

Year One Report: SSHRC Partnership Grant

Co-Curricular Making: Honouring Indigenous Connections to Land, Culture & the Relational Self

UBCO Okanagan School of Education

Sept 2021 – Aug 2022

Summary

The SSHRC Partnership Grant Research Facilitation Team is pleased to share this year-end summary report from the Co-Curricular Making: Honouring Indigenous Connections to the Land, Culture and the Relational Self research project. In May, 2021, the Facilitation Team completed data collection with 56 of 100 educator and partner research participants who volunteered to participate in a reflections survey, following their year-long participation in a series of four related, recursive, interdependent land-based experiences and four opportunities for reflection.

This report provides insight into the preliminary analysis of the reflection data. The results indicate that the land-based learning experiences and the relationships fostered throughout Year One provided guidance for educators to reconceptualize education in ways that honour local Indigenous—Syilx—histories and pedagogies responsive to the relational connections to land, culture and understandings of self in the world (<https://education.ok.ubc.ca/research-partnerships/co-curricular-making/>). The journey of inner transformation research participants experienced is revealed as they developed relationships with the land, culture, and relational self through connections established with place, made possible through the presence of local Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and community partners in place. A Syilx-informed webpage for pedagogical and curricular Indigenization at a local level, evolved as part of the Year's efforts (<https://education.ok.ubc.ca/research-partnerships/co-curricular-making/co-curricular-making-resources/>). Yet to be revealed during this journey is an articulation of the curricular pathways becoming visible through the transformative work. Many participants have articulated their wish to continue the journey and deepen the learning in Year Two.

Overview: Year One Experiences & Data: What do the Reflections Say?

Four Syilx-Informed Land-based Experiences

Through a series of four related, recursive, and interdependent land-based experiences furthering individual and collective decolonizing efforts, our research documents the learning and unlearning

journey of educators and partners committed to curricular Indigenization informed by the Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) *Syilx Water Declaration* (2014).

Experience 1: September, 2021

Syilx Water Ceremony

Learning in circle, sharing a meal

Guided by Syilx Elders, Elders in training, & community partners from the Okanagan Nation Alliance and IndigenEYEZ.

Participants gifted a copy of *nsiwtkwcn: The Language of the Water* (Okanagan Nation Alliance, 2017)

No. in attendance: 99

Experience 2: November, 2021

Captíkwł as Our Teacher:

Repairing and Renewing our Relations (Okanagan-Syilx Foundations, 2017)

Learning in circle

The teachings of Syilx laws, customs, values, and principles embedded in story, imparted by Syilx Elders, community members, and storytellers

Through Captíkwł, Syilx Oraliture

No. in attendance: 83

Experience 3: February, 2022

The Witness Blanket: Witnessing to Contribute and Further Learning

Revisiting the dark history of the Canadian residential school system.

Learning with partners Kelowna Art Gallery, Kelowna Museums.

The Witness Blanket by Carey Newman (2019) art exhibit

Tk'emlúps residential school survivor, Wordwarrior Dennis Saddleman.

No. in attendance: 79

Experience 4: May, 2022

Water's Teachings:

Who We Are/Who We Can Be

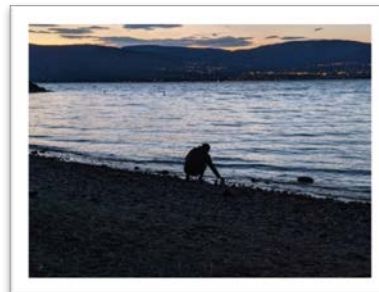
Revisiting the Syilx Water Declaration (Okanagan Nation Alliance, 2014)

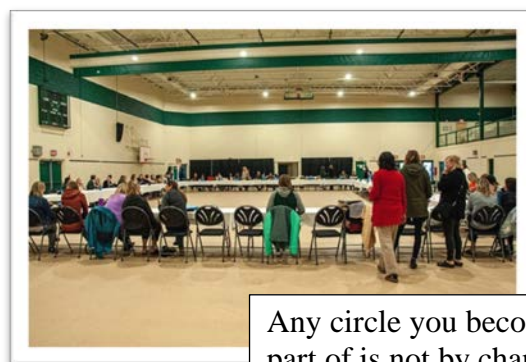
Participants choosing their own learning, unlearning and relearning experience

Learning with Elders, Elders-in-training, Sncewips Heritage Museum, and community partners from the Okanagan Nation Alliance and IndigenEYEZ.

No. in attendance: 98

Co-curricular Making: Collaborative and Inner Transformations





Any circle you become
part of is not by chance
- Elder Rose Caldwell

The Syilx & Settler Pedagogy Circle

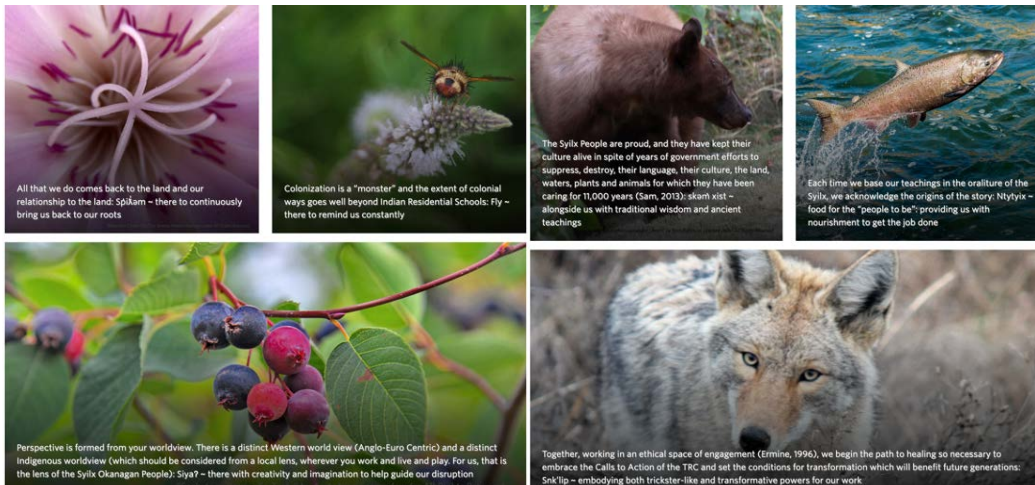
The Circles

May 10, 2021, May 17, 2021, June 1 (postponed in consultation with Syilx Elders out of respect for their work in supporting their people re the 215 children found at Tk'emlúps Residential School), September 13, 2021

The Syilx & Settler Pedagogy Circle was formed to articulate and shape a vision for the creation of a pedagogical foundation that would support educators taking their students to witness the Residential School commemorative art piece, *The Witness Blanket*. Syilx Elders, Scholars, Knowledge Keepers, and Settlers gathered in a series of circles to seek wisdom and guidance by putting heads and hearts together. A primary guiding principle of the circle was/is to foreground the Syilx Voice & Ancestral, traditional pedagogy. What began to prepare for the coming of *The Witness Blanket* art installation, is enduring for future learning and transformation. Emerging from the early Circle work are clear pathways to Syilx Ways of Knowing and Being, Stories, and Protocols to support educators and learners. As educators build their confidence around creating space for their students to make meaning from the Witness Blanket and other learnings, educators have the option to move at their own pace, exploring what it all means to them on their inner journeys. The initial *Witness Blanket* Syilx & Settler Pedagogy Circle resulted in the living-evolving webpage: <https://education.ok.ubc.ca/research-partnerships/co-curricular-making/co-curricular-making-resources/>

This webpage adheres to the community research agreement between Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA) and the Okanagan School of Education (OSE), UBC <https://education.cms.ok.ubc.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/96/2022/01/Community-Research-Agreement-2020-signed.pdf>

The Agreements, Syilx & Settler Pedagogy Circle



Reflections Sessions X4

Reflections 1

Thursday, November 4, 2021 (voluntary online forum via Zoom)

Water Reflections on Syilx Okanagan Territory

Co-Curricular-Making: Honouring Indigenous Connections to Land, Culture, and the Relational Self-reflection circle.

No. of participants: 73

With Dr. Margaret Macintyre Latta, Dr. Bill Cohen, Jody Dlouhy-Nelson, OSE, reflective space to confront, explore and examine decolonizing curricular habits and practices.

Reflections 2

Monday, January 24, 2022 (voluntary forum online via Zoom)

Witnessing the Witness Blanket through a Local Lens

Co-Curricular-Making: Honouring Indigenous Connections to Land, Culture, and the Relational Self webinar.

No. of participants: 58

With Central Okanagan Public Schools' Instructional Leadership Team (Dr. Kelly Hanson) & OSE (Jody Dlouhy-Nelson). How educators approach the Witness Blanket teachings through inner transformation first.

Reflections 3

Tuesday, April 12, 4pm to 5pm (voluntary online forum via Zoom)

Reflecting (looking back) on the Witness Blanket experience & Co-Curricular-Making: Honouring Indigenous Connections to Land, Culture, and the Relational Self.

No. of participants: 101

Learning with and alongside Elder Rose Caldwell, Dr. Bill Cohen and Dr. Sabre Cherkowski. Participants brought co-curricular making journals to do individual reflection.

Reflections 4

May, 2022

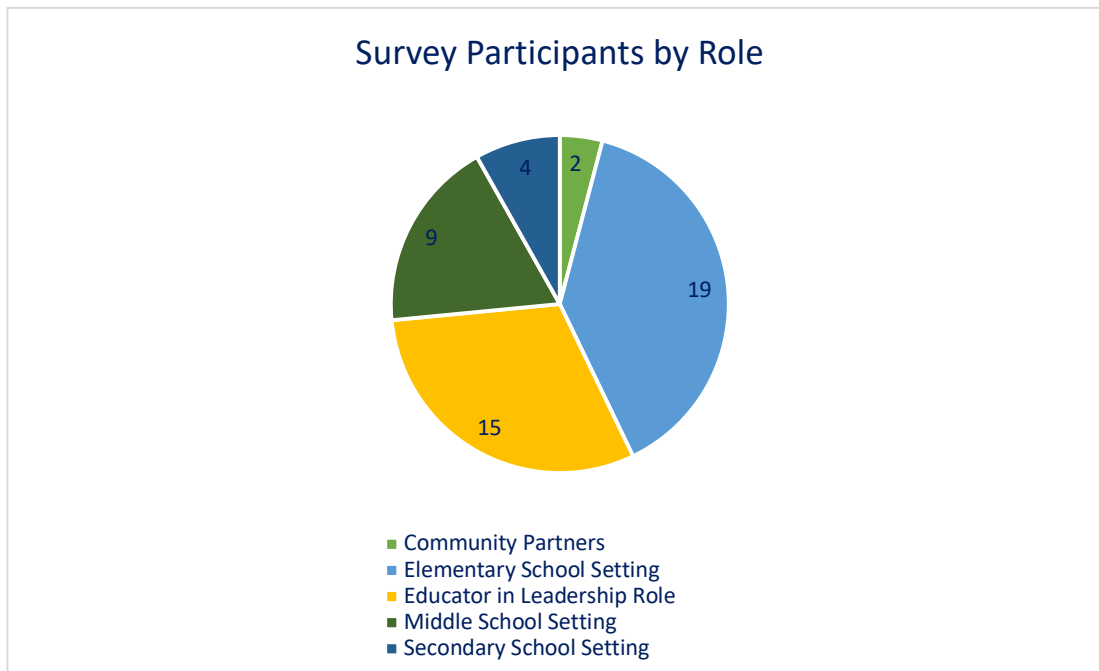
The facilitation team sought feedback regarding the four land-based learnings of the year. Over fifty percent of participants responded to four survey questions below:

No. of participants: 56

Data: What do the Reflections say

Year One was an opportunity for educators to begin to unlearn previous teachings that reinforced colonial narratives. It opened a dialogue for educators to begin to understand their role in reconciliation and start a journey of appreciation of the worldview of the local Syilx people.

Respondents. Over fifty percent (56) of those that participated in the experiences responded to these questions in May, 2022



Four Questions

What was your biggest takeaway? How are you walking differently?

Seeing **water**: in ceremony, as sacred, as medicine, as needing to be treated with reverence and respect.

Seeing **community**: bonded in community with other participants, as a safe space for learning, as serving the collective effort to decolonize curricula, and as vital for building stronger connections with local Indigenous People

Seeing importance of **learning from, with and alongside Syilx Community (Elders, Knowledge Keepers community members, future Elders)** as: work that must be guided by local ways of knowing and being; holding stories and teachings with reverence; and reciprocity.

What are you learning/unlearning/relearning as an educator and as an individual?

Unlearning the **'ways of being' that support colonization**, and preventing the trauma that arises from colonial practices in the classroom.

Recognizing **'othering'** of First Peoples supported by organizations' linear structures and control of the environment.

Countering colonization with work 'in/with community' rather than 'on community'

<p>Understanding process and time to learn local culture, Syilx ways of being and interacting The importance of Elder knowledge and wisdom. Learning to walk softly, listening more than talking. Relearning their personal role in changemaking.</p>
<p>What could have made this more impactful?</p> <p>More time and opportunity to reflect (like May session) Time and opportunity to connect with others—to enhance meaning-making; to hear about classroom experiences of others, to unpack the intense and difficult-to-digest sessions More time to be on the land with Elders, to learn to relate to tmixw and tmxulaxw, to learn about Syilx Ethics, to experience hands and hearts on pedagogy Experiencing more trans-generational, diverse representation of Indigenous voices from across the Syilx Okanagan Nation More cultural and Okanagan language elements to be part of, learn history and protocols. More doing of co-curricular making with colleagues, and carrying out of actions to help future generations</p>
<p>Where do you want to go from here? What would be most helpful as you move toward Indigenizing your curriculum?</p> <p>Participants wish to experience more and deeper learning of the local culture; and then to have a certain respectful level of independence to do the work in their classrooms. They express knowing ‘what and why’, and need more of the ‘how’.</p>

Recommendations by participants

- **Examining the world view undergirding our current curriculum** as we create new pedagogy based more in Indigenous ways of knowing
- Seeking **how to “bridge” ways of knowing**
- Introducing **children to the “language of water”**
- **Empowering students to transformative ways**
- **Illuminating where reconciliation lives on the land**; land as a relative
- **Nurturing the ways in which educators are living this way of being**; make visible/tangible—**name and notice the ways** we take this learning and apply it

Participant Feedback Representative Samples: How Year One Research Participants are Beginning to Understand Their Reconciliation Efforts

I am walking differently through the world relating to water on a daily basis. Treating water as a sacred life force, mentor, teacher, sibling, wise elder and future ancestor. I am doing internal and external work to walk—or perhaps swim—in more respectful, reciprocal and responsible ways with my close relations and new relations.

A huge takeaway for me is the patience and generosity of our Syilx partners, who are being pulled in so many directions, and who graciously take the time with others to allow us to move forward in a better way.

We need to be humble in our approach, but fierce in our commitment.

The [land-based experiences] leave me feeling like we are existing in a nearby faraway-ness that we are not naming but is at the heart of our shared commitments.



All feedback and recommendations from research participants, community partners, and research team are being used to guide decision making as the facilitation team plans for future.

