are essential to the 'commons' where people can exercise agency and community-driven relationality. In this section of the story, the visual and aural interplay conveys the semiotic tension of the effects of abuse juxtaposed with the innocence of children playing. Both practices are real and intertwined because of the intergenerational trauma that has poisoned some families and communities. This segment of the film begins with a wondering question about abuse and the first response is, "The people who do it, (pause) should stop". This declarative statement interrupts the storytelling aspects of the film. The speaker takes a stand against the past, its effects and reveals their embodied understanding and reckoning. This phrase stands out and presents a reshaping of the powerless story of being abused and being a victim in residential schools. Following Goldbard, "How we shape our stories shapes our lives. If we cede our power to shape our collective stories to others, the stories designed to keep us powerless will prevail". Brown and Windsor (2016) are reshaping the collective stories of their community by highlighting insightfully that there is understanding of pain, past stories and a new resilience. In a short essay about the interconnections of family history and aboriginal determinants of health, Macdougall (2015) reminds, "Our old people tell us that knowing who you are is the key to healthy citizens and healthy nations...the responsibility (as well as the ability) rests with us alone. We need to make this happen" (MacDougall, pg. 198 as cited in Greenwood et al., 2015).

Organization

This section focuses on how the film has been put together as a semiotic construct and how meaning is made with the viewer. It considers the film as a thematic text underpinned by the

filmmaker's construct of rhythm. Rhythm refers to the way connectivity is created throughout the film through images, speech and/or music. Lastly, this section discusses how the film reveals the embodied theme of how the past reveals the path to guide children to answer the question - "where am I going?". This is the fourth and last question that Justice Sinclair insists children in Canada must be able to answer to live healthy lives and be well integrated into society.

The narrative rhythm of this text (film) is connected by the music and chanting. It begins and ends with a chant which at times during the films escalates into a group of chanting singers. The film is punctuated by the black title screens which guide the viewers understanding of the problem-solution framing of the film around residential school experiences and the music holds it all together. The music is simple, there is a faint drum and chanting throughout. The unseen action of the music 'holding' the film together is an important semiotic device because it reveals the binding power of practicing culture. Culture is a complex system of practices including music which was historically banned through the enforcement of the Indian Act. To hear the music ebb and flow through the film evokes the feeling of being 'held' in listening. It transcends listening to only words from the speakers. Listening is always a form of mediation which exceeds dialogue and, "instead suggests that the speaker and the listener together form a kind of intersubjective agency for the making of meaning about themselves and the world" (Low et al., 2015, p. 27). To me, music creates the part of the listening relationship that is harder to understand. The singer(s) are not revealed at any time on screen nor is the topic of music a discussion point. However, like a heartbeat, it is present and creates connection between scenes and is part of the filmmaker's stories whether I 'get it' or not. The chanting frames the start and the end of the film and signals importance to the filmmaker to use this device as an entrance to the beginning and ending of their story. Perhaps my relation to it as a viewer is to accept that I

don't need to understand everything that I hear and see, and that part of the relationship is holding the unknown. In an article about digital art and games (Igloliorte, Nagam, & Taunton, 2016) created by Indigenous artist, Elizabeth Lapensee, ask a question, "How do we enact presence with traditional teachings?" (p. 181) in her art piece titled, 'We sing for healing'. She challenges players in this interactive game to "Breathe. Listen" (p. 181). Emphasis is placed on listening to the music and being present, "to enact our collective enduring presence". Allowing ourselves as viewers to be 'held' by the films as an expression of participation is the essence of what I understand listening to be.

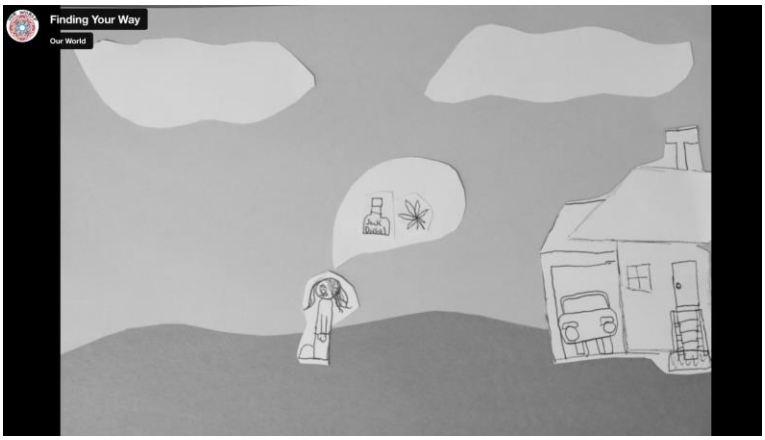
Film: Finding Your Way

My Synopsis of the Film

This film is different from the others chosen for this paper because it uses stop motion animation as a storytelling device. "Finding your way" is a 2:03 minute media piece created by Tim from Wapekeka, Ontario in 2018. The synopsis reads, "A young man gets help when he has lost his way". The animation opens with a still of a landscape with a house and a person walking out of the home with a thought bubble that has two illustrations in it. One appears to be a weed leaf and the other a bottle with the lettering, "Jack Daniel" (see Figure 8).

Figure 8

Still from Finding You Way



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The figure keeps walking and in the next scene, we see and hear the figure's thoughts;" I don't know what to do". The camera follows the wandering person into the next audible and visible thought. "Help me Creator", appears in the next thought bubble and the voiceover speaks in another unidentified language. As the person is walking through the landscape, the next prominent scene shows a feather falling from the sky landing at the person's feet. The voiceover questions this appearance, "Is this a sign?". From 00:25 - 00:31, the person picks up the feather, keeps walking and ends up at a denser looking forest area where he encounters a new character in the animation. The young man with the feather asks, "Who are you?" and the new character answers, "I am the person who will help you through your journey" (see Figure 9).

Figure 9

© Finding your way, Tim, 2018, ourworldlanguage.ca

The new character continues, “I‘ll be the one who will guide you to your lost spirit“, “with the feather you hold, you will find your way”. The person with the feather walks a little closer and begins to share in an unidentified language again but the translation appears in the speech bubbles in English, “I‘m sad.” Then he says, “I lost my way”. “I think the suicide spirit is near“, and switches back to another language but the speech text appears on the screen, “cuz he gave me this rope with negative thots”, and a drawing of a rope appears beneath the person with a feather. The seated character responds in another language, “That is not our people‘s way!”, “we are strong people”, “creator watches over us no matter where we go “. The person with the feather responds, “maybe this is the path that creator chose for me”, “maybe this is how I find my spirit”. The seated character responds, “Yes, it is within you” and at this point the screen fades into the end credits. In the next section, ’representation’, I will focus on the two characters in the animation and explore how this film portrays the importance of anchoring identity in the land making it a social determinant of health for Indigenous Peoples.

Representation: Visual & Verbal

The social determinants of health framework acknowledges the need for improved conversations and reorientation of understanding health and mental health issues of disadvantaged populations such as Indigenous peoples as a phenomenon beyond the 'social' (Greenwood et al., 2012; Greenwood et al., 2018; Richmond, 2018). This means that considering the impact of colonialism and colonization on these communities is a priority because it is, "an active and ongoing force impacting the well-being of Indigenous peoples in Canada (Greenwood et. al., 2015, p. xii). The concept of the 'social' excludes other determinants that do not fall under the 'social' such as, "...spirituality, relationship to the land, geography, history, culture, language, and knowledge systems (p. xii). The animation by Tim (2018) is about how a young man gets hep after losing his way. He is not directionally lost, but instead is being tempted by severe ideations of substance use and suicide. The depiction of this young man's journey through ideation and pain reflects all the determinants of health that are not included in traditional definitions of the factors that define the social determinants of health. Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies although diverse are grounded in the notion that land is the foundation for Indigenous ways of knowing and being (Wilson, 2008; Redvers, 2020; Stelkia, Beck, Manshadi, Fisk, et al., 2021). Tim creates a powerful short story centered on the relationship between his suicidal ideation, encountering an intervention from a feather and an unidentifiable character in the forest. The film begins quietly, there is no background music audio. It begins with the young man having thoughts about drugs and alcohol, lamenting about feeling directionless in life and praying for help. His thoughts and his cry to Creator occur during his walk through nature. This is important to note because there is a health supporting role that is inseparable from Indigenous people's cultures characterized by a deep spiritual relationship (Deloria, 2003). As discussed in

the literature review section of this paper, colonialism disrupted and dispossessed Indigenous communities from access to their lands which impacted their cultural identities. Their identities are associated with mental and spiritual wellness because of the interconnectedness with the land. In the animation, the main character reflects on his pain in nature and has a conversation with a character whom I interpret as a spiritual being. When the young man encounters this character, he doesn't know who he is. The character is also oddly depicted as seated at a large drum in the middle of the forest. I do not know for a fact that it is a drum but am interpreting the drawing on the screen as such based on my experiences in attending powwows and drum circles in Mi'kma'ki. This being identifies themself to the young man, "I'll be the one who will guide you to your lost spirit", "with the feather you hold, you will find your way". The acknowledgment of the multidimensionality of the young man requiring access to several dimensions of himself with specific reference to his 'spirit' being lost reflects Chandler's (2003) research into risk factors associated with suicide among Indigenous youth. Youth become, "...handicapped by an ephemeral sense of their own personal persistence, they often lose the thread that tethers together their past, present, and future, leaving them open to the risk of suicide" (Chandler, 2003, p. 2). The young man in the animation is possibly feeling lost because of this cultural disconnection which is rooted in relationality to the land (Wilson, 2008; Absolon, 2011; Greenwood et al., 2015; Chandler, 2003; Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; Deloria, 2003; Auger, 2016). The evidence for the reasoning is on the centrality of the feather he is holding that fell from the sky which the spirit character informs will help him find his way again. Wilson (2008) discusses the concept of relationality which can be linked to the social determinants of Indigenous people's health being interconnected with the land,

> Indigenous has to be understood – first of all, what does it mean? Well, in its original Latin it means, "born of the land" or "springs from the land." We can also take that in another way as well, as that born of its context, born of that environment...they are shaped by the environment, the land, their relationship; their spiritual, emotional and physical relationship to that land. It speaks to them..." (p. 88).

This young man is reorienting himself to being in nature and discovering the feather and the spirit being in hope of shutting out the suicide ideations. As he listens to the advice and reassurance from the being the forest that his spirit is within himself, the young man concludes, "maybe this is the path creator chose for me", "maybe this is how I find my spirit". This inconclusive ending to film focuses on the distressed young man turning to the knowledge within himself and using the feather a guide to this relational knowledge system. As discussed in the methodology section, 'knowledge is relational' and embodied and that means that one way to know your 'path' in life is to know yourself. Another 'way' is to be in relation with the land as Wilson (2008) directed our attention to. The value for the discernment in nature and finding 'his way' through his crisis is the coming together of all the connections; his self-awareness of the substance use/abuse, the suicide ideations, the feeling of being lost; the feather; meeting the spiritual being in the forest. These are all the connections that Wilson (2008) describes as ceremony, when all the connections come together because of relating with spirituality, land and self (Wilson, 2008, p.89). In the next section, 'orientation', I will discuss the use of animation digital story telling as a relational way of knowing oneself better and argue for the visual and audio story as a critical method of witnessing and listening. I will also discuss how this

animation process is important in supporting a response to the fourth and final question Justice Sinclair said all children need to be able to answer, “What’s my purpose?”.

Orientation

In a social semiotic analysis, this section deals with who or what is emphasized in the film and what aesthetic techniques are used to convey the importance. However, because this is an animation, I will focus on listening to and understanding the storytelling methods as a deliberate choice. This powerful short animation tackles a deeply sensitive and fracturing reality inflicting Indigenous communities in Canada; suicide. Indigenous young people are disproportionately overrepresented in suicide rates and First Nations boys are reported to die by suicide at a rate that is four times higher than non-Indigenous boys (Kumar & Tjepkema, 2019). Statistics, academic literature and authors have documented and studied the crisis but hearing first voice perspectives as authors isn’t common. ‘Finding your Way’ doesn’t explicitly tell the viewers that this is an autoethnographic film and it isn’t important to know. It tells us of a young man’s reflection on his ideations and his walk with and through it in just two minutes! In two minutes, the filmmaker weaves the isolating and depressive effects of substance use, suicide ideations, and cultural reclamation reminders. There is an old African proverb, “Until the lion can tell his own stories, tales of the hunt will be told by the hunter” (Denzin et al., 2008). Through this film, we hear a youth voice as a lion storytelling allowing the audience, “...the opportunity to listen and understand the social context of the suicidal person (Wexler & Gone, 2012, p. 803). The wonderings of the young man center implicitly around the question of his purpose. We hear this expressed when he laments to Creator to help him because he has lost his way. He might be referring to not knowing what his purpose is in life and seeking hope by being outside and on the land. Being here and encountering the sacred feather becomes his hope

remedy. His 'purpose' is understood within a relational and social context. In listening to and responding to the gifts of the land and environment, he laments and cries out about his pain in his traditional language and converses with the spirit being too in it. The act of praying and dialoguing in his traditional language is also a relational connection to culture since it is "one of the most tangible symbols of culture and group identity – a link which connects people with their past, and grounds their social, emotional and spiritual vitality" (Hallett, Chandler & Lalonde, 2007, p. 393). In the next section, 'organization', I will go into deeper detail about how the animation in its entirety presents meanings that engaged me as a listener.

Organization

This section focuses on how the film has been put together as a semiotic construct and how meaning is made with the viewer. It considers the filmmaker's construct of rhythm and whether it's conversational or image based and how that all together invites viewers into participating as witnesses to the chain of testimony and co-create in the community of memory.

Since this is the last understanding-explanation of this section of discussing the films, I thought it was fitting to end with the first film I watched from Our World. When I came across this website and watched 'Finding your Way' a couple of years ago, I was still doing the coursework for this degree. I had started to think about my thesis topic but was lost. I wanted to do meaningful and impactful research, but it was 2021 and fresh post-pandemic. Sharing a bit about how this thesis idea emerged is my listening response to the animation and how I created a community of memory. I don't have a relationship with the animator but I do with his art. As a viewer, I was invited to participate in understanding what I was watching and listening to and share this knowledge. This film led me to where I am today both as an academic and as a citizen of a few communities. After I had watched the animation, the ideas found me. Deciding on my

data set of using the films was instantaneous. This two-minute animation presented a first voice narrative and visual to everything I was receiving in my 'banking education' courses. Friere (1993) described this concept in reference to students only receiving information/knowledge from the teacher and the lack of dialogic engagement. Until I watched this animation, I had only heard of the suicide crises in Indigenous communities through Tanya Talaga's book, 'Seven Fallen Feathers', the TRCs work and in my course readings. The perspectives were always presented from the hunter as the old African adage says. 'Finding Your Way' opened a new dialogical space because the animation's aural stories needed a listener and then I became the speaker who shared my inspiration and impact in writing this thesis. Freire (1993) discusses the profoundness of dialogue connected to love, "love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself" (p. 62). Reciprocity and mutual dependence (Low et al., 2017) became the foundation for the rhythm I felt and heard in this animation prompting a responsive engagement. Listening to Tim's storytelling, which on the surface seems to be about suicide but is so much deeper (as I have demonstrated in the previous two sections) opened a new dialogical space. For Friere (1993), it is only through knowing one's world and dialoguing with it that 'conscientização' (p. 82) of the world being revealed. It is then that we desire social transformation. Witnessing this animation ignited my fire for action within myself. The aesthetic and aural construct in the animation weaving English and his unidentified traditional language engaged my understanding of personal ceremony of knowing oneself. Language emerges from the land and breathes life into culture. Even in his personal crisis, he explored his tension through weaving languages while attempting to understand which turn to take next. Authoring this paper steered me to listen to the way the films I chose were created. Finding my way required me to first turn inwards and hold who I knew myself to be. I turned to films to guide me in what I

needed to know that would make me a better listener. Like the young man in this animation, my feather was the films. They guided me. I did not have conversation with a spirit being, but I did turn to drawing my mysterious sperm whales as a way of processing how much I had learned from these multiple perspectives.

I will end with a more positive note in reflecting on a film than I began when I introduced this paper, 'Finding You Way' guided me into finding mine through witnessing Tim's story (and so many others!), locating some of mine, drawing some whales and deciding that I want to continue to be a SpaceMaker. For Tim (2018), Brown and Windsor (2016) and Munn who storied my imagination into listening to art as a way of knowing what I cannot un-know. In the next section of this paper, praxis, I unite my learning from all the films with the development of a practical application of an example of a lesson plan that can be used in a grade. 6 public school classroom.

Praxis

Preamble

My inspiration for the space-making praxis component of this thesis begins with my language teaching career but lands with my children's school experiences. My daughter recently completed grade 6 and her piecemeal learning during Indigenous history month prompted part of my idea for this section of the thesis. Her experience of learning Indigenous history was hearing terror stories where engagement with them ended when the bell rang. I wanted to imagine creating an art-based integrated learning tool for teachers that met the social studies curriculum and made space for students to engage in a deeper participatory way with Indigenous stories. Freire (1986) defined 'praxis' as "reflection and action" upon the world in order to transform it" (Freire, 1986 as cited in Skott-Myhre & Skott-Myhre, 2011, p. 44). Listening to Indigenous

stories that define our national and individual identities as Canadians is an important task and not a checklist item. Learning about indigenous history and life in school should be an act of praxis. I see the potential in my daughter to engage with stories, ideas and when prompted, think deeper about acting with the information she has heard. However, there were not any intentional reconciliation opportunities cultivated by her teachers. “But don’t say in the years to come you would have lived your life differently only if you had heard this story. You've heard it now” (King, 2003, p. 29). Thomas King commissioned his readers to become SpaceMakers essentially and be actively intentional about reconciliation. Children need this orientation to be reflected in their teachers so that their thoughts are liberated towards space-making. Freire (1993) warned educators of the ‘banking concept of education’ which positions students as passive, oppressed receptacles receiving education/knowledge from the teacher/oppressor. Banking education inhibits creative power while, “problem-posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality” (p. 54). Creating spaces where students are naming issues in the stories they hear, unveiling truths, considering multiple perspectives and problem –wondering cultivates and nurtures listening researchers. Low, Brushwood Rose and Salvio (2017) explore and embody the concept of being the ‘Listening Researcher’ (p. 12) in their work with youth in Montreal schools to guide them in listening to genocide-survivor stories in their communities. The listening researcher is someone who asks questions about the text they have listened to. They ask, “How does this make me feel?, Why do I think it makes me feel this way?, What aspects of this text surprise, or unsettle, or please me?, What don’t I understand? What seems to be missing?” (p.12). The classroom is a natural community of practice (Lave & Wegner, 1991) and this makes it suitable for cultivating the practice of becoming a listening researcher, using the Our World films and animations as an entrance to enhancing understanding of being a SpaceMaker in

reconciliation. In the next section, I provide more details about how the social studies curriculum in grade 6 is a suitable scaffolding entrance to integrate this listening education.

Rationale for Nova Scotia Grade 6 Social Studies Curriculum

In the Nova Scotia Grade 6 Social Studies curriculum guide, the thematic concept is centered around "World Cultures" where students study how physical environments, traditions, governments, economies, literature, fine arts, religion, and sports and recreation all contribute to the shaping of culture. The students examine their own cultures and other cultures from around the world culminating with a contextual examination of the multicultural contributions to the development of Canada as a country (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2021). As an immigrant Canadian (who did not study in elementary school in Canada), I was intrigued by the acknowledgment of the mosaic of cultures present in Canada as integral to the social fabric of the country. It prompted me to think about how my new understanding and interpretation of citizen responsibility contributes to living as an Indo-Canadian on stolen Indigenous lands. Understanding the films encouraged me to think creatively about the intersection of my understanding with my practice as an educator and artist. Teaching newcomers the truth about Canadian histories is a priority but reaching their children through the school system could have a more sustained impact. Collective learning, sharing, and listening in the committed space of a school system increases those students' relationship to knowledge as they scaffold into higher and deeper levels. Through my experience of raising my twelve-year-old daughter, I observed that through grade six, her understanding of the nuances of her racial/sexual identity began to deepen. She also started to wonder about where and to whom she belongs and the implications of it. Her sense of social justice was heightened and discussing social issues shifted from a binary response of fairness/un-fairness to asking more 'why'

questions and listening to multiple perspectives. This encouraged my search through the Nova Scotia curriculum to find a place to integrate the use of the films as pedagogy to listen and understand the multifaceted concept of citizenship. The Nova Scotia grade six social studies curriculum's principles and aims are aligned as a suitable malleable space for using the films.

Grade 6 Social Studies Objectives

The curriculum for Atlantic Canada's social studies aims to steer students to, "examine issues, respond critically and creatively, and make informed decisions as individuals and as citizens of Canada and of an increasingly interdependent world" (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2021, p. 1). The films from Our World uphold and honor the myriad of storytelling. The issues and expressions in the films are reflective of both individual artistry and community influence and involvement. Each film offers documentation of the power of community storytelling and the sentiment that the process of their creation changes people and communities (Our World, 2022). The principles that underlie this curriculum are that the content is, "meaningful, significant, challenging, active, integrative, and issues-based (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2021, pp. 13-14). The Our World films navigate significant Indigenous centric issues and reflections presenting first-voice perspectives on topics such as community strength, residential school impact, celebration of culture and lessons from the past to name a few. The experimental, amateur, and animated production make the stories accessible to varied audiences, age groups, learning styles and abilities providing the desired resource-based learning (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2021, p. 15) experience in the social studies curriculum. Using technology including information and communication technology is a priority. Building lesson plans around the films promotes using technology as a tool for research, practicing listening, understanding and presentation of

information. They also provide opportunities for collaboration and allow students to become 'active participants in research and learning' (p. 17).

General Curriculum Outcomes (GCOs) Pairing

There are six conceptual strands that organize what the students are expected to be able to do upon completion of the school year. Integrating the films which cover a range of topics can support all of the conceptual objectives and can be tailored by each teacher. The specific curriculum outcomes are thematic units that are created to organize teachers for the school year. The units are divided to reflect the integration of the GCOs. I found the section of 'Unit Four' as an appropriate entry point to use the content of film as a teaching tool. In this next section, I outline the specific curriculum outcome pairing in unit four and rationalize using Indigenous digital stories from 'Our World' to meet the outcome.

Specific Curriculum Outcomes (SCOs) Pairing

Unit four: Expressions of Culture adequately accommodates the inclusion of the films. In this unit, one of the three SCOs expects that the students will be able to,

> 6.4.1 analyze how the arts reflect beliefs and values in a selected cultural region
>
> • identify visual arts, crafts, dance, and music practiced in the region
>
> • analyze how music and dance reflect the beliefs and values of the culture
>
> • analyze how crafts and visual art reflect the beliefs and values of the culture
>
> (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2021, p. 26)

The films are artistic products and documented digital stories. They can be considered as media art outcomes alongside visual art resources available for analytical understanding about cultural beliefs and values of an Indigenous group. The Our World films provide whole class and individual learning opportunities. They can be used to model the research and listening process collectively and students can execute their own personal responses and culminate learning into a collaborative project and event.

Lesson Plan Sample with Life is Spoken

Time: 1 hour

Warm up

Small groups (max. 3) or pairs of students receive a name of a remote Indigenous community location and research information about it. (The reserve should reflect the collection of films chosen for this project).

Research Parameters:

- Location on the map
- Population count
- Languages spoken
- Name of Indigenous groups present

Topic brainstorm:

1. (Whole class) On board: “Oral Tradition”. Prompts: Tell your partner what you think these words mean. Do you know of any stories in your family? Have you met or do you know any stories from your grandparents?
2. Whole class feedback.
3. Teacher records input on the board.

Introduce concept and define oral tradition and that we’ll watch a short, less than 5 minute film about a youth’s experience of oral tradition.

Prepare to Watch:

1. Show bio and photo on slideshow of filmmaker Shekina Munn.
2. Introduce title, ‘Life is Spoken’. Ask pairs of students to discuss what the filmmaker means by the title.
3. Prediction of film techniques – how do you think the filmmaker is going to show us through visuals and audio how “life is spoken”? Brainstorm with your partner and then pair share.

1st viewing

In this stage, students should watch the film uninterrupted and be task free the whole way through.

1. After the first viewing – Pair share and tell your partner what you remember about the film.
2. Writing – ask students to answer these questions in their notebooks,

a. What images can you remember seeing?
b. What do you remember hearing?

3. Pair-share your answers and compare notes.
4. Tell students we are going to watch it a second time together as a class and this time they need to listen a little deeper (remind them they aren't expected to recall all the details – just as many as they can hear).

Watch – 2nd viewing

1. In the second viewing students should be taking notes to answer these questions

a. Who/what is the main subject(s)?
b. How do they define oral tradition?

Allow students to share in small groups with new partners.

During whole class feedback – elicit the different definitions/experiences of oral tradition by giving each student post-it notes to write their answers. This is an aesthetic technique that the filmmaker used and will possibly engage the students in a deeper way.

Watch – 3rd viewing

In this viewing the students will focus on two main questions to investigate the film's dominant themes; the varied experiences of Indigenous people and communities with the preservation/loss of oral tradition. They will also focus on the aesthetics of the film techniques and consider how the filmmaker conveyed these themes through different techniques.

a. Focus on the filmmaker, what are her thoughts on 'oral tradition'?

b. Is the story in this film conversational, musical or image based? Why do you think the filmmaker chose these techniques?

Reshuffle groups and put students in small groups/pairs to discuss these answers. As an output and whole class feedback, the students can try to:

a. Verbally summarize the film in 1 minute
b. Draw a summary of the film using post-it notes
c. Make a poster about the film
d. Write about the film in a one-page summary

There are several extension ideas to guide a continued reflection on the film and keep its memory alive for the class throughout the week. The theme of 'cultural' continuity' as discussed in the 'listening' section of this paper can be integrated into lessons prior or after the film lesson plan. Students can personalize it and center on how they acquire everyday knowledge with their family and friends. They can explore their ways of knowing and re-watch the film to investigate how the filmmaker explores her ways of knowing. Another idea is to do a filmed response. in pairs, students can write a response script to the filmmaker and reflect on what they learned and what they want to do with that learning. This can be a short video response to share with the class. These lessons plans will be in development to be expanded and integrated into a workshop series so for more information about this and other brainstorming ideas for your class, please contact me to discuss further.

Limitations

Utilizing the praxis section without relationship to the indigenous or artistic knowledge that shaped it, can be challenging for the discerning teacher. Viewing media art as tool to teach

as opposed to a valid source of knowledge through which content cannot be understood any other way can be problematic. The recommendation to these issues would be to further develop the concept of the SpaceMaker and develop appropriate pedagogy for teachers to understand the role and expectations. Indigenous ways of knowing and being pedagogy and methods should be first voice authored and led by a knowledge keeper. It is recommended that a partnership is established with appropriate people in the community to facilitate this part of the workshop. Alternatively, this can also serve as a topic of professional development to teachers to deepen their understanding and encourage them to become SpaceMakers with further self-learning. Using media art in the classroom should be led by an expert to ensure that the medium is being well utilized and appropriately engaged. A further research recommendation is to develop a pedagogy for using media art in classrooms for the purpose of encouraging students to become SpaceMakers. The praxis section as it exists in this paper is only a brief sample of how this aspect of the work could be developed into a workshop series and program of active reconciliation in public school classrooms. The next section, artistic responses, concludes this paper and situates myself as the researcher back into my artist identity. I end this paper the same way I started it, presenting my art as a way of knowing which influenced the research inspiration.

Artistic Responses

In the listening section of this paper, I ended it by naming the need for multiple perspectives to comprehend and engage with the whole. In the ‘methodology’ section I introduced art as one of my ways of knowing and understanding my world and life. While drafting this paper, I drew three original sperm whales with pencil and color pencil to document my process of understanding each of the films. I thought it was fitting to end this paper the same way I began where I presented a still from a short film I produced. Wilson (2008) commissioned

listeners when he said, "In receiving the story, you as an active listener are responsible for putting the story into a relational context that makes sense for you and for listening with an open heart and mind" (p. 126). The next three drawings are my personal artistic response making sense of this journey of learning how to become a SpaceMaker and a better listener.

SpaceMaker Whale 1

SpaceMaker Whale 2

SpaceMaker Whale 3

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