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Turning to Greet the Unheard, Unseen, and Unknown in Western Thought: Autoethnographic Stories of Learning with the Blackfoot

Sherri Rinkel-Mackay

University of Calgary

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada has calls to action for the inclusion of Indigenous knowledges and teaching practices in classrooms. Western educators have different degrees of willingness, understanding, and skill in teaching Indigenous concepts and their teaching practices can be superficial. Highlighting autoethnographic accounts of learning from Blackfoot Elders through Indigenous land-based pedagogy with current literature review data, I argue that Western educators must understand that the more-than-human entities are animate and have agency in teaching and healing people. Findings suggest that all students benefit from the wise teaching practices of inviting the more-than-human as co-teachers.

La Commission de vérité et de réconciliation du Canada a lancé des appels à l'action pour l'intégration des connaissances et des pratiques d'enseignement autochtones dans les salles de classe. Les éducateurs occidentaux n'ont pas tous la même volonté, la même compréhension et les mêmes compétences pour enseigner les concepts autochtones, et leurs pratiques d'enseignement peuvent être superficielles. En mettant en évidence les récits autoethnographiques de l'apprentissage auprès des aînés pieds-noirs par le biais d'une pédagogie autochtone basée sur la terre, ainsi que les données d'une analyse documentaire actuelle, je soutiens que les éducateurs occidentaux doivent comprendre que les entités plus qu'humaines sont animées et ont un pouvoir d'action dans l'enseignement et dans la guérison des personnes. Les résultats suggèrent que tous les élèves bénéficient des pratiques d'enseignement sages qui consistent à inviter les entités plus qu'humaines en tant que co-enseignants.

The parent's angry email with the accompanying photo was dumbfounding. Her daughter, a former Indigenous student of mine, brought home a Thanksgiving centerpiece, a potato head craft from her new school. The potato was Indigenized with rainbow-dyed chicken feathers stuck on top for a headdress, googly eyes, and felt pen war paint. The craft was facilitated by the Indigenous specialist, who is not Indigenous. When the parent questioned the specialist, she said that the craft was done because it was cute. I started the email reply with, "I do not think that this is what the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) had in mind." In 2015, the TRC made calls to action for Indigenous knowledges and teaching practices to be included in school curricula and for educators to share best practices in curricula development and teaching (TRC, 2015a). Recent research shows that Western educators have varying degrees of personal understanding,

context, skill, and willingness to teach Indigenous concepts with appropriate strategies (Oskineegish, 2014; Scott & Gani, 2018). Additionally, standard professional development may provide some background information but may not foster deep understanding of Indigenous knowing, being, and doing (Ottmann & Pritchard, 2010). Thus, teaching practices can remain as surface activities (Louie, 2020; MacDonald & Markides, 2019) with bison word searches, teepee colouring sheets, and Indigenous-themed crafts. To move teaching into a more ethical space it is a "deeper level [of] thoughts, interests and assumptions" (Ermine, 2007, p. 195) that require Western educators to deepen their understanding of Indigenous worldviews (Leddy & O'Neill, 2021; Louie, 2020). *Western educators* is a term that refers to all those who teach using Western education paradigms, regardless of their cultural background. As such, "Western, refers to a mind-set, a worldview that is a product of the development of European culture and diffused into other nations" (Ermine et al., 2004, p. 5). Western worldviews are predominant and required paradigms in current Canadian education practices (Kerr, 2014).

Traditionally, in Indigenous education, "the environment is the classroom" (Pepion, 1999, p. 132), and learning "involves a communication with nature" (Pepion, 1999, p. 131). This kind of land acknowledgment has the teaching orientation that the more-than-human entities have agency in teaching (Barrett et al., 2017; Calderon, 2014) and are "able to 'speak' to humans and give them knowledge and understanding" (Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal, 2012, p. 2). Understanding this requires a shift for most Western teaching practices to embrace *Indigenous land-based pedagogy*, which includes the *more-than-human* in a relational web (Harrison & Greenfield, 2011; Jacob et al., 2018). The phrase more-than-human (Abram, 1996) "refers to a world that includes and exceeds human societies, thereby associating them with the complex webs of interdependencies between the countless beings that share the terrestrial dwelling" (Souza, 2021, p. 2). It includes, but is not limited to, place, land, plants, animals, elements, sky, planets, stars, ancestors, and spirits. As such, this challenges the prevailing Western thought of humans as separate from and superior to the more-than-human.

Colonization and residential schools tore Indigenous children from land to learn indoors through Western paradigms (Chambers & Blood, 2009; TRC, 2015b). Western schooling perpetuates this colonial approach by discounting and disrupting the kinship and established learning relationships with the more-than-human (Bastien, 2003; Little Bear, 2009). Providing opportunities to be with and learn from the more-than-human moves Western teaching practices into a more ethical space for Indigenous students by integrating Indigenous epistemologies (Pack, 2019; Watts, 2013) and Indigenous land-based pedagogy. Leroy Little Bear (2009) explained that learning from the land is a "necessary aspect of any curriculum" (p. 21) in any school and for every student.

Research findings from current literature review data and autoethnographic accounts of learning with the *Siksikaítsitapi* (Blackfoot) support the concept that the Indigenous web of relations remains unseen, unheard, and unknown in most Western classrooms. I argue that wise teaching practices invite the more-than-human as co-teachers to benefit all students. In using the phrase *wise practice*, I intend to acknowledge that "Wise practices are an Indigenous perspective on *best practices* [*sic*] that recognizes there are a diversity of Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and that local histories, communities, and cultural practices are relevant" (Manitowabi, 2022, p. 1).

My context and background set the stage for the research design, centered around a key question. In moving toward a more ethical space in teaching Indigenous content, what role do Indigenous land-based pedagogies have in wise teaching practices? A literature review and

findings, supported by four autoethnographic vignettes, precedes a discussion of the study's implications for Western educators.

Context

I am a Euro-settler descendant. In my twenty-eight-year teaching career, I worked as a classroom teacher in public schools with students from kindergarten to Grade 8 with many cultural backgrounds and multiple abilities. During that time, I also taught environmental education, and for three years, I taught a cultural program for Indigenous students. Additionally, I worked as a teacher-mentor with a university-based professional development organization. Several projects involved co-creating learning resources alongside Indigenous students, teachers, Elders, Knowledge Holders, and Cultural Advisors.

Later, as a student in a master's program, I engaged in studies focusing on Siksikaítsitapi wellness and knowledge systems. An Elder council informed the land-based coursework on two reservations. Additionally, I was paired with a community Elder to receive personal teachings and guidance. Interestingly, my experiences in the MEd program paralleled those I facilitated with Indigenous elementary students. The key difference is that I learned through Indigenous land-based pedagogies and more-than-human kinship. Instructed in these ways, I realized that I sometimes missed the mark when teaching. These experiences helped me come to know better (Elliott, 2009) and showed me a different way.

The results of this study have been shared with Siksikaítsitapi Elders, Knowledge Holders, educators, and academics. Their guidance and direction are embedded in this article and the stories shared. I respect and adhere to the Siksikaítsitapi knowledge acquisition protocols and have been transferred certain knowledge rites (Pepion, 1999). Introducing or sharing Indigenous paradigm concepts as a Euro-settler descendant carries a deep responsibility, and I do not introduce concepts that are not already in the public domain. Themes in autoethnographic accounts are supported by literature review findings that forefront published Indigenous authors, and I refer to these publications to make meaning of my own experiences. Therefore, the article's scope is to share a general lived experience and growing understanding of Indigenous connections to land and the agency of the more-than-human.

My intention is to invite and encourage. I invite you to walk alongside me through lived stories of my autobiographical accounts. I offer my stories to give a felt understanding of concepts that otherwise may be difficult to comprehend. Not all Western educators have direct access to learn from Elders or cultural experiences with Indigenous communities over extended periods. Thus, it may be difficult for non-Indigenous educators to have an entry point in understanding Indigenous land-based pedagogies experientially, and I offer up my stories as a way into the concepts presented. However, what is accessible to all human beings are inherent capacities for listening to and learning from the more-than-human (Abram, 1996) by being mindfully present to experience a relational felt sense (Kimmerer, 2013). Western paradigms discount this ability (Abram & Jardine, 2000). Without a felt understanding, Indigenous land-based pedagogy can remain theoretical and superficial, which is then transmitted to students.

This article is also written as a reciprocal responsibility to give away some of what I have learned. The Siksikaítsitapi have an ethic of reciprocity (Bastien, 2003; Little Bear, 2009), and when one receives knowledge, there is a responsibility to share to help others do good with it (A. Blackwater, Kainai First Nation, lives near Standoff, Alberta, Canada, personal communication, November 4, 2017). Bastien (2003) echoes Blackwater by quoting a Ceremonialist, "It is our

responsibility, in the *Siksikaitsitapi* [*sic*] way, to give back what we have been transferred. It is not the way of the people to sit with or keep that which has been given to you. For example, those who have received an education return and give it back to the people" (p. 48). Therefore, I have a duty to consolidate the teachings given and share wise practices.

In so doing, I also answer the TRC's *Calls to Action*. Reconciliation requires many hands and good hearts as "reconciliation is often pushed back onto Indian people; it is expected that they are the [only] ones doing the work" (S. Eli, Piikani First Nation, lives on the Blackfeet Reservation, Montana, United States, personal communication, May 2, 2022). Therefore, the "only way out is through and the only way through is together" (Elgin, 2020, p. 21), and all citizens must participate.

Additionally, reciprocal responsibility extends to strengthening and protecting the relationships with "the collective in the cosmic universe" (Bastien, 2004, p. 2). By sharing this knowledge, I also honour the more-than-human, the ancestors, and those to come (Bastien, 2004; Chambers & Blood, 2009; Wilson, 2001). Further, this gift-giving, reciprocity, and responsibility continue with you, the reader, reading this article, as you may integrate lessons shared and help others. This is how knowledge grows and change occurs.

Background

In 2004, working with a professional development organization, I began to help create an internet learning resource with a tribe in the Siksikaítsitapi Confederacy. To prepare for the project, we met with an Elder. At our first meeting, he recounted a story to help us work together in a good way. He told us city planners included an archeological review of a new residential community in the planning stages because the Siksikaítsitapi argued that the area was culturally significant. A review was conducted, and the site was determined not to be significant. Some Siksikaítsitapi Elders challenged that finding. They visited the site with city planners and archeologists. It was not long before Elders had pointed out culturally significant artifacts and landforms. The archeologists and city planners could not see the same way as the Siksikaítsitapi; they did not know the stories, songs, and traditions that hold authority in many Indigenous paradigms (Crowshoe & Manneschmidt, 2002). The archeological evaluation required re-orienting ethical principles whereby including the Siksikaítsitapi altered "the power base in the complex web of evaluation relations" (Barnett & Camfield, 2016, p. 532). The Elder's story challenged me to consider my limitations in cultural bias and ask, what am I not seeing? With subsequent work experiences, I began questioning "how alternative paradigms and perspectives can open up new ways of thinking about phenomena" (Corlett & Marvin, 2018, p. 378). An Elder insisted that if I were to help co-create the resource, I had to attend different cultural events and ceremonies, spend time on the land, and learn some Siksikaítsitapi language. She told me:

> You cannot know the land without knowing the plants placed here by the Creator. You cannot know the Creator without knowing the plants. You cannot know the plants and their healing powers without hearing our stories from our ancestors. It is one of the same (Friesen et al., 2010, p. 180)

Engaging in these ways, I started to see, hear, and know what was before unseen, unheard, and unknown as I had a lived experience of "the situated nature of knowledge" (Corlett & Marvin, 2019, p. 380). At times, a commitment to experiencing things I had no touchstone for shattered my ego and colonial mind. The Elder was correct; working with the Siksikaítsitapi and co-creating

a resource ethically could not be done through a colonial lens. Thus began my nearly two-decade-long relationship with the Siksikaítsitapi. I had the gift of learning from many Elders and Knowledge Holders, and some became mentors, friends, and family. In 2005, I received the Blackfoot name *Áahsitápiaki* (Kind-hearted woman), and in 2021, I was gifted a new name *Íkinnápaki* (Gentle-natured woman). By sharing my names here, I am addressing my positionality to the community (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2021), and I am honouring what the community has taught me about introducing who I am.

When the resource was complete, Elders were engaged to give a final review. At the meeting's end, I made a bold and incorrect statement. I said that the resource was like a bridge in that it brought ancestral knowledge into the future and that the information would never be lost. An Elder sternly replied that the information would not be lost, that the more-than-human would always reveal themselves and teach those ready to learn; the Siksikaítsitapi did not need the resource for knowledge to continue into future generations. After several years of working on the resource, I had not understood a fundamental tenet; the more-than-human have agency.

Research Framework

My experiences led me to articulate a primary research question. In moving toward a more ethical space in teaching Indigenous content, I pondered, what role do Indigenous land-based pedagogies have in wise teaching practices? Secondary questions bring the topic to the classroom level. What role do the more-than-human have in teaching and understanding Indigenous concepts? What are wise practices in teaching land-based pedagogies and concepts?

Holographic Design

Figure 1 illustrates my research study framework. The figure and framework might be considered a holograph, where each piece is contained in the other. This holograph may be congruent with a general Indigenous worldview (Meyer, 2013), as the collective can be seen as the individual and the individual as the collective (Clement, 2019). My ontology and epistemology are contained in research questions and vice versa. Research questions informed the literature review. The Source of all creation is at centre and infuses all. The stories in the autoethnography reflect themes in the literature review. These stories are to benefit the collective in an ethical space. The colours represent the more-than-human, and the framework's shape reflects reality's cyclical nature.

In this article, I interconnect research questions, literature, findings, and a discussion of interpretations to demonstrate how this study achieves the results (Tracy, 2010). Data contained within autoethnographic stories were supported by a theoretical base, "methodological tools and research literature to analyze experience" (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 276). They were situated in the larger context of current academic articles with the literature review (Hughes et al., 2012). To ensure rigour, validity, and reliability, data were analyzed using a coding strategy to determine trends and themes (Le Roux, 2016; Quicke, 2010; Richardson, 2016). Although autoethnography can be understood as similar to some Indigenous methodologies (Kovach, 2021), the methodology in this article is in the Western autoethnography tradition, and the epistemology is subjective and phenomenological (Bohac Clark, 2019). This study does not include Indigenous spiritual methodologies, such as ceremonies (W. Ermine, Sturgeon Lake First Nation, lives on the Sturgeon Lake Reservation, Saskatchewan, Canada, personal communication, April 14, 2022). Therefore, the more-than-human are not part of the research methodology; they are aspects of the findings.

Figure 1

Research Conceptual Framework

Literature Review

When Indigenous children were taken from their families to attend Indian Residential Schools, they were forced to learn within a building using a Western paradigm. Therefore, not only were they taken from their human families but also from a web of relations with the natural world (Bastien, 2003). Central Indigenous cosmology tenets are that a web of relations includes a kinship with the more-than-human (Battiste, 2002; Reta, 2010) and "learning how life is interdependent is … a preeminent objective in the educational process. Learning how to connect the power of self with all other forms of life is the essence of human development" (Bastien, 2004, p. 95). Although the last Indian Residential School closed in 1996 (TRC, n.d.), some argue that not much has changed for Indigenous students in a Western classroom. As Little Bear (2009) explained, "in other words, just as a person would suffer from absences from friends, parents, and other relatives, Aboriginal people suffer when absent from the land" (p. 23). Stonechild (2020) agreed and suggested that this is spiritual abuse because it supplants land with a Western doctrine. Therefore, denying access perpetuates harm, as Indigenous students do not have access to truth as told by land. Dave Courchene (in Courchene et al., 2021) purported that all children have rights, a right to the truth and to know the truth. He said that they are not being told the truth about human domination. He maintained that they must go to the land to learn and experience the truth.

Indigenous Land-based Pedagogy Tenets

Place in the Circle

Many Indigenous cultures understand that human beings are the last creation (Deloria et al., 2001; Pack, 2019; Watts, 2013) and, as the youngest, are the most vulnerable. "In the Blackfoot world … humans are the most pitiful" (First Diver, 2015, 24:47), and as "pitiful, … had no knowledge of how to survive on earth [*sic*]" (Bastien, 2003, p. 43). Through guidance from the more-than-human, the Siksikaítsitapi survive and learn their roles and responsibilities from the wisdom and knowledge of their relatives and become co-creators in the circle by reciprocity (Bastien, 2003; Blood et al., 2012). Colonization broke this circle and created an unstable hierarchy with humans as superior (Courchene et al., 2021; First Diver, 2015). See Figure 2.

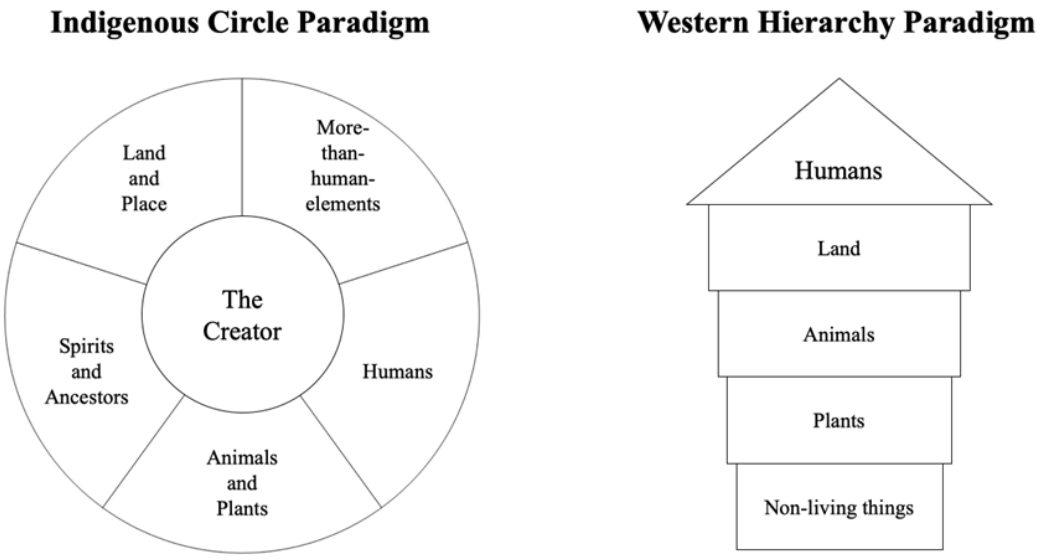
The More-Than-Human Are Animate and Have Agency

Indigenous cosmology holds that all creation is animate, has spirit, and agency (Bastien, 2003; Kimmerer et al., 2020). John Borrows (2018) explained that

> A language of animacy builds on the insight that the world is alive and has an agency of its own. It must therefore be respected. If trees, mushrooms, otters, and mosquitoes are all endowed with agency, then the scope of our relationships take on different meanings. When we add the sun, moon, and stars to this list we may start to see and hear the world in a different way. Each of these forces possess powers of communication, which humans can discern if they pay attention to their larger natural environment … (p. 52)

Figure 2

Conception of Indigenous and Western Relational Paradigms



In this way of knowing, "humans are neither separate from nature nor superior to nature" (Nxumalo & Credillo, 2017, p. 103) as everything is interrelated and connected (Clement, 2019; Ermine, 1995; Little Bear, 2012). Siksikaítsitapi Elder Bruce Wolf Child put it this way: "*Ihkanaó'ohpápiisskáta* (we took everything as of our body which is beyond relations but of us). *Ksa'ahkomma* (the earth [*sic*]) and *kánao miyánistsi píkssi* (all the wonderous beings: birds, animals, et al.)." Our way is about relationships to all things. (D.P. Mistaken Chief, Kainai First Nation, lives in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, personal communication, January 21, 2023). Therefore, a relationship with the more-than-human is not one way (Bastien, 2004; Little Bear, 2004). Humans have social responsibilities and ethical relationality (Nxumalo & Credillo, 2017) to care for those who care for them (Borrows, 2018; Wildcat et al., 2014). Siksikaítsitapi Elder Duane Mistaken Chief explained, "It's about the maintenance of harmony and balance via our words—*Aatsimoiyihkaan* and our actions that are based in that are *Aatsimihkásin* (harmonizing and balancing behaviours)" (D.P. Mistaken Chief, Kainai First Nation, lives in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, personal communication, January 21, 2023). Further, Kimmerer (2013) suggested that the more-than-human "can't meet their responsibilities unless we meet ours" (p. 140). These alliances are strengthened and renewed through prayer, offerings, ceremony, and visitation to specific sites (Bastien, 2003; Chambers & Blood, 2009; Simpson, 2014).

This relationship is generative because knowledge is communicated and built upon by both the more-than-human and human (Borrows, 2018; Lync & Mannion, 2021). They influence and shape each other (Courchene et al., 2021; Little Bear, 2004). As one, they are "co-being, co-belonging, and co-becoming" (Clement, 2019, p. 287) through multiple time scales (Larsen & Johnson, 2016; Wilbur & Gibbs, 2020). Little Bear describes this as flux: "all things are animate, imbued with spirit, and in constant motion. In this realm of energy and spirit, interrelationships between all entities are of paramount importance, and space is a more important referent than time" (Little Bear, 2000, p. 77). This way, a person can communicate with an ancestor or a bison that lived 200 years ago.

Relationship to Land

Little Bear (2004) said that because of "the inter-relational aspect of the Blackfoot paradigm, the Mother Earth cannot be separated from the actual being of Indians" (p. 4). As one Elder expressed, "I AM THE ENVIRONMENT [*sic*]" (Little Bear, 2004, p. 1). Hence, Earth is the mother (Little Bear, 2009), as she gives life and nurtures human beings. The Siksikaítsitapi are ethically and intractably intertwined with place, land, and the more-than-human (Bastien, 2003; Chambers & Blood, 2009; Marule, 2012). This understanding is not unique to the Siksikaítsitapi, however. Gregory Cajete (2000) suggested that "all Indigenous tribes … are ultimately tied to the relationships that they have established and applied during their history with regard to certain places and the earth as a whole" (p. 4). Further, Indigenous cultures understand that humans are made from a place on Earth (Deloria et al., 2001) and that their flesh "is literally an extension of soil" (Watts, 2013, p. 27). This strong relationship (Alfred, 2009; Jukes et al., 2019) may be difficult for non-Indigenous people to understand (Honohano, 1999; Louie, 2020). Indigenous scholarship reiterates the "deep connection that many Indigenous people have with the traditional territories that have been inhabited for thousands of years" (Scott & Gani, 2018, p. 175). This goes beyond a contemporary romanticized notion of Indigenous connection to land (Alfred, 2009; Blood & Chambers, 2006). Such "stereotypes reduce a complex cosmology to simplistic schemata" (Chambers & Blood, 2009, p. 271) as Indigenous People hold vast knowledge of the more-than-

human individually and collectively. Additionally, if humans are land, they are responsible for communicating with it. Equally, the more-than-human want to communicate with humans (Clement, 2019; Jukes et al., 2019; Watts, 2013; Wilbur & Gibbs, 2020).

Indigenous land-based pedagogies are comprehensive epistemologies related to personal knowledge, well-being, and collective wholeness. These are essential aspects to understand when working with Indigenous students and teaching Indigenous concepts. The literature evinces that continuous interaction with the more-than-human is more critical than a seasonal field trip. In summary, concepts central to Indigenous land-based pedagogies include understanding that humans are vulnerable and are in a web of relations, that the more-than-human are animate and have agency, and that Indigenous peoples are the land.

Western Place-Based Pedagogies

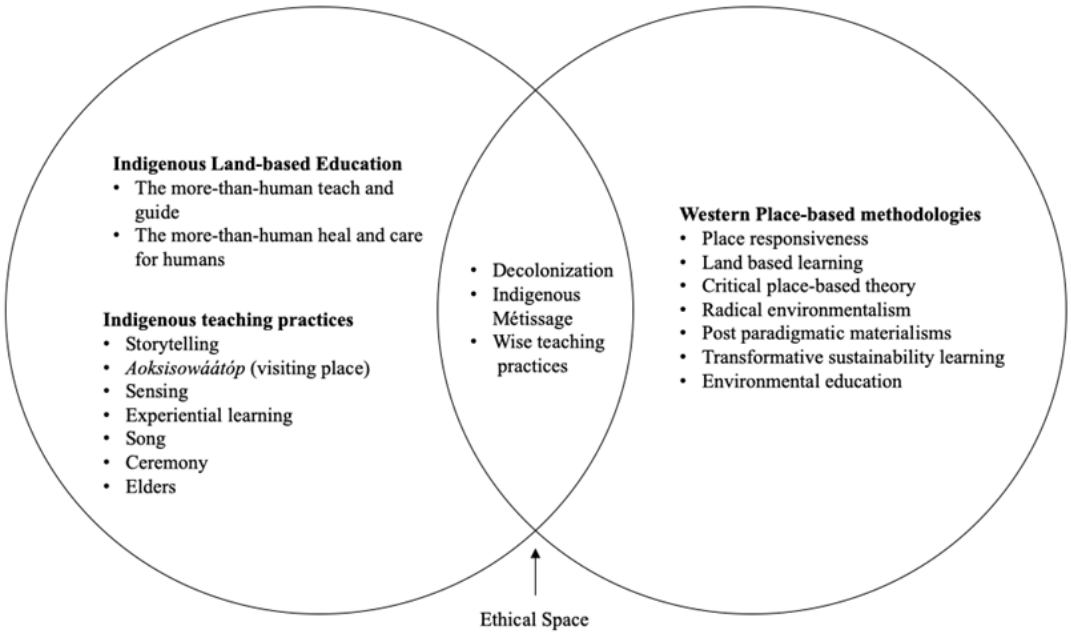
Western place-based pedagogies were included in the literature review to ascertain if strategies and concepts are congruent with Indigenous land-based pedagogies. Two thought paradigms (Crowshoe & Manneschmidt, 2002; Little Bear & Heavy Head, 2004) were core to Western and Indigenous pedagogies (see Figure 3). Generally, findings suggest that Western teaching practices tend to use place instead of include place. Place-based education promotes developmental and environmental pedagogies (Nxumalo & Cedillo, 2017) that primarily understand the land and more-than-human as educational materials to meet teacher-designed objectives and curricular goals; a fragmented and human-dominated view. Indigenous land-based pedagogies foreground that the land and the more-than-human are culturally inseparable from Indigenous people (Nxumalo & Cedillo, 2017), and as Narcisse Blood explained, “learning from place is who we are” (First Diver, 2015, 58:34). The more-than-human are also inherently valuable and have agency (Wooltorton et al., 2020). For example, a rock gets a human to pick it up. When viewed through human relational materialist pedagogy (Jukes et al., 2019), it is so that the human has something to do. From an Indigenous land-based pedagogy perspective, this action is not just for human benefit. The more-than-human require humans as active participants to keep the circle’s integrity and strength. Therefore, the rock needs the warmth of a human’s hand to carry it to a new spot and place it in the medicine wheel.

Ethical Space

Cree scholar Willie Ermine used the term *ethical space* to describe a shared space that “is formed when two societies with disparate worldviews are poised to engage each other” (2007, p.193). Ethical space is necessary because “diverse human communities do not share a common moral vocabulary, nor do they share a common vision of the nature of human beings as actors within the universe” (Ermine, 2007, p. 198). In this space, both views have voice. It is where cultures “could be allowed to speak for themselves” (Little Bear & Heavy Head, 2004, p. 38) and “express who they are and still be heard and valued” (Louie, 2020, p. 193). Further, Dustin Louie (2020) recalled a teaching from Siksikaítsitapi Elder Reg Crowshoe that in an ethical space Indigenous worldviews “need not to position themselves relative to or underneath the umbrella of Western scholarship, instead these practices may be seen as parallel to one another” (p. 193).

Figure 3

Venn Diagram of Research Themes



Dwayne Donald (2009a) proposed decolonizing the Western and Indigenous relationship in education "to consider a curriculum sensibility called Indigenous Métissage. Indigenous Métissage is a place-based approach to curriculum that is informed by an ecological and relational understanding of the world" (p. 1). Indigenous Métissage evokes ethical space. Cultures coexist with their different world views to seek "to understand more deeply how our different histories and experiences position us in relation to each other" (Donald, 2012, p. 535), and ethical relationality is fostered.

Figure 3 highlights Indigenous land-based practices and Western place-based practices reviewed in the literature. In the Venn diagram, practices that overlap are in the ethical space section.

Findings

Two salient features emerged from the synthesis of literature with autoethnographic stories; the more-than-human teach and guide, the more-than-human heal and care for humans. I argue that these are critical aspects of Indigenous land-based pedagogies that must be understood when instructing Indigenous students and delivering Indigenous content.

Four stories within the Findings section represent some of my experiences and correspond with themes predominantly discerned from Indigenous literatures. In Siksikaítsitapi culture, people are encouraged to have four oral stories to position themselves within community and collective knowledge. It is a standard protocol that, after each story, you say you are giving the particular lesson's luck to the listeners, or in this case, you, the reader. For example, when I tell a story about adversity, I say, "I give the luck of problem-solving to you." It then becomes a

reciprocal responsibility for you to integrate the lessons in your life and pass them forward. My four personal stories follow the discussion of four of the findings.

The More-Than-Human Teach and Guide

As competent, influential teachers (Battiste, 2002; Simpson, 2014), the more-than-human have deep patience, particular skills, and profound wisdom (Hanohano,1999; Little Bear, 2009). They actively shape events and give particular lessons to match the human context and ontological style (Hill, 2008; Lync & Mannion, 2021). They will also direct and create conditions for learning (Bastien, 2004; Jukes et al., 2019; Watts, 2013).

Further, places "are repositories for the knowledge left by the ancestors" (Chambers & Blood, 2009, p. 261) and can be conceptualized as a library, archives, or up-to-date databases that humans can learn from (Bastien, 1993; Chambers & Blood, 2009). Courchene (in Courchene et al., 2021) explained that land has a universal language called love and is accessible to all humans. He said that answers will always be given when one spends time with the more-than-human and asks for guidance. However, these teachings are not always understood with intellect; instead, they come through a felt sense (Cianchi, 2015; Deloria et al., 2001; Deringer, 2017). As Aborigine Elder Neidje said,

> You can look,
> But feeling …
> That make you.
> Feeling make you,
> Out there in open space.
> He coming through your body.
> Look while he blow and feel with your body …
> Because tree just about your brother or father …
> And tree is watching you. (Blewitt, 2014, p. 38)

This teaching and guiding requires active human participation and openness to receive communication.

First Story

I returned to the medicine wheel after the biopsy. We visited it earlier during the seminar, and I needed to go back. I sat beside a large stone on the west side. I felt wholly held by that stone. In its presence, I realized that the stone was once the stuff of stars. It told me of time before time. The rock reminded me of what Elders told me, that stones are our grandfathers. As grandfathers, they have deep wisdom to inform us about change, resilience, and resourcefulness. Stones have a long view through time, and it showed me how such transformations are healing. It told me that the grandfathers are inside of me, as rocks eventually become my bones, and if trauma passes down through generations, so does resilience and resourcefulness. The forming and reforming story is in our bones, and as such, this understanding is different from a conventional Western deficit narrative. The help I need is already here to face my challenges. It is inside of me, and it is within this landscape. Inside and out, stones teach me. As I received this information from the stone, I became less afraid. I thought back to when I was teaching and how we had passed around a stone in our sharing circle; I used it to indicate a student's turn to speak. I had not let the stone

speak in our circle.

With this story, I give the luck of wise teachers to you.

Attentiveness. Humans are enabled to be taught (Jukes et al., 2019) with a particular attentiveness called *mókákyao'sin*, translated as "to take in intelligence. The word's root is kákyaósin, which means actively taking in intelligence by observing by sight, hearing, and feeling. The end result is mókákyao'sin, wisdom" (D.P. Mistaken Chief, Kainai First Nation, lives in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, personal communication, April 20, 2022). Through this quality of attention, "authority, precedent, and rules" (Borrows, 2018, p. 51) are communicated to humans, as well as instruction, guidance, and support. Deep concentration, careful observation, and sensing through time are required (Donald, 2009a; First Diver, 2015). This conversation can be initiated from a person to the more-than-human. For instance, engaging in a conversation with a tree (Courchene et al., 2021) is possible as Indigenous languages do not have an "animate/inanimate dichotomy … languages allow for talking to trees and rocks, an allowance not accorded in English" (Little Bear, 2000, p. 78). In this paradigm, humans are wise when talking with and listening to the more-than-human (Donald, 2009a). One must actively take in intelligence, *oo ma'ahk ókákyao'ssi*, to invite and fully receive instruction from the more-than-human about what is required for learning and well-being to act wisely, *oo ma'ahkókáksi*.

Second Story

In the early morning light, I saw a petroglyph of a falling man, and he was upside down. Even though I had walked that trail many times, I had not seen it before. It is said that ancestors and spirits write on rocks to give people personalized messages. The glyph seemed to shout something significant to me, loudly and urgently, but I did not understand. I thanked it for showing itself to me. I would only understand what it was shouting once we went home. Later, I tried to find the glyph again to show my travelling companion, but we never found it. It is said that glyphs hide when the message is not for you. Next, we hiked to a cave and saw the enormous blue *Ksiistsikomiipi'kssii* (Thunderbird) pictograph. Ksiistsikomiipi'kssii seemed alive and huge, filling the cave. I was sure I could smell the bird; the pictograph was so lifelike. When we left and continued to walk up the coulee, I thought a lot about Ksiistsikomiipi'kssii and its meaning. I knew they were associated with transformation and renewal. Moments later, I found a giant dead bull snake with its mouth open. A few steps further, I found eggshells broken open from chicks. All these signs wanted my attention. I felt afraid as I knew it was not a coincidence seeing what I had that day. I was wary for the rest of the trip and cancelled the activities that were planned. Ironically, that night, I wrote about teaching students to pay attention to the signs and stories when tracking animals. I wondered how it would have been different if we had asked animals to tell us the story instead of making one up and what we would have learned if we had listened for the animals' directions.

When I got home, my doctor called to tell me I had a massive heart tumour. If I had proceeded with the activities, I might have had a heart attack or stroke. I was shocked but recalled I had been given messages not only of the fallen man but also of renewal. I could see myself as a victim, as the prognosis was not good, and there was a significant chance I would not survive surgery. However, the teachings from the more-than-human offered guidance and comfort, suggesting a different possibility. They spoke to me strongly of rebirth, resilience, and support, whatever the outcome.

The following year, I returned. I could not find the falling man glyph, and when we walked

back to the cave, Ksiistsikomiipi'kssii was smaller. In fact, Ksiistsikomiipi'kssii was red and small, not blue and large. It was as if the glyph shrunk once it received my attention. An Elder explained that sometimes spirits *aayiinápskásiiya* (make themselves known). Ksiistsikomiipi'kssii was there to help me. He said that the bull snake was there to help me, too, as it is understood to be a protector and benevolent spirit/snake by Siksikaítsitapi. I now return yearly to make offerings to give thanks for the guidance, support, and my life.

With this story, I give you the luck of guidance and mókákyao'sin.

Fostering Personal Gifts and Talents. The more-than-human recognize both individual human gifts and the needs of the collective (Blood & Chambers, 2006). Therefore, they use their agency to create conditions for human gifts to strengthen the collective (Bastien, 2003; Donald, 2009b; Larsen & Johnson, 2017). As Little Bear (2004) explains, "events happen at a place. It is the place telling the story. It is the place determining who you are" (p. 7). Humans are summoned to "dialogue, and relationship among the humans and non-humans who share the landscape" (Larsen & Johnson, 2017, p. 2). The more-than-human also encourage self-worth in acknowledging human gifts (Larsen & Johnson, 2017). It is in giving for the collective; the individual is also strengthened (Bastien, 2004).

Third Story

With abandoned vehicles littering the ditches, I drove through a blizzard to get to the school. I thought of turning around, but I knew I had to go. When I arrived, storm clouds moved on, and the sun peeked out. For the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and LGBTQ2+ art installation, which also honoured those who never came home from Indian Residential School, the teacher and I had students create a collage of positive and negative images of students' hands. For the negative image, students made sun prints. When we put the prints into water to develop them, the teacher's face turned pale. One sun print had manifested, one more than the physical number of children present, and it looked completely different from the other prints. The teacher called in an Elder, who smudged and prayed with the children. The school community interpreted that a child ancestor from a nearby graveyard made a sun print along with us. Instead of being afraid, I felt joy. This work had allowed spirit to manifest from the past in a physical, tangible way. This is not a problem in Siksikaítsitapi ways of knowing because ancestors would take part if you were on the right track, with a good heart, and if ancestors wanted to speak. Clearly, it was important for the ancestor to have its physical handprint as part of this art installation. Later, Elders directed that the collage be the exhibit's focal point because of the ancestor's participation. The project I facilitated gave voice to the ancestor and the students who created the artwork. It was as if the ancestor arranged my presence and gave me a safe passage to the school. In my teaching plans, I did not consider the agency of the more-than-human. This showed me what happens when I allow for their participation and direction.

With this story, I give the luck of having your gifts recognized and being asked to give them.

The More-than-Human Care for and Heal Human Beings

As the most vulnerable, "all human beings survive on the good graces of other beings" (Blood et al., 2012, p. 53). For example, bison choose to walk in front of the arrow or bullet to give themselves to the collective (Oetelaar, 2014; Smith, 2018). Recognizing your gifts for the collective is an action of love (Kimmerer et al., 2020). The more-than-human are active caregivers, and

spending time with them can be healing in multiple ways (Little Bear, 2009). Simply walking on or being with land can be healing as you breathe in the essence of medicines there and "breathing them in, you undergo healing within your soul and your body" (V. Fox, Wesley First Nation, lives near Morley, Alberta, Canada, personal communication, August 17, 2021). Fellner (2018) further suggested that the more-than-human offer "a place where we can let go of our pain, hurt, and trauma. The land has been central in our survivance … The land is critical in our mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional wellness" (p. 290). Land also provides community and connection (Keast, 2020), as humans are always with their mother and relations who bear witness (Little Bear, 2000). They are never alone—a different concept from Western individualization and the nuclear family.

Fourth Story

I met classmates outside school to wait while our professor hung prayer flags before we drove to harvest the bison. Several classmates were anxious, and some had never witnessed an animal being harvested. I was less so, because I had helped drag and butcher game for my family. The last year I taught, a hunter brought a moose for my Indigenous elementary students to learn to skin and butcher. The hunter brought it in his 4 ×4, and the moose arrived, stone-cold. It had hung in a garage for several days, away from land, students, and prayer.

When some classmates cried in fear and anticipation of seeing the bison shot, I shared a teaching that I had been given at a piercing Sundance the summer prior. On the third day, a warrior had a hard time with his fasting dance in the heat. He stumbled in his suffering. His wife stood near me, and she could see my concern as I almost fell with his falling. She scolded me, "Do not pity him as it makes him and his prayers weak. He is doing this for our community. You give him strength by bearing witness". When I stopped pitying the Sundancer, he lifted himself strongly, and his steps were higher as he resumed the dance. After I shared the story with my classmates, another said a prayer before leaving and asked that we help the bison by bearing witness.

When we arrived in the field, the bison was very agitated. When one of our classmates made an offering, said a prayer, and sang a song, the bison became calm. After the song, the bison stepped forward, turned sideways, and stood still, so the shot was clean. The bullet killed the bison instantly. She gave her life for the collective.

Despite my advice to my classmates, my eyes watered. They were tears not of pity but gratitude. My tears came from the profound lesson the bison had given me. The bison had taught me about the power and purpose of reciprocal gifting. Our offerings, prayers, and songs were in exchange, and the bison gave the only gift she could give back; she offered her life. I thought back to a teaching I was given that there is a duty to recognize the individual gift one has to benefit and strengthen the collective. As I stood in the field, I immediately understood how different this was from the Eurocentric notion of individualism and gain. In her turning sideways to take the shot, I asked myself how would I turn sideways and offer the gift that I could give to strengthen the collective. What was my gift now that I was no longer teaching? Could I be as clear as the bison in my purpose? How did I enable students to give their gifts to the collective, or did I?

We took turns butchering the bison in the field. When the heart was taken out of the bison's chest, I rushed forward and asked to hold it. We put the heart into a plastic bag, and I held that warm heart next to mine. I felt the bison heart heal my scarred heart, classmates bearing witness. As a blessing, an Elder directed me to cut a piece off the heart and eat it raw; he told me to go

around the circle and offer a piece to everyone.

Several nights later, I dreamt of the bison in the field. She came to me with her drum and sang a song, turning sideways to look at me. I do not remember the words, but I can remember the drumbeat. It sounded like a heartbeat.

With this story, I give the luck of knowing your gift in the circle of belonging.

Wise Teaching Practices and Strategies for Personal and Professional Development

The environment is considered the ultimate classroom and laboratory (Little Bear, 2009). Learning from the more-than-human is central to Indigenous ontology priorities (First Diver, 2015; McVittie et al., 2020; Oskineegish, 2014; Wooltorton et al., 2020) and Indigenous identity (Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2009; Raffan, 1993). Learning in this way has extensive documented benefits, such as student achievement, positive self-esteem, and cultural regeneration (Fellner, 2018; Keast, 2020; Rebeiz & Cooke, 2017; Reid, 2019). Aside from extended immersion experiences on land (Simpson, 2014), the literature review consistently highlighted key practices with students. It is essential to include local Indigenous peoples' perspectives, advice, and wisdom. Ideally, seek local Indigenous Knowledge Holders and Elders for guidance on developing lessons and experiential activities (Battiste, 2010; Cooper, 2020; Louie, 2020) while ensuring cultural protocols are followed for engaging with Indigenous communities and content (Kovach, 2021; Rebeiz & Cooke, 2017). Preferably, Indigenous Knowledge Holders and Elders share culturally appropriate teachings, stories, and songs to build multiple perspectives (Cooper, 2020; Donald, 2009b; Pack, 2019). Including Indigenous literature, media, and histories builds a storied understanding of all who dwell in a place (Nxumalo & Cedillo, 2017). However, this learning cannot only be through books or listening. Teaching students mindfulness techniques (Deringer, 2017; Kimmerer, 2013) and visiting with the more-than-human is also essential for students to have an embodied and emotional understanding (Clement, 2019; Harrison & Greenfield, 2011; Marule, 2012; Stevenson, 2008). Forefronting reciprocity and giving back for gifts received is also important (Bastien, 2004; Kimmerer, 2013).

Professionally and personally, wise practices for a Western educator mirror those of students, specifically to make a relationship with a place or the more-than-human, apprentice to it, and spend time with it (Lync & Mannion, 2021; MacDonald & Markides, 2019; Pack, 2019). There is a Siksikaítsitapi practice called *aoksisowáátóp* which "refers to the ethical importance of visiting a place as an act of relational renewal that is life-giving and life-sustaining, both to the place and to ourselves" (Blood et al., 2012, p. 48). Aoksisowáátóp requires time is spent with a place, like time might be spent with an old relative, and to believe place has something to teach. Literature suggests that learning in this way helps a person build capacity to learn from other places and extend seeing into other realms (Carvalho et al., 2020; Larsen & Johnson, 2017; Pack, 2019). It requires an inner journey to a place of stillness (Bastien, 2003) to receive messages and knowing. It takes an outer journey to places to understand inner landscapes (Cianchi, 2015; Friesen et al., 2010). The journey is essential as the educator's connection to land fosters students' connection (Lync & Mannion, 2021; Pack, 2019; Seiling, 2020). The inner and outer journeys (Ermine, 1995) help the Western educator become aware of the students' experiences. Like the student, a Western educator must have a felt experience to appreciate fully the necessary place in education of the more-than-human.

Relevance Outside the Classroom

The agency of the more-than-human is being investigated in other fields, such as environmental sustainability and geography (Blewitt, 2015; Larson & Johnson, 2016). Indeed, Indigenous paradigms would offer an alternate lens to help solve issues requiring different thinking (Little Bear & Heavy Head, 2004) in disciplines such as environmental science, social sciences, and medicine (Cooper, 2020; Jacob et al., 2018). As Courchene asserted, "issues such as climate change, pandemics, racism, violence, mental illness, and addictions are…symptoms [of] the severing of our relationships with our source of life, the earth" (Courchene et al., 2021, 0:24:04). There is a growing global awareness that dominant Western thought paradigms are no longer sufficient to solve current environmental and social ills (Bennet et al., 2021; Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2009). Therefore, the Western "world is in need of a new thought, a new plan, a new vision, and it begins by returning to the spirit and the land" (Courchene et al., 2021, 0:17:10). Collectively, humanity must meet in an ethical space, where the presence and wisdom of Indigenous peoples and the more-than-human are valued (Bastien, 1993). The more-than-human also call for human beings to be in the circle and right relation (Larson & Johnson, 2016).

In summary, my findings reveal that the more-than-human have agency. They actively teach, guide, take care of, and heal human beings. However, human beings must commit to relational participation with the more-than-human, and each other to strengthen the circle.

Discussion

Aside from the TRC's *Calls to Action*, many Canadian provinces and territories mandate that Indigenous perspectives are in curricula (Scott & Louie, 2020; Ottmann & Pritchard, 2010; Scott & Gani, 2018). In order to effectively include Indigenous perspectives and pedagogies, I argue that Western educators must be aware of and challenge Eurocentric attitudes and practices which minimize Indigenous knowledges. Marie Battiste (2010) agreed and asserted that Western educators must "normalize Indigenous knowledge in the curriculum so that both Indigenous and conventional perspectives and knowledges will be available … for all peoples" (p. 17). Despite various supports and materials available it may be that Western educators' perspectives are the biggest hindrance to pedagogical change (Leddy & O'Neill, 2021).

Data suggested that a lasting change to Western educators' practice requires a humble openness (Reid, 2019) to consider and acknowledge alternate worldviews (Ottmann & Pritchard, 2010). This may disrupt the notion of Eurocentric superiority in education (Battiste, 2010; Jukes et al., 2019). As McKegg (2019) suggested, "this work will be tough and scary and not for the faint hearted. But it is vital to unlocking potential transformation…that affirm and validate Indigenous peoples' ways of knowing and being" (p. 357). This is more than a methodological upheaval; it challenges Eurocentric cosmology and spirituality (Watts, 2013).

Recent Canadian studies show that although "teachers may see themselves as open to decolonizing approaches, their desires often do not align with their actual practices" (Scott & Louie, 2020, p. 126). For some, it is the disruption into ethical space necessary to design culturally appropriate curricula. If Western educators do not accept that an alternate equal world view exists, teaching practices may remain at the surface level. Teaching practices must move beyond promoting static representations of Indigenous cultural knowledge with "a veneer of Indigenization rather than a mindful reconceptualization" (MacDonald & Markides, 2019, p. 104). That is, designing curricula that do not appropriate knowledge but are robust, authentic, and go

"beyond consumptive relations with Indigenous knowledges" (Nxumalo & Cedillo, 2017, p. 101). Therefore, it is critical that Western educators put in "the necessary efforts to reach ethical spaces and complex cultural interactions … through the process of finding productive ways of combining two separate knowledge systems into one applicable framework" (Louie, 2020, p. 194). Methodologies such as Indigenous Métissage could be enacted in classrooms to ensure ethical teaching practice moves beyond theoretical ideas. Such methodologies should adhere to guidelines and cautions in the wise teaching practices highlighted in the findings.

Luckily, generosity is alive within the more-than-human, and Indigenous ontological realms invite Western educators into the circle as relational paradigms value relationships over separation (Wooltorton et al., 2020). Learning with the Siksikaítsitapi, my experience as a Euro-settler descendant reflects this profound generosity. Donald (2009a) recounted a lesson from Siksikaítsitapi Elders that teaching outsiders "is a responsibility and an act of kindness viewed as movement toward connectivity and relationality … [and] has resonances with ecological understandings of the earth" (p. 19). For example, Blood (Alberta Education, 2020) suggested that the settler's arrival in Alberta and 175 years of colonization is a mere moment in Siksikaítsitapi's vast knowledge of place, which sustains them. He said that all could benefit from this knowledge by visiting Siksikaítsitapi places and one another. Further, being at a place "provides that kind of awareness that these are [both] our sites now. Yah, they are Blackfoot [sites], but we aren't going away; you aren't going away. We might as well try and learn from each other" (Alberta Education, 2020, 03:10). These concepts also exist within the language. "*Íihpiipótootspi*—we were put here with knowledge, or it was given to us, and it is our collective responsibility to share or pass on knowledge, *Íihkanaitápstsi*" (S. Davis, Kainai First Nation, lives near Standoff, Alberta, Canada, personal communication, June 5, 2021). Even when praying, the Siksikaítsitapi pray for all to "understand that the land is here to nurture all beings" (Chambers & Blood, 2009, p. 273) and ask that wisdom bless everyone.

Further, the Siksikaítsitapi understand that the Creator gives unique gifts to all beings, and gifts are inherently tied to different places. As Louie (2020) suggested, the Siksikaítsitapi are "an example of a culture that has foundational knowledge that raises up ethical spaces" (p. 194). This disposition encourages the Siksikaítsitapi to create relational networks with other nations (Donald, 2009a; Louie, 2020), share their place gifts, and include people like myself in teachings and ceremonies. Therefore, these teachings are for all beings, and all peoples (Courchene et al., 2021; Ermine, 1995) as "Indigenous Knowledges are a gift to students, teachers, and classrooms, and can extend to building community and neighbourly relations across Tribal boundaries" (Jacob et al., 2018, p. 172). What it takes is a willingness for Western educators to accept the gift.

Data collected and findings reported in this article are intended to inspire Western educators to answer the individual call to the gift of a deeper understanding of Indigenous paradigms to authentically meet the TRC's *Calls to Action* (TRC, 2015a). May this article also be an invitation to the possibilities of knowing the more-than-human world, our relationships, and our responsibilities. May, you, as the reader, also turn to greet the unseen, unheard, and unknown in Western thought. Our relations are waiting.

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Sherri Rinkel-Mackay taught kindergarten to Grade 8 students with many cultural backgrounds and multiple abilities. During her 28-year career, she also worked as a teacher-mentor with a university-based professional development organization. Several projects involved co-creating learning resources alongside Indigenous community members. Her passions include the literacies of landscape.