WALKING IN A GOOD WAY:
A SELF-STUDY OF MÔNIYÂSKWÊW

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By
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Kim Roxanne Sadowsky, candidate for the degree of Master of Indigenous Education, has presented a thesis titled, Walking in a Good Way: A Self-Study of Môniyâskwêw, in an oral examination held on June 18, 2018. The following committee members have found the thesis acceptable in form and content, and that the candidate demonstrated satisfactory knowledge of the subject material.

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Abstract

This is a contributing work to the self-study world for non-Indigenous educators navigating the pathways of Indigenous Education. The uniqueness of this work is embodied in focusing on Indigenous teachings as a framework. In seeking miskâsowin, I used self-study as a methodology to inquire into the moments of tension I experienced as a non-Indigenous educator teaching Indigenous Studies. Through the (re)telling of stories of tension, I have come to new understandings of what it means to be môniyâskwêw in these spaces. Indigenous knowledge empowered my miskâsowin framework of analysis as I explored nêhiyawêwin teachings as a way of inquiring into my experiences. Seeking miskâsowin became the foundation to my self-study. The research methods I employed took me on a holistic immersion of reflective prayer walks, journal collection, artwork and poetry. The intention of the self-study was for me to find meaning and understanding in the moments of tension I encountered as they guided me in finding my place as môniyâskwêw.

Through my research I was able to develop an emerging model to guide me as I continue learning to walk in a good way. The model sihtoskâtowin illuminates insights I should be mindful of as I walk. I offer my stories, understandings, framework of analysis and model as a possible pathway for educators seeking understanding of these spaces. Although my stories are deeply personal, self-study opens up the pathway to share vulnerable stories as a way to contribute to the larger educational landscape. It is my hope that other educators will find understanding as they walk with me on this journey.
Acknowledgements

*It is important to first acknowledge that this thesis was written on the traditional lands of the nêhiyawak, Anihsinâpek, Dakota, Lakota, and Nakoda. The homeland of the metis and most recently defined as Treaty 4 territory.*

**To my supervisors: Dr. Kathleen O’Reilly,** I cannot express how thankful I am our pathway crossed. Thank you for guiding and understanding me in a way that shapes my research to be honest and vulnerable in such a magical way. Stories hold much knowledge and healing. I know your spirit understands that on the deepest level. For that I give thanks. **Dr. Angelina Weenie,** your intuitive wisdom in understanding this research journey was opening up a pathway of healing for me is something I will be forever grateful for. Your guidance and knowledge have opened up new meaning for me. I understand now sometimes I need to pray and sometimes I need to *kiyâm!* *nanâskomowin.* **To my committee members: Dr. Michael Cappello,** your patience and honesty guided me towards finding my pathway to Indigenous Education. I thank you for giving me courage to shift my path and trust where my spirit was pulling me. **Dr. James Daschuk,** I cherish bumping into you at just the right moments. Your words of encouragement and inspirational work in community gave me hope that this was a journey I needed to embark on. **Dr. Ken Montgomery,** thank you for continuing to be on this journey with me. Your passion and visions for education helped feed the fire of my thesis journey. **To Solomon Ratt and Robin Goforth:** *nanâskomowin.* Your kindness with language translation and understandings have warmed my heart and given me courage. **To The Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research** for the funding I received during my thesis journey: thank you.
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It was a true honour to have you guide me on this journey. The ethical energies that emerge to align such perceptive wisdom are humbling beyond words. miyo-pimâtisowin
Dedication

My students’ stories illuminated a pathway for me to start walking. Their constant push for wanting something greater from the education system finally gave me the courage to begin. It seemed they could see so clearly what was needed: but few were listening. They said to me one day: “You have to tell them. You have to help them learn.” So here I am. And, it is to my students, I would like to dedicate this thesis. I would not be here without their teachings, stories, acceptance, love, encouragement, resistance, honesty and guidance. I will be forever grateful for the knowledge they have shared.

To my parents: thank you for always supporting and believing in me on my journey, wherever the pathway leads. You challenge me in good ways to open my eyes to the complexity that exist around me. I am thankful for that. To my family and friends who love me despite all my quirks, thank you. You see my passion and strength when I do not see it in myself. The many hours you spent listening to my experiences, the tears you wiped away and the resilience you built within me, I am grateful.

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PROLOGUE

Beauty in a Broken Heart

"We’re all storytellers, really. That’s what we do. That is our power as human beings. Not to tell people how to think and feel and therefore know— but through our stories allow them to discover questions within themselves."


I have come to understand that if we listen, stories can guide us. The interconnectedness of our stories, can lead us back to our own identity as we find our place in community. For me: it is what my spirit called me to do. Recently, with the loss of my dear friend and mentor, I realize more than ever the responsibility I have to community and the importance of following this spirit. He was a teacher, a student, a friend, a knowledge keeper, but most importantly he embodied what it means to be in community. When I first met my friend, we were at the same school when tragedy struck and a young man was murdered. He gathered teachers and students together to try to help us understand how to grieve with community and how to respect community at such a time of loss. He spoke to us about protocols regarding a traditional wake and funeral. He showed us how to honor the young man’s life in a good way. These were my first learnings about such things. I learned not only how community is changed by grief, but also how it is supported in the journey. Little did I know, I would need these same teachings and understandings to grieve for my friend six years later when he suddenly left us. Perhaps in his own way, he had been preparing us.

I see it clearly now, how someone can open up such pathways for others and the importance in doing so. When one teaches for community, to strengthen that community, the lives in those communities are forever changed. Forever shifted. I know I would not
be who I am today without these teachings. And for that I give thanks. Recently, I have started learning *nêhiyawêwin* (*Cree*) words for community. There is no easy translation for this word as it depends on what aspect of community you are speaking of. It hit me hard to understand how powerful Indigenous language is with this new teaching. What does community mean? In one translation *mâmawi-mâto* means, “we all cry together” (Wolvengrey, 2001, p. 322). Even in its translation it calls for unity. One does not cry alone. We are walking a path of interconnectedness and relationality at all times. There is much learning that stems from a sense of loss both personally and professionally as I move forward. For me, this gives comfort and understanding as I sit down to write my thesis when my heart is broken.
Chapter One: As I Walk

1.1 The Journey Begins

Everything in this world, physical and metaphysical, is a teacher. This is an understanding that has been validated for me through connecting more deeply with Indigenous ways of knowing and being. There is so much learning that can come to life when I engage in knowing in this way. Indigenous Knowledge systems are rooted in processes that intertwine knowledge holistically in an understanding of coming to know what we know. These understandings are distinct and push against Western terms of what is accepted as valid knowledge. My understandings of Indigenous knowledges,
practices and processes encourage me to create something that embodies what I have come to know and have embraced spiritually through my life experiences. The processes of coming to understand what I am learning about myself in a holistic sense have come through prayer, reflection, and story grounded in intuitive knowing. Thus, it is through story I have chosen to write this thesis.

There is much work to be done in opening up spaces so that Indigenous voices can be heard, valued, honored and lifted. It is necessary for me to learn, listen, push, and be still while always being mindful of the space I hold as mōniyāskwēw. I know more than ever I have a responsibility to complete this thesis. I did not start this journey for me alone. And I am not finishing it for me alone. I am finishing this journey to open wider the pathway for others. Specifically for non-Indigenous educators walking the path of teaching Indigenous Education. However, there are things I have learned that may be beneficial for all peoples walking the complex pathway towards decolonization. I will contribute what I can so others can see that Indigenous Knowledge systems are valid, important, inspiring and necessary in the academic world for us to truly understand knowledge and ourselves. I do this to honor those that have walked before me in hopes of lifting their work higher. I come with a responsibility to community. As I begin to walk, I tread lightly being mindful to do things in a good way. Doing things in a good way means being upfront about my intention, not harming others in my process and being respectful in all I do. It involves being open to learning and pausing. It is embodied in giving back in an ongoing relational journey. At the heart: being mindful of the interconnectedness of all things and the ethical spaces that exist between.
It is important before I begin to acknowledge the researchers and teachers in my life. You have helped me begin to learn, research and essentially showed me how to live in a good way. You have shared your stories and I am thankful for this guidance. You have steered me on this path of respecting Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and have helped me grow. You are the knowledge keepers that have shared deeply with me in a way that has transformed my own way of being. To all of those teachers in my life, to those who influenced my teachers and to the ones whose footprints of knowledge guide us all, I say thank you. You have shown me that when my spirit tells me something this clearly: I must listen. nanāskomowin

1.2 Towards miskásowin

In seeking miskásowin, I used self-study as a methodology to inquire into the moments of tension I experienced as a non-Indigenous educator teaching Indigenous Studies. Through the (re)telling of stories of tension, I have come to new understandings of what it means to be mōniyāskwēw in these spaces. Indigenous knowledge empowered my framework of analysis as I explored nēhiyawēwin understandings as a way of inquiring into my experiences. Seeking miskásowin became the foundation to my self-study.

One of the most important teachings I have learned is that intention must be at the forefront to all I do. When I am clear in my intent, the risk of harming others is diminished. I have learned it is no longer acceptable to cloak my actions in good intentions after I have caused harm. When I am honest and direct about my purpose, I
am able to carry out my work in a good way. And so it is important I explain my intention in sharing this journey.

For me, it became a way of healing: a way of telling my stories. Many of these experiences have left a deep woundedness within my spirit. However, through exploring deeper into what I was encountering, I have found meaning and understanding. My stories have become a pathway to resilience. My spirit is stronger as a result. I am beginning to see the layers of complexity that are embedded into each and every relational interaction as I walk in these spaces as môniyâskwêw.

It is also my intent that others find relational understanding within my stories and research. Lastly, a foundational intent of my research is to empower Indigenous methodologies and ways of being and knowing as valid pathways in the academic world. Although I am môniyâskwêw, I believe it is fundamental that I use my journey as a means of opening pathways and lifting Indigenous voice higher. I do this by privileging Indigenous researchers, language and teachings as the foundation of what binds my research together. I am careful in how I walk while doing so and use language as a key to opening wider my understanding of môniyâskwêw on this research journey.

I pray that my stories do not harm others and I have been careful to not implicate others in my sharing. However, I take full responsibility for what could transpire from sharing my stories. This is my learning of tipêyimisowin. I have read the following quote many times:

*Once a story is told, it cannot be called back. Once told, it is loose in the world. So you have to be careful with the stories you tell. And you have to watch out for the stories that you are told.* (King, 2003, p.10)
I realize the importance of King’s (2003) words describing the care I must have when I tell stories. I wanted to be sure that any stories I tell in my research are done in a good way. I do not tell these stories to harm or hurt anyone, but instead to tell my truths that lay within the world of môniyâskwêw: the hard truths that we often do not speak.

In telling my stories, structuring my thesis became a challenge for me. I found difficulty in attempting to present a cyclical holistic process in the boundaries of the thesis document. However, I have chosen the final layout as a way to illustrate the pathway I walked. In Chapter 1: As I walk, I begin by situating the research and myself. In Chapter 2: Opening My Eyes, I share my literature review where I explore the understanding of self-study and Indigenous methodologies. I also discuss what I have learned about Indigenous Education and decolonization. In Chapter 3: tâpwêwin, I present my research model and framework of analysis. I also share some of my stories as a way to illustrate the collected data and analysis. In Chapter 4: Moving Towards miskâsowin, I discuss my findings and the five themes that emerged during my research. In Chapter 5: My SpiritSpeaks, I present my final thoughts and implications of my research. In doing so, I offer the model sihtoskâtowin as a way to illustrate my understanding of walking in a good way.

As you move through my thesis, there are reflections, stories, poetry, photographs and artwork interwoven throughout. This is to give insight into the process and learning that was taking place as I carried out my research. They are foundational to the understandings that have emerged as a result of my self-study. These deep learning experiences have illuminated pathways I feel are safe to walk as môniyâskwêw. Now, let’s begin to walk.
1.3 Coming to Know môniyâskwêw

My late friend asked me one day, “Who are you? Where do you come from?” He said, “don’t make it so complicated. When someone asks you this question, just answer. Be simple. Be straight” (Personal Communication D.Benjoe, 2010). So here I go… I am môniyâskwêw (Cree meaning non-Indian or white woman) who lives on Indigenous lands and whose relatives come from across the waters. I am a teacher. I am a learner. I am a human being. I choose to use môniyâskwêw to describe who I am because this is one of the first nêhiyawêwin words I learned. I have come to understand môniyâskwêw means much more than white woman. I first heard this word when I had walked into my friend’s house six years ago and overheard his younger brother speaking in Cree. I recognized the word môniyâs and something shifted in me. I knew he was talking about me. In that moment, I realized who I was as a non-Indian woman very much mattered.

I am coming to learn that who I am as môniyâskwêw within our colonial story bears scars so deep that someone would be concerned that I had walked through their door. We laugh about it now but it opened my eyes to the ignorance of my own self. I am beginning to understand the complex meaning this word embodies. It is not easy to simply define an Indigenous word, as these words are alive. Each word holds a story within its meaning and within each, a worldview lives. These teachings I have learned through personal interaction with kêhtê-ayak, colleagues, friends and students. It has been within community that I learned these teachings about how language is embedded in our understandings of one another. As I begin to understand the complexity of these stories it adds so much depth to the journey I am on as an educator and researcher.
As a non-Indigenous woman, I realize it is imperative that language becomes a part of understanding my place within this story. Throughout my thesis, I have been intentional in intertwining nêhiyawêwin into my story. It is in being deliberate that I make known the importance of these teachings being foundational to my process. And in doing so, empower the distinctness of language. I do this not by sprinkling words here and there, but instead with deliberate intention to ground my work in nêhiyawêwin understanding. As môniyâskwêw, these teachings shine truths within my story that I have yet to discover. And it has been within community I have learned this.

This road might look different from the one others have walked. I do not assume others will want to walk this path. But for me it was something I felt necessary in navigating my pathways as môniyâskwêw. I hope this work will appeal to other non-Indigenous educators trying to navigate these pathways. For me I needed something deeper than ‘unsettling the settler’ (Battell Lowman & Barker, 2015; Regan, 2010). This is why I have chosen not to use the term settler as away to define my identity. In learning about unsettling one key understanding that emerged was that Indigenous peoples should not have to carry the burden of my journey. My discomfort should not be their responsibility to heal. In that understanding alone, it hit me that in using the term settler I was still comfortable. It was settler language: it was English. And although I could dig into my own story of how my settler identity is interwoven into the complications of colonialism, I was still doing so from the epistemological standpoint of settler language and the meaning it embodied. Something deep was missing for me. Based on this deconstruction, the understanding of how my identity was interwoven into the
community of students I was teaching and how teaching Indigenous studies was relationally connected did not resonate for me.

This is why throughout my thesis I have chosen to identity myself using the understandings of móniyâskwêw. Because no matter how many times I acknowledged my privilege, my whiteness, or the responsibility this entailed among other settlers, it had little meaning until I understood how Indigenous peoples perceived these same implications. I had little understanding of the weight I carried with me and the platform of responsibility I had until community started to teach me the realities of their pathways and how they perceived me. Deconstructing my own story was a start, but engaging with Indigenous Knowledge systems and community helped me to see how I was viewed in their eyes and what boundaries I needed to be careful of stepping over. These are not things I could determine on my own or learn from other settlers.

Because of these learnings, I have chosen to frame my identity by sharing stories that reveal layered personal awakenings through engaging with Indigenous community while teaching Indigenous Studies. When I speak of community I am referring to the students, family, kêhtê-ayak, community members, friends and family whom I engage with through relational building. They have helped me learn to define my understanding of who I am through Indigenous language and teachings. I believe this is critical in engaging with my research. Beginning to learn Indigenous language and understandings of who I was within community evoked a necessity to learn within my spirit. The term whiteness or settler did not evoke the same understanding for me as móniyâskwêw. There was no story attached that took on life or spirit for me.
I understand for many, the settler journey embodied in anti-oppressive theory has been meaningful and necessary. For me, however, I felt something was missing. I needed something more. I needed authenticity. When I use the word authenticity, the emphasis is on experiences that are organic and relational in understandings grounded in engagement with community, language, protocols and teachings. It means putting heart and spirit into what I am doing. I felt that this would guide me towards critical competency instead of partial knowledge. Without engaging with Indigenous community, I did not understand how I was truly going to learn about the need to unsettle. And this is where my pathway took a turn.

As a result, I decided it was important my writing privilege Indigenous worldview instead of putting forth colonial discourse for decolonization. Learning to understand the language and worldview is part of the journey. Walking in community to learn the deeper understandings of what these teachings embody is part of decolonization. Indigenous peoples have always had to come over to the western side to learn worldview so I knew in this journey I needed to engage in Indigenous community to learn. If I wanted to learn what it meant to be môniyâskwêw in this space I had to engage with community who saw me as such. I needed to go the center of knowing, as I did not feel learning from the periphery from other settlers was enough. I feared I would continue to colonize without realizing I was doing so. It was not the settler theory that guided me to understand who I was as môniyâskwêw. It was only in engaging with community that I came to a place where I began to understand who I was as môniyâskwêw within community: for me that held so much more meaning.
1.4 Who am I as mōniyāskwēw?

My name is Kim Sadowsky. And although I was born in Treaty Six territory and raised within Treaty Four territory, I have had little understanding of what that means. It has only been in recent years I am starting to understand how that impacts my identity as a non-indigenous woman teaching in community. I have spent most of my life in Regina but I understand my story goes much further back. My family has roots from the east of Europe in Czech Republic, Austria, Ukraine and Poland. My parents both grew up in farming communities in Saskatchewan eventually leaving them to attend university. They met and moved to Northern Saskatchewan to start a family. My dad taught school and my mom took care of the four children. When I was one year old my family moved to Regina to pursue more opportunity. Eventually both of my parents became educators.

Growing up in Regina, we lived in the same middle-class neighborhood for all of my schooling. During this time, I do not recall Indigenous Education being part of my learning in school often. The only vivid memories I have are from high school. I remember my Social Studies teacher talking about feasts and the protocol attached to it. I did not have an understanding at the time that this was knowledge I would need later in my life. I recall going on a trip to Batoche and Wanuskewin Heritage Park to learn about our local history and the land. Our teacher was a historian and found creative ways to engage us. The simulations and role-plays we engaged in involved hands on learning. For me they allowed a deepening of understanding that assisted me to think critically about our history. He always used humor and stories during classes. I appreciated his way of teaching and I know it became part of my own teaching pedagogy as I pursued
my education degree. I finished at the top of my class earning the Governor General’s Award and a full scholarship to the University of Regina.

I received my Bachelor of Education in 2001 with a major in Social Studies and a minor in Physical Education. Indigenous history or discussion surrounding the impacts of colonization did not come up often during my time at university. I had one Indian Studies 100 class during my four-year degree despite being a Social Studies major. This is something I point out to students often. I explain that anyone my age or older within the education program, did not engage in learning about these things. While the program has changed since then, it often leaves me feeling overwhelmed. I think how many educators walk with me in this experience of having a complete gap in learning and understanding of colonial impacts and the realities facing our communities. It makes me feel a deep urgency for this work.

The highlight of my degree was my Physical Education classes, especially my Outdoor Education. I loved them. Through experiential learning, my professor challenged us to experience learning holistically using the land as a vessel to engage in all subject areas of learning. It was challenging at times but these understandings have stayed with me throughout my years of teaching. As much as possible I have endeavored to create lessons that embody experiential learning and land-based learning.

During my time at university, I found that something within me was awakening. These resulted from moments of tension. One moment I distinctly remember occurred in my women’s studies class where we learned about white privilege. I remember being frustrated during that class and pushing back. It was not until many years later that in
working with Indigenous community, I would come to understand what exactly my professor was trying to illuminate for me.

Another awakening that has stayed with me occurred in my internship during my fourth year of education. I was teaching about Christopher Columbus to a History 30 class. Some of the students had said something racist regarding Indians. I stopped the class and I explained how misinterpreted the word ‘Indian’ was. Even though my understanding was limited at the time and I have come to understand Indigenous teachings surrounding the word much deeper, this conversation in the class had an impact. After the lesson, a young man came up to me and thanked me. I was dumbfounded. “For what?” He said, “for talking about my people. No one talks about Indians. Thank you for acknowledging we are here.” That moment of tension has remained with me even to this day. His words hit me hard. I just went through four years of education to be a history teacher and clearly there were huge pieces of knowledge I had missed or were missing from the program completely. Something was awakening but I would only come to understand this many years later. I have come to understand that when I have these moments of tension they connect me to deeper learning.

1.5 Deeper Learning

After convocation, I received a fulltime contract. During those years I taught a variety of subjects but one that stands out for me is grade 9 Social Studies. I loved teaching it, but I would only teach the first three units: Time, Change, and Causality. The last unit was Culture and had aspects of Indigenous knowledge woven throughout. I remember making a conscious decision not teach it. I remember justifying to myself that
I did not have time in the semester. Knowing what I know now, I regret that deeply. But I am beginning to understand there may have been a much larger spirit at work.

Looking back, I may have been more in tune than I understood. I never liked teaching about things I had not had direct experience with. If I am going to teach something, I want to have some foundational knowledge guiding me. I did not feel that the curriculum was enough in guiding me to teach Indigenous Studies then, nor do I feel it is enough now. I admit fully, there was something about the title of the last unit that scared me: Culture. I did not feel comfortable teaching from curriculum, or from any book, about culture. I still will not teach about culture from a book or curriculum. It has only been in engaging with community that I have come to embrace an understanding and have the confidence in my classroom to navigate such territory. I do believe something intuitively in my spirit was guiding me.

That same intuitive feeling led me to the next phase of my teaching career. After five years of teaching, I sold everything I owned and moved to Italy to teach History in an International School. I was so lucky to meet some amazing people who invited me to become part of community. They encouraged me to experience local life and speak Italian. This was so important in understanding the community I was in. This same understanding emerged in all of the places I lived over the next few years.

Surrounded by community, I started to see how biased our stories of history really were. Prior to this experience, I had not begun to deconstruct the stories I had been teaching from curriculum. In Italy, I was tasked with teaching about WWII from their textbook. These new stories were not replicating the villainous accounts I had learned growing up. I was teaching a very different narrative. Another such encounter occurred
when I briefly taught English in Slovakia. Here I spoke conversational English with a
government worker. She would tell me about how different things were post
Communism. She explained how capitalism had caused many problems for the Slovak
people. I was in awe listening to her stories that countered my own learning.

Engaging with community also taught me to see myself differently when I was
challenged about my origins. I remember being proud to be Canadian, however, there
were several moments where that identity was challenged because of my last name. To
say I was Canadian was not a sufficient response as my name told a different story. For
my new friends, my last name carried a story, even though I was not even sure where my
roots began. They explained to me some of the layers of racism and oppression that
existed in their community towards eastern Europeans. Another experience came when I
was living in Slovakia. I was speaking with some locals and I was curious about my
mothers’ maiden name Mrazek. I told them I knew that her family had come from
around the area but I knew it as Czechoslovakia in our family books. They took one look
at the picture I had of my grandfather and laughed. “He’s Czech, not Slovak!” To them,
there was a big difference. “We are not the same,” they said. This was all very new to me
and even now when I think back, I realize how far I am from knowing my own
Indigeneity. Through my travels, and even more so now that I am engaging with
Indigenous community, the necessity of knowing where I come from and my family
story has become central to understanding who I am as mōniyāskwēw. A yearning to
search for my own story developed.

I believe these experiences opened up a pathway that led to teaching Indigenous
Studies and opened my spirit to Indigenous understandings of identity. Once back in
Canada, I found myself explaining to students, “If you want to know about the history of a place, event or peoples: you NEED to talk to people from these places!” I began to ask students each semester what their roots were as we embarked on learning our familial stories. I believe these learnings were guiding me towards the next phase of my journey. I have learned that with Indigenous epistemology, knowing where one comes from is foundational. Knowing my Indigeneity allows me to engage deeper with community as our stories collide. These interwoven stories that span over place and time become essential to understanding my place within these stories and deepen my identity.

1.6 My Eyes Have Been Opened

Even with these experiences, in 2011, when my late friend asked me to take on the Native Studies courses at the school we were teaching, I was afraid. But I believe my journey up until that point had been preparing me. I knew what I was going to do needed to engage community. I began teaching the course with the support of some good friends, colleagues, and the students. Over the next couple of years, I found myself developing a way of teaching in which I shifted the control to the students because I truly had very little understanding of the position I was holding. Being a non-Indigenous woman holding a space that could be perceived as oppressive, I needed to make sure I was doing justice to the course. So, we all began learning together.

There was a movement happening within my students, and myself. I could feel something deep shifting. We started to develop a simulation. Together we holistically experienced historical events in Canadian history while engaging in community. It became a living simulation as I shifted my teaching practice. Each day the students and I
found creative ways to engage in key events in Canada’s history while drawing out our own conclusions about how the events of the past have influenced our place in Canada today as Treaty people. Our ultimate goal was to create either a social action project or personal growth display that demonstrated our knowledge and role in moving our relationships forward. It was an entire lived experience taught through story, primary resources, land, and community.

Perhaps most significant was when students discussed the inter-generational cycles that exist as a result of our history. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students bring into awareness the current social realities and policies that exist today and identify how we are implicated within them. Students explored their own family roots and stories acknowledging their identities within this history. Students pieced together how the past has impacted their understanding of the present and put forth hopeful possibilities for the future. Students created their own way of displaying their learning that made sense to them. Whether through painting, music, drama, writing or other mediums, they told the stories of their learning and how they were interwoven within.

The final projects have been heartbreaking and beautiful all at the same time. Their presentations of their projects have demonstrated learning that resonates far beyond the curriculum and classroom. The simulation that the students take part in not only challenges them to look at their own perceptions of history, but to challenge their families, friends, teachers and society to re-evaluate the sources in which we learn as we begin to re-conceptualize our ways of knowing and being. I am in awe of the experiences, relationships and learnings that have unfolded.
1.7 Not All Rainbows and Lollipops

While I was excited about what was happening, sadly there was constant resistance, belittlement and outright slander about the course by both teachers and students not directly involved with our learning. These were attempts by individuals to invalidate and undervalue what we were doing. Most of the resistance came from non-Indigenous colleagues and students and will be illustrated later within my thesis.

I see this now as a push back from the system and not just the individuals themselves. During these times, Indigenous students, families, friends, kêhtê-ayak and community were a massive support in navigating the pathway forward. These moments often resulted in epiphany moments or personal distress within myself. I would find myself walking and reflecting on the events that had occurred and what I needed to do next. I believe these moments started to shift my pedagogy.

During these experiences I was often pulled back to these words, “As long as you know who you are…nothing else matters.” A kêhtê-aya whom I worked with for many years spoke these words. He was speaking about the importance of being true to yourself and knowing that your own story of who you are is the one that counts. Sometimes we cannot change the stories other people tell of who we are. I came to an understanding that, ‘it’s not about me’ but instead, it is part of a much larger story. Any discredit towards me personally, or towards my students and the class, was an attempt to discredit the message of what we were doing.

In this struggle, I began a journey of situating myself in a larger colonial story. Who was I as mōniyāskwēw in this space? These learnings have become imperative to my journey as a non-Indigenous woman teaching in an unfamiliar world. It has often
resulted in feelings of loneliness and confusion; however, it has led me to become what my supervisor termed an “Engaged Ally” (K. O’Reilly, personal communication, November 15, 2016). In becoming an Engaged Ally one can no longer walk alongside in camaraderie alone. I cannot call myself one without envisioning the action that is embodied in the words. Instead, I am forced to walk differently, live changed and engage on every level in an active way. I cannot wear the t-shirt if I am not actively part of the journey when I take it off.

This understanding eventually led me to transfer to the First Nations University of Canada to finish my Masters degree. I felt pulled there. Something about the path I was on did not feel right. I was considering leaving the masters program all together. In the spring of 2016, I signed up for my last course before embarking on my thesis proposal and research. I had decided to take a course through First Nation University of Canada. I was wrestling with my thesis journey because what I wanted to do needed to be grounded in Indigenous understandings, but I had yet to engage in learning I felt was embodied in these ways of knowing and being.

I remember the first day of the class we were going around the circle sharing about ourselves, and why we were there. I was quite grumpy and said, “I don’t even know what I am doing or if I even want to finish.” I surprised myself with my honesty and something in that moment shifted. I knew I was exactly where I needed to be. It was during this class that synchronicity was at work. I found out that there was a masters program starting at the university in the fall and I immediately knew what I wanted to do. I wanted to engage in holistic learning that was grounded in Indigenous
understanding. If I were to write about these things in my work, I needed learning to take place that connected me directly to Indigenous knowledge and community.

The courses that I had taken previously had grounded me in theory, but I remember feeling that theory was not enough. Something did not feel right. I knew it was time to go. I remember discussing my new plan with colleagues, friends, family and even faculty members. I explained I needed to do something that pushed back and opened up pathways. There was a common question I would be asked, “are you sure you want to do that?” One of my close friends, and a fellow academic, said to me one day, “be careful Kim. You don’t want to end your career before it starts.” Although he was saying it from his own experiences, I was taken back by the comment. Push. But do not push back too hard was a message I was receiving. In their eyes it seemed as though I was signing a death warrant.

I could not fight the deep pain in my heart. I was not where I wanted, or needed, to be and a pathway had opened up to walk a new journey. I have a hard head when it comes to things like this. When my spirit calls me to something so clearly and the pull is so strong, it is difficult to talk me out of doing it. I knew I needed to walk this path and so I took the steps needed to transfer. I am extremely grateful for the learning that was shared with me before I made this decision. I thank my professors for guiding me and encouraging me to walk this new path, even though, it meant leaving.

I ended up doing a couple of extra courses before starting my thesis work and I am extremely thankful for that. Those courses would prove to be foundational in validating my choice to walk away from what I had been doing and towards something new. This work has been extremely difficult mentally, emotionally, physically and
spiritually. But the learning that took place has taken me to where I need to be. It put at ease my urgency that there needed to be a larger reason for me doing my masters. I have come to believe that reason is to give back by helping to open up the pathway for other non-Indigenous educators walking the pathway toward Indigenous Education.

1.8 Starting to Walk

I realize now without these struggles, I would not have embraced a new way of knowing; or have started to move towards a new way of being. Organically, these struggles have inspired various experiences that led me to this research. The stories of tension are what I have chosen to explore. These moments have shaped me as an educator and a person. They have impacted how I respond to: “Who am I?” “Where do I come from?” The response is riddled with complexity permeating a deep embodiment of lived experiences entrenched in colonial epistemology. The understanding of oneself is so essential to everything we embody and everything we embody is essential to understanding oneself. I believe this is why it is important I explore my story as mōniyāskwēw.

I walk along this new path softly as a non-Indigenous researcher as I know I will never truly understand all the facets and layers embodied on this path. Some spaces I must be invited into. So I give thanks to those who have welcomed me on this path and encouraged me to walk in a good way learning what place the mōniyāskwēw has on this journey. I mindfully walk and I will continually go back to the teachings my late friend and mentor shared with me, “Be kind. Be honest. Show compassion. Have a sense of humor,” (Personal Conversation D. Benjoe, 2011). This journey will be different without
my mentor but I was recently told, “there is beauty in a broken heart. There are many teachings that come from pain. These truths lead to healing” (Personal Communication, R. Goforth, 2017).

The truth is, our experiences help us grow in continual learning. I know I must move forward on this journey, as it is necessary in opening up pathways for others. I know I will need strength. I have been through difficult journeys before and prayer has kept me strong. I pray in the way my Granny used to do and this is important to me. But I also pray with smudge as my new family has taught me and I respect this on a deep level. And most of all I pray with nature, as this is where I feel the most connected. It is with these understandings I carried out my thesis work. I believe this is all important to say. Hiy Hiy
Chapter 2: Opening My Eyes

“It is not about how well you can quote theory; It’s whether those ideas affect how you act”

A kēhtē-aya once said to me, “the government has always been afraid of educated Indians.” I remember the conversation distinctly. I was new to teaching Native Studies and I was unsure why Indigenous Education in my school seemed to be lacking. I was confused by why policies seemed to limit the opportunity for Indigenous students to succeed and why many of my colleagues seemed to accept the myth that Indigenous students were inferior and were not capable of learning. His words still resonate in my heart.

Years later, I have come to a place where I see the need to shift within myself, and my classroom, in hopes of decolonizing the system. Decolonization refers to the understanding of literally and metaphorically undoing the damage of colonialism. This embodies all the underpinnings of epistemology, pedagogy, axiology, ideology, and any other ‘ology’ that has been influenced and stained by oppressive colonial discourse. This involves not only the individual, but also community and societal levels of systems that exist. Sovereignty and reclaiming of language, land, traditions and knowledge are at the heart and spirit of decolonization (Absolon, 2011; Aikenhead, 2011; Aluli-Meyer, 2008; Ermine, 2000; 2007; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008).

This includes an investment of self and building relational connectedness through the use of Indigenous Knowledge systems as I come to understand my place as mōniyâskwêw. The self-study methodology opened up a pathway that allowed me to explore this more deeply. During my journey, community has been influential in helping
me to connect deeper with these understandings as it has truly been transformational learning. Conversations, readings, and most importantly experiences within community have strengthened my ability to express in academic terms my understanding of these pathways. In my literature review I first give understanding to why I have chosen the self-study pathway embodied in Indigenous methodologies as a way to engage with my research. I then explore my understanding of decolonization and the role of Indigenous Education. Lastly, I discuss Indigenous Knowledge systems being foundational for non-Indigenous educators walking the pathway towards Indigenous Education. I offer this literature review as a written reflection and reminder of my learning as môniyâskwêw.

2.1 Self-Study as a Pathway to miskâsowin

Self-study is a methodology that allows me to become immersed in my research in a holistic way as I engage in deep learning. I was pulled to self-study because its methods offer a pathway to follow my intuitive sense of self. Self-study empowers me to explore my “processes, emotions, complexities, nuances, values, cultural templates, embodiment, and the political and social contexts of teachings” while carrying out my research (Pithouse, Mitchell & Weber, 2009). Although the academy pushed back against its authenticity and validity for many decades, self-study is now an accepted and valid pathway to carry out educational research (Berry & Loughran, 2005; LaBoskey, 2007; Loughran, 2007; Mitchell, Weber & O’Reilly-Scanlon, 2005; O’Reilly-Scanlon, 2000; Weenie, 2010).

Self-Study is “a methodology characterized by examination of the role of the self in the research project” (p.4) and the Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices or S-
STEP “emerged in an environment in which teacher education specialists were advocating for more authentic approaches to teacher education” (Kitchen & Russell, 2012, p.4). This approach resonated with many educators, as they were tired of implementing research that had not been carried out by educators. They felt the research was neither authentic nor useful in the classroom experience. As a result, self-study opened up a valuable authentic pathway to travel in seeking educational reform and pushing the boundaries beyond the self in forms of continuous learning as educators. Self-study has the possibility of influencing pedagogical and epistemological shifts including policy in the larger educational landscape. I became pulled to how self-study aligned with my own intent of doing research (Berry & Loughran, 2005; Clandinin & Connell, 2007; Hamilton & Pinnegar, 1998; Hutchings & Shulman, 1999; Korthagen & Lunenberg, 2007; LaBoskey, 2007; Loughran, 2007; Mitchell, Weber & O’Reilly-Scanlon, 2005; O’Reilly-Scanlon, 2000; Samaras & Freese, 2009; Weenie, 2010).

Loughran (2007) discusses, “the use of the term self-study is used in relation to teaching and researching practice in order to better understand: oneself; teaching; learning; and, the development of knowledge about these” (p.9). This spoke to me directly as a pathway for inquiring into the moments of tension I was experiencing teaching Indigenous Studies. Berry and Loughran (2005) discuss how moments of tension can provide key jump-off points for inquiry using self-study methodologies and that excited me. Tensions and discomfort provide frameworks to develop self-study research. These moments allow educators inquiry spaces to critically examine their own pedagogies. This correlated with the intent of my research. Through sharing my stories,
self-study would allow me accessible pathways to shift my pedagogies and transform my practice. O’Reilly-Scanlon (2000) sums it up when she says:

*Teachers’ stories, in the forms of narratives, biographies and autobiographies, have been gaining stature and value for their own sake and on their own terms. Since teaching has so much to do with the inherent beliefs, attitudes, feelings, past experiences, values and thinking of the teacher, we need to look to the teacher for insight and knowledge about teaching.* (p. 44)

Inquiring into my stories allows a pathway towards deeper understanding. In moving towards *miskåsowin* this research methodology aligned with my intent and purpose.

As Weenie (2014) explains, “writing about, reflecting on, and studying my teaching creates a self-awareness and facilitates a change process” (p. 504). It is through critical reflection into my stories that I can come to know myself in relation to others. Reflection is vital to the journey and interrogating my experiences. It allows me to reframe my experiences and inquire into them. As explained by Pithouse (2005), “I search inward and outward, backward and forward through my on-going personal experience to uncover, penetrate and lay open the personal tension that moves me to engage in this inquiry” (pg. 206). My reflective practices allow for deeper inquiry and it is a critical and foundational component to my self-study.

I was pulled to self-study as my methodology because of the intimacy of realization and learning that can emerge when one digs into their own teaching practices. Mitchell and Weber (1999) discuss the power self-study has to transform my pedagogy and coin this understanding as ‘reinvention’ as I engage in self-transformation. They explain, “it can be wonderfully motivating in its ability to bring home a painful or a beautiful truth, and help us appreciate and even bring about our most meaningful moments as teachers” (p. 232). The pathway self-study opens up for me to evolve,
revalue, explore, shift and transform is compatible with my search towards *miskásowin as mōniyâskwêw*.

The self-studies I explored demonstrated a variety of methodologies. Art, photography, story and prayer inspired me. To discover who I am as *mōniyâskwêw*, requires processes that are deep in holistic self-reflection. It was important that my research journey honor these pathways. My supervisors Dr. Kathleen O’Reilly and Dr. Angelina Weenie have both walked the path of self-study and suggested I explore it as a methodology for deep immersion and reflective learning. The more I inquired into self-study I realized that it was the pathway I needed to walk. The synchronicity of immersing holistically while reflecting on deep learning experiences aligned with how I wanted to carry out my research.

Derry (2005), describes “embodiment as a way of knowing that goes beyond the intellectual, logical and rational mode of thinking that has been traditionally defined as knowledge. It includes emotions, culture, physical sensations and life experiences” (p. 35). In her work, she used drawing to elicit responses, present data and pull out difficult information as she explored perceptions of herself. Although her study surrounded bullying, the richness this art based method provided as a basis of inquiry, was enlightening for me. O’Reilly-Scanlon (2000), adds insight to the understanding of embodiment as she explored how memories of our schooling experiences become embodied and influence our lives as educators. She employed stories as a key way to embody the research. The narratives were collected through journaling and used as the basis for inquiry. The stories shared in her work provided opportunity for teachers to investigate their own memories of school and explore how that influenced who they had
become as teachers. The stories shared by the participants, and O’Reilly-Scanlon, deepened my understanding of the processes unfolding during the research. I loved the idea of reflective journaling and digging into the journals as a way to interrogate what was changing within me.

Embodiment is further investigated by Diamond & Halen-Faber (2005). In their work, the batik metaphor was used as an intuitive process to explore during the self-study. “Batik is an ancient Javenese art of wax-writing derived from painting” and “holds strong symbolic meaning as it was also considered to be a way or method to develop spiritual discipline” (Diamond & Halen-Faber, 2005, p. 88). Through using their sixth sense they created poetry and art as a basis of inquiry for studying the role intuition can play in developing lessons and flexibility in the classroom. This struck me as I had begun to question the role intuitive spirit was playing in guiding me within my own classroom setting. The understanding of the spirit providing intuitive guidance for the research resonated with me deeply.

Weenie (2010) also spoke of using the spirit as a guide. She used poetry, along with photographs and story, to deepen her understanding of the inbetween spaces that existed for her as an Indigenous academic and educator. Her process of knowing was embodied in her final dissertation as she displayed the photographs, stories and poems that led to her understandings. She explored the moments of disruption that existed as she walked her path and found her voice. Prayer was foundational to her journey and I felt safe knowing this was an acceptable pathway in research. It is the understanding of deeper embodiment that guided the development of my self-study.
It is with these understandings of self-study that I chose this method for my research. In moving towards miskâsowin, the understanding of self-study is one that can aid in coming to a place of knowing. Self-study is an intimate form of research embodied in holistic reflexivity that opens pathways for such knowing to come to life. As well, it is “a way for [me] to ask the deep questions about [my] practice that [I] dared not ask alone” (Samaras & Freese, 2009 p. 13) and to become vulnerable as I make public that which is personal. Through moving towards miskâsowin and digging through my personal experiences I can move towards understanding my space as mòniyâskwêw.

Self-study is a natural way to dig into the stories of my lived experiences and how I live within these stories. It is within these stories that my epistemology and pedagogy is embodied. As Absolon (2011) explains on her doctoral journey, “I now restore myself by re-storying myself” (p. 18) and in doing so Okri (1997) echoes “if we change the stories we live by, quite possibly we change our lives” (Okri in Clandinin, 2013, pg. 22). In using self-study as the pathway to my research, I will reflect on how I am walking as mòniyâskwêw in my educational space and I will explore how to start walking in a good way as I continue on the journey of teaching Indigenous Education.

2.2 Indigenous Methodologies as a Foundation to Self-Study

In beginning the journey of self-study, I have come to understand that Indigenous methodologies must be central to how I walk. Indigenous understandings emphasize the life-long learning journey I am on. I am always searching and (re)searching my pathways as more knowledge is gained through my lived experiences. I must connect with the knowledge on a deeper level and dig into how it is embodied in the past, present and
future landscapes on a political, social and personal contextual levels. Self-study allows this organic holistic relationship with the research to exist.

At the heart of Indigenous Methodology are relationships, and as a result of teaching Indigenous Studies, I have been provided opportunity to build respectful relationships that aided me in this journey. In living out the cyclical research process, I began my research preparation many years ago, as these relationships are what brought me to graduate studies in the first place. These relationships have guided my understanding of how to carry out my research in a good way. I have learned that Indigenous methodologies call for methods that are distinct. They call for a process that intertwines knowledge holistically in an understanding of coming to know what we know and my methods honor distinct ways of opening up these pathways (Absolon, 2011; Aikenhead, 2011; Aluli-Meyer, 2008; Ermine, 2000; 2003; 2007; Grande, 2004; Kovach, 2009; Morrisseau, 2005; Weenie, 2008, Whiteman, 2009; Wilson, 2008).

In addition, “Indigenous Methodologies require methods that give back,” (Kovach, 2009, p. 82) so my research is embedded in working to engage in Indigenous Education as mōniyāskwēw and put forth pathways others may pull understandings from. Along this journey, I must always be aware of the colonial influences of my own self and be in constant reflexivity while engaging with the research in a way that calls into light these influences. This learning takes a holistic investment. This means engaging with Indigenous community for guidance. Learning in a way where relationships are at the heart of what I do becomes essential. It is with this understanding I feel my research would not be worth carrying out if not done so in a way that illuminates a pathway of holistic engagement. Engaging with Indigenous pathways must be done in way that
brings respect and honor. I must ensure my research does not further damage my place as móniyâskwêw in these spaces (Absolon, 2011; Grande, 2004; Kovach, 2009).

2.3 Coming To Terms With My Colonial Past

My eyes have been opened to the deep dark secrets of the education system. I have started to see things within our system that are so clear it hurts deeply. The patterns, policies, lessons, conversations and attitudes that exist perpetuate the colonial system to stay intact. I have started to come to terms with the fact that our education system had a key role in the destruction and devastation of Indigenous communities and knowledge systems in Canada. This is our colonial history and it has created “an ingrained belief, an enfolded consciousness recreated through systems, institutions and processes in mainstream Canadian society” (Ermine, 2007, p. 198). I am beginning to understand that since education has been a powerful force in continuing these colonial systems, it is essential that education become the catalyst for empowering Indigenous Knowledge systems to return once again in aiding to disrupt, and dismantle, the current system all the while working to build strong communities. Through the ongoing process of decolonization through embracing Indigenous Knowledge systems this movement may be possible (Absolon, 2011; Ermine, 2000; 2007; Kovach, 2009; Weenie, 2008, Wilson, 2008). This involves working together as both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples by making connections about how the past is impacting our current relationships and what these relationships may look like moving forward.

The words the kêhté-aya shared, “the government has always been afraid of educated Indians,” are making more sense to me the more I learn. For centuries,
Indigenous peoples have been assimilated, segregated, integrated, and arguably, annihilated at the hands of our education system. And simultaneously, while this was occurring, their non-Indigenous counterparts were learning that Indigenous peoples “were inferior, they were pagans, that they were heathens and savages and that they were unworthy of being respected” (Sinclair, Ottawa Citizen, 24 May 2015). This is a reality that still reverberates in communities today. This story continues as Indigenous students are abused through policy, curriculum, and the institutional environment. This system has created “the collective story of Aboriginal people [that] is entrenched in colonialism, patriarchy, sexism and racism” (Weenie, 2008, p. 547).

In June 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s 94 Calls to Action were released. I had a sense of hope as a pathway was illuminated. I knew I had a responsibility in taking an active role in working towards decolonizing my classroom through Indigenous Education as expressed in the Calls to Action:

“We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to: i. Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples’ historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students”


I was excited, but reality hits as I think about the system I am teaching in. Again, I hear the words the kêhtê-aya shared, “the government has always been afraid of educated Indians.” With this renewed call I wonder if things in the education system will be different. In Saskatchewan, Treaty education has been mandated since 2007. Despite this, there still remains a resistance towards truly understanding what relationships are embodied in this work and I do not believe there is a mandate in this province that is going to change that.
The provincial government claimed at the time, the importance of “forging new ties” as they promised to mandate the K-12 curriculum of Treaty education in Saskatchewan (Saskatchewan Legislature Speech from the Throne, 2007). Sadly, while doing this literature review, that same government shone light on the lack of understanding of the true spirit and intent of Treaty education. The minister of education Bronwyn Eyre (2017) pushed back against Treaty education claiming it watered down curriculum from “too much wholesale infusion” and “too many attempts to mandate material into it both from the inside and by outside groups” (Saskatchewan Hansard, Nov. 1, 2017). A comment like this stops decolonization in its tracks. It illuminates where our society stands and puts forth the urgency of just how much work is left and needs to be done.

The gap lies in deepening learning about what Treaty education truly embodies. In my own system, many educators, and the Saskatchewan Curriculum, refer to this as Treaty Education only. However, I am coming to understand it is much deeper than teaching about Treaties. I must push beyond thinking about this education as simply content and instead embody the spirit behind it. The shift must come through the spirit as pedagogy. As Whiteman (2010) explains, “for the education system to truly respond to the needs and aspirations of First Nations people, the change must be visionary and transformational” (p. 12).

2.4 No More Excuses!

I know the education minister’s remarks resonate throughout educational institutions in the form of colonial discourses and pedagogies. I am frustrated, but still
hopeful. Perhaps it is a good thing these beliefs have been called out. I know I cannot change what others think or do in regards to Indigenous Education, but I know I can shift as I become aware of my own colonial practices. I must ask myself, how have I approached Indigenous Education in the past? How am I approaching it now?

When I think of Indigenous Education as simply attending events or creating topical activities in my classroom, I am contributing to the ongoing colonial discourse. When I do this, I create token moments of learning and send the message that these learnings are an imposition to my other lessons and units. I devalue Indigenous Education and I instill a set of belief systems for both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous students I teach. I continue the colonial cycles. This is no longer acceptable. As Weenie (2008) explains, “they cannot be more add-ons or supplementary pieces but the core components of Aboriginal curriculum” (p. 552) must lie at the heart of how I teach. It is important that I no longer ‘other’ Indigenous Education as something extra or something to be added. Educating in a way that is not authentic, valid and respectful can have devastating results and impacts. As Larocque (1991) explains:

“the effect on non-Native students is ignorance, fear and possible hatred of Native peoples. The effect on Native children is self-rejection. The net effect on society is the stereotyping, mistrust, and mistreatment of Native peoples.” (p. 74)

The struggle exists as our current education system is about keeping the dominant intact by recreating and producing this epistemology to remain through the empowerment of the dominant and disempowerment of Indigenous Education.

Consequently, because Indigenous peoples have been left out, or completely denied a voice in the story of our society, non-Indigenous peoples control educational policy and institutions. As Kovach (2009) explains, “forgetting this country’s colonial
history thus maintain[s] its reproduction” (p. 76) and perpetuates the continuation of the ideological colonial story of interlocking systems of racism, classism, and sexism. This discredits and marginalizes Indigenous Knowledge systems and the lives of my students.

So, despite mandated Treaty education, it is the fundamental relationships involved in how I view this education, knowledge, and pedagogy that must be interrogated and renewed. As Ermine (2007) says, “the historical dimension of these relations can be envisioned as a repeating pattern of connect and disconnect, of engagement and disengagement, of union and rupture” (p. 196). This pattern is dictated by the dominant society and has become an integral underpinning to our educational system. As a result, the gatekeepers of knowledge within the educational system built on colonial forces have left out Indigenous Knowledge systems as being valued, worthy or legitimate. Instead they are viewed as being deficient or having no relevance in education. When Indigenous knowledge is brought into spaces it is often done so in artificial and token ways. As long as I continue to engage in educating as the system always has, I contribute to the maintaining and reproduction of the dominant non-Indigenous Knowledge systems. This “anguished pattern in the history of Indigenous-West relations tells us that we continue to do the same thing over and over again even as we pursued co-existence” (Ermine, 2007, p.197) and it will take breaking out of this colonial dance in order to move forward. This calls for an envisioning of possibilities.

In moving forward, I must begin to look at curriculum and contextualize the information, holistically, and build relational opportunities to connect with students lived experiences in the community. It involves discussions surrounding how to create spaces where this pedagogy is accepted, implemented and encouraged. It must become about
decolonizing my pedagogy by grounding my practice in Indigenous understandings (Anuik and Gilles, 2012; Ermine, 2007; Grande, 2004; Larocque, 1991). I must begin to build a new understanding of what is valued as knowledge, and where and whom knowledge comes from, while embodying Indigenous Knowledge systems. I must have the courage to “[observe], collectively, how hidden values and intentions can control our behavior, and how unnoticed cultural differences can clash without our realizing what is occurring” (Ermine, 2007, p. 203).

I need to learn what decolonizing my practice entails to truly become an educator with an embodied knowing and understanding of the necessity of Indigenous Education. This involves a holistic investment of self and requires much patience. Building relationships becomes foundational. This is difficult however, because the discourse attached to Indigenous Education has implied it as something to be included instead of something to be lived, and this is where I must begin. To empower Indigenous Knowledge systems to return into my classroom spaces, I must start to question what is the value of knowledge in our education system and where that knowledge comes from. Whose knowledge is valued? I must accept that knowledge is active, it is not controlled; it is living. And that doing something for the sake of simply doing does not make much sense. For “knowledge that endures is spirit driven” (Aluli-Meyer, 2008, p. 218) and Indigenous Knowledge systems call for authenticity and embodiment.

2. 5 Beginning to Walk the Path of Indigenous Education

Understanding the responsibility I have in shifting epistemology and pedagogy must involve not only becoming aware, but embodying Indigenous Knowledge systems
as pathways. While the term Indigenous Knowledge does not have a distinct definition, language, ceremony, spirit as knowing, land as teacher, land as remembering, experiential learning, holistic, alive, inclusive, relational and cyclical are all key foundations that Indigenous Knowledge systems embody. This understanding is emphasized by Weenie (2008) in her description of curriculum that “involves the colonial history, worldviews, philosophies, languages, cultures, stories, songs, literature, art, spirituality, ceremonies and ethnos of Aboriginal peoples” (p. 552). Indigenous Knowledge systems are alive, both in this world and beyond. These are some of the understandings of what is meant by Indigenous Knowledge systems and are reiterated within the works of Absolon (2011), Aluli-Meyer (2008), Battiste (2000), Brayboy & Maughan (2009), Ermine (2007), Grande (2004), Goulet & Goulet (2014), Kovach (2009), Weenie (2008), Whiteman (2009), and Wilson (2008).

It is essential I understand that embracing Indigenous Knowledge systems is not only beneficial for my Indigenous students. These ways of being, doing and knowing provide opportunities for both students, and teachers, to experience growth and learning. It allows us all to transform within ourselves to build stronger communities. As acknowledged by Aluli-Meyer (2008) “genuine knowledge must be experienced directly” (p. 224). Further, “knowledge that does not heal, bring together, challenge, surprise, encourage, or expand our awareness is not part of the consciousness this world needs now” (p. 221). The transformative pathways that Indigenous Knowledge systems set forth leaves open opportunity for all involved to move towards healing from our colonial past and building towards stronger communities. Iseke-Barnes (2008) explains:

*We are challenged as educators to transform our educational practices and to consider Indigenous curricula and ways of educating that account for our*
In order to move forward and transform the educational landscape, I need to begin to understand that it is not always what I teach about Indigenous Education, but also how I teach it. I need to move beyond simply including Indigenous Education, and instead, learn how to become an educator who embodies the spirit of Indigenous Education. This involves embracing Indigenous Knowledge systems.

I need to embrace the ability to nourish my learning spirit in a holistic way as, “teachers are better able to nourish the learning spirit of students when they understand themselves as lifelong learners, validate and learn from their students, and use holistic teaching pedagogies” (Anuiik & Gilles, 2012, p.63). When I look at Indigenous Education as something to be lived I begin to embody this understanding. Cajete (2006) suggests, “Indigenous people experience and participate in the natural world not simply with their mind, but with their spirit, emotions and body as well” (in Aikenhead, 2011, p.76). In other words, I am also a student of lifelong learning, and I need to connect myself to what I am teaching and the relationships that are embodied within it. I need to draw out my own lived experiences of what I know, and ultimately, what I need to learn and unlearn in order to transform. This ultimately requires relationship building with Indigenous peoples, communities, languages, understandings and belief systems.

Learning involves a deepening of understanding. Showing respect for relationships and learning about Indigenous Knowledge systems is necessary. Ermine (2007) explains, “Elders and the oral traditions provide us with the codes of conduct as human beings within our communities” (pg. 195) and this means that relationships must
be cared for in a good way, as it is essential to the journey. Learning about history and our past is just a piece of the process. Engaging in the lives and community of the colonized will allow for much deeper transformation.

Connecting with kēhtê-ayak and moving into community allows a reconnecting with the land beyond the four walls of the classroom. “Land-based seasonal activities with students restore connections to the land, develop social bonds, knowledge, and skills, and teach cultural values in context” (Goulet & Goulet, 2014, p. 203). It is one thing to discuss residential school history, it is quite another to be standing upon the land of an old residential school. Discussing the historical implications while drawing on location is foundational for immediate relational connectedness. Drawing on relational connectedness to location allows for a much deeper learning, valuing and appreciation of the learning. The land has so much to teach us and as Aluli-Meyer (2008) so eloquently suggests, “one does not simply learn about land, we learn best from land” (p. 219).

It is vital that any such land-based learning is carried out in a good way. Finding out what protocols might be required before embarking on such lessons is essential. In bringing in Indigenous Knowledge systems, I must ensure I am being respectful, following protocol and being ethical as there is a long colonial history of disrupting communities and extracting knowledge for the gain of the colonizer (Grande, 2004; Kovach, 2009; Restoule, Gruner & Metatawabin, 2013). Kovach (2009) reminds me that, “adhering to such protocols offers deeper appreciation for the holistic quality of Indigenous knowledges” (p. 147) and will help to decolonize the relationship that exists between our community of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples which may involve “bad reputations”, “distrust” and “broken promises”. Following protocols when
engaging in such activities engages in further deepening of learning while empowering distinct Indigenous community knowledge.

Along with land, language becomes a vital vessel in decolonizing the system and embracing Indigenous pathways. As Whiteman (2010) explains:

*Without the articulation of our identities through our own languages, we filter and distort knowledge that has been transmitted for generations. Further, in translating these knowledge systems from their original languages, we privilege English and enable the false belief that English is a language that can ‘speak’ for us.* (p. 24)

This is further reiterated by Weenie (2008) when she explains, “Aboriginal thought embedded in Aboriginal languages is what must be cultivated and nurtured in Aboriginal curriculum” (p. 554). I now realize that I cannot fully begin to comprehend an Indigenous understanding of colonial relationships and decolonization without language. It is a deliberate and conscious decision to make central Indigenous language in my understanding. Language becomes like ceremony, unlocking essential understandings embodied within its teachings. It is vital that my movement forward embraces and empowers Indigenous language revitalization as part of my journey.

### 2.6 The Choice to Live Differently

Opening up these spaces means I must invest myself and learn, and at the same time unlearn, while building relational connectedness through the use of Indigenous Knowledge systems. I must put aside my assumptions of these pathways and attempt to come to experience and learn about them in a real way. This does not mean becoming an expert on Indigenous traditions or culture. This does not mean ‘playing Indian’. It means beginning to understand and utilize Indigenous Knowledge systems in a good way.
Brayboy and Maughan (2009) explain Indigenous Knowledge systems constitute “a circular worldview that connects everything and everyone in the world to everything and everyone else” (p. 13). In viewing the world in this way where everything and everyone is interconnected, it naturally calls for responsibility in how I walk as môniyâskwêw.

This understanding invites deeper questions about ‘who are my teachers? what are my resources?’ In Western understanding I would access books, videos, lesson plans and curriculum. However, moving towards Indigenous Knowledge systems involves thinking about questions much deeper. Plants, animals, landscapes, kêhtê-ayak, community, language, family, and students become my resources and my teachers.

Kovach (2009) explains, “our teachers are in community” (p. 152) and this leaves open the understanding that these teachings can come from such things as people, land, and metaphysical experiences. She also emphasizes the need to make note of the complexity of bringing in Indigenous knowledges into colonized spaces as “non-Indigenous people must suspend disbelief” (Kovach, 2009, p.156) and open themselves up to new pathways to gaining knowledge and understanding. As an educator, I must work to open up spaces through decolonization so that this learning is encouraged, welcomed and embraced.

Sprinkling Indigenous content here and there is no longer a valid response to decolonizing my understanding of Indigenous Knowledge. An aspirational goal in this sense would have me embody the characteristics of Indigenous Knowledge systems where building relational connectedness is essential. This is a process that is deeply holistic, intertwined with epistemology, pedagogy, ideology and any other intellectual way of understanding how I come to know what I know, do what I do, learn how I learn, value what I value and essentially, how I become who I desire to be (Grande, 2004;
Embodying this way of knowing involves “the choice to live differently, about standing in defiance of the vapid emptiness of the whitestream, and about resisting the kind of education where connections to Earth and the spirit world are looked upon with skepticism and derision” (Grande, 2004, p. 239). To decolonize mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually, I must approach Indigenous knowledge from a place of openness that involves travelling down new paths. I must put aside discomfort, disbelief and my urge to dismiss understandings. Instead, through ongoing dialogue, critical reflection and action, I can move toward decolonizing both my mind and heart, and most importantly my learning spirit. Engaging with language, community, culture, and deeper teachings will ultimately guide my understanding of the self in relation to it all.

I must acknowledge and understand that this journey cannot be walked alone. These pathways of moving forward must involve Indigenous peoples as the key stakeholders. It involves a surrender of power and control over those places/systems that are not mine to control. In fact, Grande (2004) and Tuck & Yang (2012) argue that Indigenous peoples land and sovereignty must be restored before decolonizing can be achieved. And, although I may not have direct connection to the macro goals of decolonization, on a micro level, my classroom becomes the garden for these seeds to grow. Empowering the understandings and teachings of decolonization using Indigenous Knowledge systems as pathways, students can begin to connect on a deeper level to the realities that need to occur before decolonization is possible.
2.7 Patience Young Grasshopper

This is not a simple process and there are no step-by-step instructions on how to “Decolonize and Indigenize,” although that would make a great colonial slogan. This is not a quick process and I must be aware that decolonization “is not a metaphor for other things [I] want to do to improve our societies and schools” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 1). It is not a substitute for other issues and must continue to move and address the imbalance of power systems that exist because of colonization. Instead, Grande (2004) explains, decolonization “begins by recognizing the privileges inherent to [my] own positionality” and “examines the ways in which [my] ‘social and historical location’ shapes [my] work” (p. 201). As mîmiyâskwêw, I need to come to terms with the privilege that is embodied in the position I hold and see the negative assets this evokes when sitting in spaces that are not mine to dominate.

In 1998, Peggy McIntosh’s essay made impact when she named White privilege in the academic world. Since then, privilege identifiers are not only associated with race or gender but instead are named based on multiple layers of interrelated identifiers. Class, sexual orientation, religion, education, ability, age and other identifiers inform our relationships to one another based on hierarchy and power (Au, 2012; Husband, 2012; Kumashiro, 2000, 2015; Leonardo, 2009; Marx, 2004; McIntyre, 1997; Tupper, 2011, 2014). Decolonization involves a process of seeing myself in a true light of privilege and understanding how these complexity are interwoven into community. I believe an important part of this process is decolonizing through Indigenous understandings rather than settler deconstruction in understanding these identifiers.
Being mōniyāskwēw holds power that I have not always been aware of. I am a white, female, Christian, straight, Eastern European, able bodied, university educated, cis-gendered person. So what? What does that mean when I put myself in community? What does that mean as mōniyāskwēw? For example, in asserting myself as a female in terms of privilege I associate myself with some western-feminist views of equality. However, in asserting myself as a female in Indigenous community, I must understand that these are complex waters to navigate and that feminist views are not always relational to traditional teachings that have been grounded in community prior to colonialism. These teachings show me that there are certain spaces I may or may not hold as a woman as there is deep respect for the role of women. This cannot be viewed in the same light as discrimination or equal rights for women because the teachings surrounding the roles of women and men are grounded in spiritual understandings. Being non-Indigenous, I must recognize it is not my place to assert my feminist views into these spaces as a result of my lack of understanding traditional teachings.

These are complex spaces to navigate and it is difficult to deconstruct these understandings using settler theory and I believe it is NOT my place to attempt this as a non-Indigenous women. This conversation alone is dangerous territory for me to be writing about. And my only intent in bringing forth this example is to clarify there are spaces I will not, and should not, try to assert myself in. There are stories I will share later in my thesis that are directly related to these learnings that further highlight the importance of learning traditional teachings as a pathway to decolonization and the complexity of spaces I hold as mōniyāskwēw. These are the teachings I feel I need to explore further when understanding what spaces I hold teaching Indigenous Studies and
in my work towards decolonization. To learn, I must be directly engaged with community. Therefore, I must make a commitment to learn more about the community I teach in and how that is directly related to who I am as mōniyāskwēw teaching Indigenous Studies. In doing so, I must explore my own story, myself within this story, how I am relationally connected to community and how community is relationally connected to me. And ultimately, I must inquire into how this impacts how I teach and the spaces I hold as mōniyāskwēw.

2.8 Where do I begin?

As I completed my literature review, I knew my research needed to be grounded in these same understandings. My work must open up a space to decolonize. Indigenous methods and methodologies should be foundational to my study. And at the heart, I must explore what the journey looks like for me as mōniyāskwēw. Engaging in self-study provides me the foundation to do this. I feel it is important that I bring understanding to what this pathway has looked like for me in hopes that it may offer others knowledge or guidance of where to begin and how to walk. Through the completion of this reflective literature review, I was able to develop a pathway for research to explore the spaces I hold as mōniyāskwēw walking the path to becoming an educator who embodies essential teachings embedded in Indigenous Education.
Chapter 3: tâpwêwin

kâkisimôwin

pimohcêwin

nanâskomowin

The title of this chapter is tâpwêwin because my students use this word often when we are in discussions together. “Tâpwê Sadowsky. Tâpwê,” they would say. When I asked what this meant they said, “there is truth in what you say.” I found this very powerful. This understanding can be found discussed by the Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan (2000) and I have heard it echoed in community many times. I felt it was appropriate to use this word in order to explain the analysis of my research as I move towards speaking truthfully about my place as môniyâskwêw.

3.1 What Dreams May Come

Through the (re)telling of stories of tension, I embarked on a self-study that interrogated the moments of tension I faced as a non-Indigenous woman teaching Indigenous Studies and how holding this space(s) transformed my pedagogy and epistemology. I inquired into these stories using Indigenous teachings as a theoretical framework of analysis. Self-study grounded in Indigenous methodologies opened up a pathway of deep learning for me to question, engage and interrogate my understanding of decolonization and the spaces I hold as môniyâskwêw. In moving towards miskâsowin I was able to create understandings of my place within the Indigenous Education world.

The research idea came to me in a dream. It was after a very difficult day of being challenged by colleagues about sharing school data with students. In my classroom
we had been discussing the graduation rates of First Nations, Metis and Inuit students and this had been deemed inappropriate by some of my colleagues once they caught wind of it. That night I had a very vivid dream. The words I heard repeating over and over were, "tell your stories... look at pedagogy... decolonize! Who are you in these spaces? Talk about that!" It felt right and it was clear what I needed to do. Cajete (1994) explains:

“True learning results from deep motivation, the desire to obtain something for which one cares deeply, down to the bones, with one's whole heart and soul” and this “intention is energized and guided by one's innermost conscious and unconscious thoughts and feelings.” (p. 69)

I have come to understand that in starting with myself, I am honouring the Indigenous pathways that have been guiding me thus far on my journey. I knew it was important I listen to this dream and share my stories as a way of coming to know my research.

By sharing honestly and openly my journey of being môniyâskêw in this space, I hope to offer possibilities for others, even though in doing so I render myself vulnerable. When sharing my stories, Clandinin (2013) reminds me that there is much to be learned. She states, “I have come to rethink moments of tension and the educative promise these moments hold when we risk making ourselves vulnerable by inquiring into them” (p. 76). Thus, I have dug into my lived experiences and through story, shared this journey.

I have come to understand the importance of telling my stories as a way to shine light for others navigating these pathways, but also as a means of healing myself. In the end, my research is but a glimpse into these understandings, as the learning journey is never finished. I am a life long learner along with those I teach. It is my hope the work I have done will give back in a larger way as to honor Indigenous community and what
has been shared with me. This work cannot simply be about improving my own practice but instead offer insight for other educators to evolve in their own practice in empowering Indigenous pathways. I want to make my thesis accessible to community both in language and understanding so that others may engage in the sharing of what I have learned. These understandings are reflected in the methodological pathways and methods I have chosen to carry out my research.

Placing Indigenous understandings as foundational to my work, and learning with community about distinct protocols, teachings and knowledge is vital. It helps to keep cultural practices in community strong and helps me avoid the colonial practice of taking what I need for my use and appropriating it within my work (Whiteman, 2009). This was essential knowledge when embarking on my research. Engaging in traditional teachings, language and pedagogy is continual on my journey and guides my steps. I acknowledge that I am still learning as I begin this life long learning process and I have put forth my pathway with deep respect for my learning.

Throughout my research, I engaged and connected with Indigenous researchers and those honoring Indigenous practices to guide me. I did this in the best way I knew how. Just as when I began to teach Indigenous Studies at my school, I approached this research and prayed for guidance from students, kêhtê-ayak, community members, family and colleagues. I sought guidance from those creatures and beings that exist in this physical world and beyond. The importance of being spiritually attuned to our world is something I have always believed in and sought throughout this research. Indigenous methodologies provided me pathways for doing so in the academic world.
3.2 miskâsowin: Centering the Research

I chose to reflect on my experiences of tension as a way to engage with my research. I have come to understand that these moments offer opportunities to explore the spaces created to engage in transformation. And although I am tempted to shy away from these moments and view them as having negative consequences, I am encouraged instead to embrace these moments and experience them as possible growing points. Clandinin (2013) and Clandinin & Connelly (2000) suggest an inquiry space comes to life when we open up and explore the intersectionality of our moments of tension.

In Huber, Huber & Clandinin (2004), their focus was to, “understand what happens in moments of tension where children’s and teachers’ stories to live by are seen to be resisting stories of school” (p. 181). The study shared insight into how the awakening to stories of resistance directly impacted how they carried themselves within the classroom space. In deconstructing these stories they were able to find meaning in their present behavior. They explained, “these moments can be understood as moments where we are telling and retelling our stories of who we are and who we are becoming in the midst of storied landscapes, landscapes which may seem nonsensical to us” (p. 194). I appreciated this study, as I too wanted to dig into these moments of tension to understand how my pedagogy was being impacted as I found my space as môniyâskwêw.

Instead of ignoring, avoiding or forgetting, the goal is to move through these emotionally loaded experiences and feelings to reach new learning about myself, and the world around me. These moments allowed me to interrogate the space I hold as môniyâskwêw. In doing so, I understood it was important I seek that centering place where understanding lies. My supervisor Angelina Weenie introduced me to the
nêhiyawêwin word miskâsowin and I carried this understanding with me throughout my research. In the book *Treaty Elders*, they explain *miskâsowin* as “finding ‘Ones Self’ or finding ‘One’s Center’” (Cardinal & Hildebrandt, 2000, p. 21). However, she is helping me understand that the story of this word embodies much more and it is on this research journey I am learning the importance of finding that center. For, “the centering place is a preparation for the holistic journey of learning based on the understanding of one's own creative spirit and capacity” (Cajete, 1994, p. 196). It is at this center that allows me to begin to understand the transformation that has been occurring within me.

In moving towards *miskâsowin*, I am beginning to understand how moments of tension have shifted and shaped who I am becoming as an educator. And although initially I wanted to tell the stories of my students, I have come to realize it is difficult to do so from an authentic place when I am not sure of how I myself am interwoven into these stories. It is important that I first start to navigate these waters before I try to tell the stories of others. Indigenous understanding has helped me to see that it is important that I begin from a place of self. The journey begins with me. I must make it known, however, that the student’s stories have been an integral part of this journey, and as stated in Weenie (2010), “it is proper and ethical to tell only my own story, but in the process of telling my story, I will undoubtedly implicate others” (pg. 11).

### 3.3 Come Walk with Me: Data Collection Methods

My self-study used three main methods as data collection for my research: (1) **Prayer walks**, (2) **Teaching Stories** and (3) **Reflective journaling**. I chose these methods as ways to honor Indigenous methodologies. As demonstrated in Derry (2005), Diamond
& Halen-Faber (2005), King (2004), Weenie (2010), and Whiteman (2009) these methods provide opportunity to engage holistically with the research. It was important to embrace these methods as they opened up possibilities of engaging with my research mentally, emotionally, physically and spiritually.

**Prayer Walks**

My prayer walks play a very important role for me in my reflections and have done so for many years prior to my thesis journey. I like to take walks. I always have. It is my time to reflect, decompress and to pray. Often when I walk there is insight that seems to be given to me. I am grateful for this and continue to give thanks. I have used prayer walks to contemplate the ways I teach and to reflect on my teaching stories. It is on many of my walks that I have come to understand the direction of my path or have identified teachings within the tensions of the day. I am often pulled by the sound of a tree, a forging rabbit or a glimmer of light. I take photographs sometimes to encrypt these memories. This is important for further contemplation, thought and reflection.

Upon reflecting during the prayer walks, guidance appears and helps me to shift in my teaching practices. Cajete (1994) explains this as integral to the journey. That seeking guidance before acting is vital in shifting our practice. He assures that “prayer, deep reflection, patience and ‘waiting for the second thought’ are regularly practiced in Indigenous decision making” (p. 225). This method felt appropriate for my exploration.

Prayer, dreams and other methods that are metaphysical are important intuitive pathways for me. Morrisseau’s (2005) explanation of the House of Invention would suggest what is written in my thesis has been given to me through methods such as this;
that my story is already written within me and I must seek to engage in transformation to find it. Ermine (2000) reminds me, “Aboriginal epistemology is grounded in the self, the spirit, the unknown. Understanding the universe must be grounded in the spirit” and “prayer extracts relevant guidance and knowledge from the inner-space consciousness” (p. 109). I engaged prayer as an essential method used in my research journey to embody deeper understanding of myself (Absolon, 2011; Aluli-Meyer, 2008; Ermine, 2000; 2003; 2007; Morriseau, 2005; Weenie, 2010; Whiteman, 2009; and Wilson, 2008).

Each day for four months I took a walk after my teaching day was finished. I walked along the lake near my home. Before I began my walk I would pray and set an intention based on a moment of tension I experienced during that day. For example:

One day I had a rather rough interaction with a student about how I was teaching. He wanted to know why I was awakening deep emotion in students. He was mean and direct in his words. They stung me. “Why do you wanna teach this way?” Each day he came he would repeat the question, “Who are you to call my people Indians?” and “I just can’t accept what a white person is saying.” That day, I walked and reflected on the deeper meaning of what he was trying to teach me alongside what we were trying to do in the class. These understandings seemed to be in direct conflict in my heart. I was offended, angered and hurt that he was pushing back. For several years, the class had grown in attendance and students sought out the class because we were learning in this way. Why should I care what he thinks? On my walk I asked myself, what was I missing? What was he trying to show me? As I walked that day I remember sitting and pausing. I was crying. The wind was blowing on my face bringing forth a sharp sting. Ouch! I opened up to something deeper. Why was I hurt? Who had I been hurting? What was I bringing to life when evoking these deep emotions? I knew I needed further inquiry into this interaction. He was trying to show me the spaces I had unintentionally opened up teaching in this way - (March 15th, 2017)

Reflecting on this experience proved vital when later that semester I encountered another adversary at a conference when I was presenting. He challenged me on what gave me the right to be speaking about Indigenous Studies. I was able to respond to the challenge in a good way. I realized later that evening that without my student questioning me earlier in
the semester, I would not have been prepared to answer the question at the conference. Upon further reflection, I was able to conclude that sometimes I need adversaries to keep me honest and to keep me doing things in a good way.

This example illustrates how I used moments of tension in order to provide intentions for my prayer walks. Recognizing what is happening in these moments of tension is central to my learning. If no moment of tension was experienced throughout my day, I would look at old student projects from Indigenous Studies to trigger moments of tensions to reflect upon that had happened in years leading up to the research. On my weekends I would review old journals I had written over the last six years of teaching Indigenous Studies to trigger moments of reflections to set my intention. I found that often memories from prior years triggered relational understandings of present moments.

As I walked I would make mental notes of any ideas, images, or understandings that came to me. I would collect these notes on my iPhone for convenience and transfer them to my computer once at home. I would also use my iPhone to capture photographs of moments that shifted my reflections. During my walks, I would often stop and sit down and close my eyes. I would be mindful of any teachings that were coming. It is important to understand I did not always walk on the path as I have a habit of veering off into the trees or bushes to connect with nature and deeper learning. Teachings would appear as thoughts, in aspects of nature, the environment and even daydreams.

Yellow Bird (2012) in his work about neurodecolonization, describes mindfulness as “being deeply aware of what is happening from moment to moment, outside and inside [myself], without judging or attaching to the content, feelings, and emotions that arise” (p. 67). Indigenous peoples have engaged in these processes long
before colonial systems banned ceremony and discouraged mindful practices in connecting with the creator. He further elaborates on how when I engage in mindfulness “[I] can delete the old ineffective neural networks in [my] brain and activate new empowering ones” (p. 81). This became fundamental when discarding colonial knowledge, stress and trauma that had been created from my experiences.

This understanding was important when taking my prayer walks. It was important that I let go of the self-talk and stories that were running through my mind, and instead open myself up to new knowledge that could emerge when I cleared my neuro pathways. I needed to be open and aware, welcoming in knowledge that appeared from the physical and metaphysical world around me. After my walk, I would record additional notes about what was significant to understanding what was shifting within my pedagogy and space as mōniyáskwêw. Sometimes it would come in the form of a journal, random thoughts, a story, poem or drawing. I collected these reflections for four months.

**Teaching Stories**

My teaching stories became a vital source of research for inquiry. They were key in choosing reflective intentions during my prayer walks. After an experience at school I would often write down my teaching stories. It was from these stories that I was able to go back to engage in deeper critical reflections. Iseke (2013) explains:

“In storytelling, we can become who we are meant to be. In the stories we tell of who we are, where we come from, what we understand, and how we belong, we make ourselves and our connections to our world.” (p. 573)

In studying self it is natural to dig into the stories of my lived experiences and how I live within these stories. In doing so, this opened up possibilities to study my shift in
pedagogy. Clandinin (2013) explains that, “we need to inquire into all of these kinds of stories that have become intertwined, interwoven into who we are and are becoming” (p. 22). As I inquired into these stories I would search for tensions, dilemmas and bumping points that had brought me to my current understanding of my experiences. I would then choose an intention for my prayer walk from these understanding.

I found it fascinating to reread some of my teaching stories and find that when I initially wrote them down, the feelings, emotions, thoughts and processes were from a very emotional subjective place. When reflecting more critically I was able to pull out new understandings that were outside of myself. I wondered how many times I had told that story and not seen what was really taking place. My teaching stories as a source of critical reflection and setting of intentions for my prayer walks played an extremely important role in my research.

Although these are just my everyday stories I have chosen to engage with what Benjoe (2017) explains as “acimowina (everyday stories)—the stories of individual’s experiences” (p. 25) are transformative and lay the ground work for understanding, compassion, empathy and growth. By telling my stories, I am choosing to make myself vulnerable knowing that truths may be revealed that could build understanding and movement forward within others and myself. He elaborates, “the act of story-telling not only heals the individual telling the story, but also the listener who bears witness to that testimony” (Benjoe, 2017, p. 25).

I also understand that there is responsibility once I tell these stories, as there are those who are implicated in my stories. Thomas King (2003) reminds me, “stories are wondrous things. But they are dangerous” (p. 9). So in sharing my teaching stories and
reflections, I have carefully chosen specific examples to be sure to not publicly implicate others. The stories I have chosen to share through my reflective process are ones that are difficult but I feel they illuminate the path I have been walking. In these stories, I have found truths in who I am as mõniyâskwêw.

**Reflective Journals**

I chose to write reflective journals as a way to engage with my prayer walks and moments of tension. Using journaling is useful for reflection and critical inquiry. During and after my prayer walks I would write thoughts, notes and ideas that came into knowing. My reflective journals provided a foundation for the analysis during my self-study. As Absolon (2011) explains, “stepping back for a while provided time and space to mentally, emotionally, spiritually and physically breathe, contemplate and reflect on the process” (pg. 34). The journals laid the foundation to engage with my experiences in a holistic way allowing me to critically inquire into my place as mõniyâskwêw (LaBoskey, 2007; Loughran, 2007; O’Reilly-Scanlon, 2000; Russell, 2009).

In addition, my reflections were not only written. They also unfolded in the forms of artwork, photographs, poetry and story. As demonstrated in Derry (2005), Diamond & Halen-Faber (2005), King (2004), Weenie (2010), and Whiteman (2009) these methods provided opportunity to engage holistically with the research and honor Indigenous pathways. Empowering Indigenous methodologies is encouraged as Morrisseau (2005) explains, “music and art are very healing things for people. So we allow ourselves to become instruments or channels for the Inner Master or spirit, so that we may inspire others” (p. 18).
3.4 (Re)Searching

At the end of four months, I revisited all of my reflections. I printed them out and worked tactilely with them. At this point, I would pray before I began the inquiry process. Each time, I would smudge with the braid of sweetgrass that had been gifted to me when I first started my research journey. I felt it was important to continue to seek guidance through prayer as I worked with the data. Using medicines to clear my mind is something I have done prior to the research and knew was necessary to continue.

I gathered the reflections together and laid out folders on my office floor. I sat and worked with my reflections, as I wanted to physically be with my data. I believed it was important in experiencing my research this way. Working with the reflections physically often triggered further reflections, memories, ideas, and thoughts. I would write further reflections when this occurred. I believe there is a spirit in the research data. When engaged holistically it allows me to interact with the data in a good way.

During this time, I sat on my office floor surrounded with folders. I had labeled these folders with themes I thought might emerge. I started to sort the reflections based on themes often cutting them up into pieces, as parts of the reflections would belong in different folders. I would reprint a reflection if I felt it belonged in more than one folder. As I read through my reflections and pulled out themes, more and more folders started to emerge with new themes. At one point I had 20 different folders. In the end, I was able to hold onto five themes that resonated over and over again as I repeated the process.

The next step was to analyze my data. For this step, I developed a holistic framework of analysis. I revisited my reflections once again searching for points of inquiry using the framework. In identifying these points of inquiry, I was working with
the reflections in a holistic way that allowed for deeper engagement. This was a process I came to know through a culture camp during one of my graduate classes. Engaging with my data mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually allowed for a thorough process of analysis to occur.

3.5 miskâsowin: Framework of Analysis

In seeking miskâsowin, it was important I embed holistic understanding while interrogating my data. A holistic framework allowed this process to unfold creating a pathway to guide me in exploring and engaging with my research. The holistic questioning developed follows the medicine wheel teachings and was adapted from a framework I received during my ED 821/822 class with Dr. Angelina Weenie and William Ermine in July 2017. The framework had been developed by the Indigenous Education Faculty to support holistic thinking and understanding. We were given the framework to use to deepen our reflective practices during a four-day culture camp at Sturgeon Lake First Nations. It was at this camp where deeper understanding of analysis occurred for me. As a result, setting miskâsowin at the center of the framework is a foundational underpinning of the self-study.

I have chosen the concept of miskâsowin to build a framework of analysis around. It is in seeking miskâsowin I think I may begin to understand the transformation that has been occurring within me. By interrogating my holistic layers, I started to move towards finding my center. Such holistic framework understandings and models can be found in the works of Fowler (2006), Goulet & Goulet (2014), Graveline (1998),
O’Reilly-Scanlon, Crowe & Weenie (2004), Kovach (2009), and Weenie (2010). Their works inspired my framework to emerge.

Using these understandings I developed the *miskásowin* holistic framework:

![Diagram of miskásowin framework of analysis](image.png)

Although separated into spiritual, mental, emotional and physical questioning, it is important to note that they are all interconnected. The following questioning was used to guide my research inquiry:

- **ahcâhkowi (spiritual):** Was anything triggered by this experience? How am I seeing myself in this moment? Did anything shift within me after this experience?

- **mâmîtoneyihcikan (mental):** Why am I choosing to tell this story? What impact did this experience have on my view of space? What did I learn from this experience?
mosihtâwin (physical): How did this experience shift (or not) my pedagogy? How did this experience shift (or not) my relationship with community? What else shifted after this experience?

mosihowin (emotional): What did I learn from this experience about myself? What did emotions prevent me from seeing at the time of the experience?

Volitional Insight: What assumptions have I made? How would I use this experience in my future teaching? How did this experience shape me? Why is this experience important for me to write about?

These guiding questions allowed entrance spaces for inquiry as I moved towards understanding my place as móniyâskwêw.

3.6 Searching for miskâsowin

It is important to understand, my process begins and ends with prayer: always. For four months, I collected my reflections on my prayer walks setting intentions from moments of tension that occurred within my teaching day. My reflections came in the form of story, poems, drawing, photographs and reflective journal. After four months, I sorted the reflections into themes. Using miskâsowin as a framework, I searched for deeper understanding of my place as móniyâskwêw as I analyzed and inquired into my reflections. All the while, prayer was central.

Because the process is a holistic and cyclical experience, I struggled to find a way to represent this in my thesis. Despite first organizing my reflections into specific themes followed by analysis, I found this extremely off putting. Each reflection often highlighted several emerging themes at a time so I felt it did not make sense to deconstruct them in such a segregated way. Instead, the reflections that I offer are embedded throughout my thesis. Some are the original data I collected during my four
months of prayer walks. Others are reflections that emerged while sorting through the data and some are reflections that were written prior to my thesis journey that I was reminded of during the research process. Dates have been attached to show this cyclical process but do not appear in any particular chronological order, as they did not surface in that way. The entire process of data collection, inquiry and analysis was extremely holistic and cyclic. The illustration below demonstrates the pathway I followed:

![Diagram](attachment:image.png)

*Figure 3.2 searching for miskâsowin*
3.7 Becoming Vulnerable: Sharing My Stories

For the purpose of closing this chapter, I have decided to share four examples of the data I collected. The reflections and stories have been written using different fonts to evoke a creative intuitive element. After each example, I have demonstrated inquiry points that were identified and analyzed using my holistic framework. These are written in point form, half sentences, and scattered thoughts. They offer questions that I further engaged with during my inquiry process. These inquiry points often resulted in further prayer walks, reflections and ultimately the themes I share in my analysis. These reflections were selected to highlight holistically inquiry points that emerged based on my teaching stories and reflective journaling. I offer them as conclusion to this chapter.

December 22nd, 2017: Why The Fuck Is My Auntie Hanging On The Wall?!

This experience has shaken me to my core. I feel as if everything I have been learning has come to a head. As I reflect, I am going in circles trying to ask myself if I could have or should have done things differently. Indigenous knowledge systems hold power and traditional teachings have deep understandings. So how does one navigate this in a colonial institution? Maybe I should have kept my mouth shut. But when community comes and directly asks you for help, what do you do?

I will tell the story but I must be very careful not to harm anyone in the process. Too many people have been hurt through its process already. I am still hurting. I cry about it. A lot. But it feels as if my tears are coming from a deep place that is not my own. This all unfolded due to a project of reconciliation. Several Indigenous students had become concerned about the manner in which it was being carried out. It went against some of their cultural teachings and they were worried about how it might impact families because community is small. The faces of the Missing and Murdered women were being drawn and their stories shared alongside. It was a project to honor. But these students did not feel honored. They were hurting. Many still are.

Students were coming to me for weeks with questions and discussions. This is how my room is. It is a safe space to question things. One student had taken her artwork home and shared the project with her family. She said, “I don’t feel I should draw this woman. I feel like I need permission from her family.” Another young man said, “if I see my auntie’s face up there, I am gonna be very angry. It’s too fresh. Too fresh.” I suggested the students talk to their teachers. I wanted to avoid stepping on toes and I felt it was important I did not speak FOR the students.
I became directly involved the day I saw the projects being hung. Something inside me shifted. I asked if they thought it was a good idea to put it out to community? Had they asked the Elder? What about students who might be triggered? I shared some stories about how small community was and the events that evolved when we did a similar project four years earlier. There was a lot that came out of it and without community support it could have been considered disrespectful and hurtful. Looking back, I can understand why this may have been perceived as offensive or aggressive towards the teachers but I was doing my best to navigate the waters.

They spoke to the Elder. A smudging of the portraits took place. And they were displayed. Something was shifting. I said to the teachers, “we have brought these things to life, and now we have a responsibility to care for them.” What happens now I thought...

My classes discussed the project the next day as many students were triggered. Words like recolonization and revictimization emerged. One student said, “if they are going to do a project that honors us, it NEEDS to involve us.” Another student said, “this hurts me. I don’t want to see those faces. It goes against my teachings about how we humanize our people.” Another wondered, “did they get permission?” I take full responsibility for the conversations that took place within my classroom that day. Rumors started to fly that I was bashing the project, harassing teachers, dividing the school and I had organized a mob.

I stopped and I prayed for helpers. I cried. I truly believe, those prayers were heard. At noon a group of students showed up angry and upset in my room. The young woman looked at me with tears and said, “Why the Fuck is my auntie hanging on the wall?” I told them they needed to go and see the teachers involved. At that point, I had been warned to step back.

A large group of students had formed demanding answers. And when they could not find the teachers involved the students ended up standing in front of the display and refusing to move. Despite most of the students being respectful, some heavy words were exchanged with some staff members and non-Indigenous students. The young girl was crying asking “why couldn’t you have drawn her with what she loved? She loved flowers? She loved to laugh. She was a mother. Why did you have to draw her face?” Many people did not understand what was happening and said “but it is honoring you!” The young woman said, “This doesn’t honor us. If we say it doesn’t honor us, it doesn’t honor us.”

In the end, I was blamed for starting the “protest”.

As I write this, there are many teachers who still will not speak to me.

The next day, we gathered the students in the auditorium and had a healing circle. In the week that followed, the students and teachers met to decide what should be done with the portraits. I had an opportunity to talk with the elder after everything calmed down. He said, “Kim, you should have called me.” He was right. We had always had a good relationship but I was unsure how to walk. I did not want to step over boundaries, as I had not initiated the project. But I know better now. Indigenous peoples are distinct in community, family and individuals. These are tricky waters to navigate. I should have reached out for support.
I am saddened to a degree by the events that unfolded. But also proud of those girls for standing up for what they believed. I’m proud of the staff that allowed them to be heard. Who stood and listened. We had awoken something. Voices needed to be heard.

Indigenous families have had many things taken from them without permission. It is part of the systemic cycle of colonial violence. It was not just about the faces of the women or permission. The grief runs deep for many reasons and learning these layers is part of reconciliation. If the process was quick, we would have done it years ago. Trauma runs deep. And much healing is needed. That is why we must be so very careful in how we walk and what we open up. Our scars and wounds shape us. These things are not new and so we walk careful. In the end, there is so much more learning to come. The most important thing is moving forward together. Rebuilding our community. Raising awareness about what is important. I honestly believe this happened for a reason.

I am truly sorry for any pain I caused others during this experience. I came offering my personal input, and guidance as raised from students and their families, and although my intentions were good, people got hurt. I wrote a long email to apologize to the teachers. And I apologized to the students for my role. My Indigenous students said, “why are you apologizing? You were trying to help us? Yup, always the Indians apologizing. White people don’t know how to apologize.” I said, I felt it necessary to take ownership for my role. tipéyimisowin. Maybe in modeling, we can teach others, it is okay to make mistakes. My greatest learnings have come from such things. And I know I need to walk more softly next time. I pray others will do the same.

Inquiry using Holistic Framework: February 18th, 2018

ahcâhkowi (spiritual): I am deeply wounded. There is something heavy in my spirit. I am confused deeply about my space. I have hurt people by trying to protect my First Nations students. People are angry with me. They will not speak to me. My fire feels as if it is dying. I want to run away. I know I do not belong here. I cannot imagine how students feel. I am seeing something deeper within these spaces. Something has been brought to life.

mâmînîyihcikan (mental): The voices of the students need to be heard. They have been silenced in the name of reconciliation. I am confused who I should listen to. I am confused what has transpired. I am uncertain why their voices were not listened to. I have learned that we will silence voices in the name of reconciliation.

mosihtâwin (physical): I will walk alone if I have to if it means lifting student voices higher. I know I MUST absolutely engage with community during projects of reconciliation. I can no longer walk blindly. I understand permission is necessary each and every time I enter into intimate spaces. I cannot and should not believe there is not enough time to do things in a good way. There is ALWAYS time.

mosihowin (emotional): I do not feel safe. I reacted with emotion trying to advocate. I turned to prayer. I am angry now. I am hurt. I have realized how tired I am. How wounded I feel. I know I need to work on healing. I am connecting these emotions to how Indigenous peoples feel in the system. I cannot begin to understand how resilient one must be to encounter these experiences
daily. I know in being angry it has helped me see that I should not be weak but instead stand for the things I have come to know. In being hurt, I hide away and did not stand strong when my students needed me. Because I was emotional I did not walk in a good way. I should have sought the help of others in community. I should not have been worried about stepping on non-Indigenous toes. I understand now that the teachers were doing what they thought was best. There were good intentions but people were harmed. I should not have thought it was my place to guide. I should have sought guidance and support.

Volitional Insight: I have assumed that other people walking these pathways are at the same place as me. This was a mistake. I thought in discussing bringing things to life people would understand the importance of spiritual protocols. I took for granted that others would be walking in a good way and engaging with community. In the future I will walk more carefully in guiding others. I will be patient and kind. But I will also be stronger when people refuse to listen. This experience highlighted for me the layers of complexity that exist walking in institutional spaces with spiritual teachings. Doing the work of reconciliation with no guidance from students, families, and community is NOT walking in a good way. I see the elders role as complex as one voice does not give permission for many families. I understand the importance in seeking permission when sharing intimate stories. And I understand that there are many stories that are not mine to share. Permission is key in sharing stories.

June 3rd, 2017: What Do You See?

This artwork was created during an exercise in one of my grad classes while learning about the work of Norval Morrisseau. It organically emerged. I was blocked at first. I did not know what to draw. And then I just closed my eyes and breathed. I knew I wanted to draw a moon and a tree. These are two beings that guide me. The moon has always been important in my life. She seems to always be there when I need her. No matter where I was in the world, she was shining down letting me know it was okay. And the trees help me stay grounded. They know so much. They have so much to share. So that is where I started.
I placed myself on the ground praying because I am pitiful. I am struggling. I am learning. I am thankful. I am asking for help. When I am hitting my low moments on this journey, I always sit and pray in the trees and to the moon when I see her. I feel grounded. I feel connected. The lines that connect me to the tree and to the moon also connect to one another because we are all interconnected. And our hearts and our spirits impact the flow of energy. I am not separate from their journey nor theirs from mine. And I wanted to represent that interconnectedness in my artwork.

I used only four colors. Green, blue, red and yellow. All of the symbols: the human, the tree and the moon embody all of these colors because we are all interconnected giving and receiving from one another. I am green because Mother Earth grounds me and teaches me. It is where I feel the safest. It is where I find peace. My spine or foundation is water. I am a water sign (Cancer) and the moon is my friend. She too is influenced by the ebb and flow of the water and the water is influenced by her. As a human, I have come to understand, Water Is Life. We cannot exist without it. This is also represented in the spine of the tree which is embodied within the roots. And the energy globes that hang from the branches. The moon embodies all the colors and is a powerful being. We are all interconnected with the RED line of passion pumping through our heart spirit.

You will notice my heart is lower near my stomach. I believe that when we say ‘listen to your heart’ we are not really talking about the emotional one as that one can deceive us. We are talking about the spirit of it. And I think that exists a little lower down. I believe this because it is that sensation that guides me from a place below my heart but above my stomach. A place of deep intent. Deep intuition.

I was sad looking at my final piece all smudged up with smeared marker. But then I remembered, nothing is a mistake. Nothing is by accident. And I smiled. It was almost as if those shadows of messiness represented the ‘invisible’ energies, or ethical spaces that exists between us. (I am going to pretend that was on purpose! Hahahaha!) The yellow background and pieces that exist remind me that the LIGHT is always stronger. NOTHING in this universe was created to hurt or harm us. We MUST walk in a good way to live in harmony with every being. To be KIND and know that the harm we inflict on others is harm to us as well. It is like the artwork, the ethical space, the energies are fluid and connected and one cannot walk alone or in harmony without the other. The energy we feed into the system influences and has ripple effects far beyond our grasp.

This is a portrait of me learning this understanding.

Inquiry using Holistic Framework: March 4, 2018

ahcâhkowi (spiritual): My grandmother passed away while writing this thesis. She shared with me that I was born on a very special day for Ukrainian people. The Green Festival or Ivana Kupala. What she told me is that everyone used to gather in the forest near a stream and stay awake all night. Very special and sacred things happen on that evening. Large fires are built and kept going all night. The trees are enchanted and move from place to place talking to each other. Even the animals can talk! The moon shines and all is magic. I do not know much about my Indigeneity and roots to the old country, but something about this speaks to me on a very deep level. I am not sure why she waited 37 years to tell me this. Maybe timing is everything.

mâmîtoneyinhcikan (mental): This portrait is from my spirit. I am not a good drawer but it emerged. I have learned there is knowledge within us that can emerge if we connect within
ourselves more deeply. Further than the mind. I have seen these experiences in my classroom. What story can best illustrate this for others? For the skeptics? We think so much with our minds. How can I write spirit into my thesis from an academic perspective?

*mosihtâwin (physical)*: Prayer is central to my process. I walk. I pray. I give thanks. How can I explain that this is also part of my pedagogy in teaching? Each day I pray for that guidance. Is spirit welcome in the classroom? It is there regardless. Building relationships with Indigenous peoples who live in this way has opened up projects to evolve deeply. I notice I am seeing this differently though. It is like I see ‘ugly’ in how people walk because they are not being respectful to the ethical space that dances between. Yes! I need to talk about ethical space.

*mosihowin (emotional)*: I was nervous to draw this artwork. I am not good at it. But it evolved and I am happy with it. I feel it speaks about who I am on a deep level. I feel crazy when I speak of these things. But learning about these teachings in the academic setting is empowering me with knowledge that I can use to battle the skeptics. I want to feel brave to tell these stories. I feel safest walking through the trees and sitting with the bunnies. Listening to what they have to say. When I pause my emotions rest and I can see more clearly what the message in the learning is. Can prayer walking be a model for others?

**Volitional Insight:** I know that people dismiss the idea of spirit. But I have witnessed spirit in my classroom bring projects to life and take on lives of their own. This indicates the necessity of ethical space. What happens when we bring things to life? Is it possible to help non-Indigenous educators form a deep respect for the interconnectedness that exists between all living things? I am wondering how much of this I can write in my final thesis. I must be very careful, as there are some things that are not meant to be written down. I cannot talk about spirit from an Indigenous standpoint because I am not Indigenous. But I can speak about how I have experienced the spirit work through me and within my classroom. How much can I say?

**January 27th, 2018: I am NOT Sorry. I am Angry.**

Why is it when YOUR students come armed with words like ‘white fragility’, ‘social justice’, ‘unsettling’ and ‘deconstructing’ they are being educated. They are being empowered. They are working towards reconciliation.

**But when Indigenous students come equipped with cultural knowledge and teachings, social justice vocabulary and empowered voices from their families and community...it is called COACHING!** Why is it when students talk about spirit and traditional teachings you become afraid? Why do you say it is INAPPROPRIATE? Why are you angry?

You accuse me of BRAINWASHING students... sending them to your classrooms as MESSENGERS. The accusations are too many to keep track of... People are afraid of me, I offend and disgust you... I AM DANGEROUS.

I feel like a child who is being chastised. But there is a fire in my soul. I will not stay silent!
I guess I must apologize. It must be my Indian Whisperer powers! I was using them for **EVIL** instead of **GOOD**. I am so very sorry. I forgot **THEIR** minds, community and families must be so **FEEBLE** that a white woman needed to guide them in how to **THINK**, what to **BELIEVE**, and how to **COMMUNICATE** with the outside world... **This disgusts me to my core.**

Sadly... These things you say about me are **NOT** new. And I am not the first to be called such names and accused of such things. This way of oppressing **CYCLES** and **CYCLES** and **CYCLES**. At first I thought it was **ME**. I really did. I thought maybe I was doing something wrong. Maybe I shouldn't be teaching certain things. But I have come to understand, it is **NOT** about **ME**! It is so much **BIGGER**.

You see... I teach... **NAY... I LEARN FROM...** the decedents of great chiefs, elders and **NATIONS**. The sons and daughters of chiefs and elders who live in **OUR** communities today. The decedents of ancestors whose knowledge is embodied in **RESILIENCE**, traditional teachings, beauty and strength. And **THEIR** knowledge and way of knowing **IS STILL HERE** and it guides **ME**! There is movement and empowerment within community and our students come into our buildings equipped with **CONFIDENCE**, **VOICE** and **STRENGTH**. Is this why you are **AFRAID**?

How dare you think **THEY** needed **ME** to **TELL** them **WHAT** to **SAY**. **HOW** to **THINK**, **HOW** to **BEHAVE**! You need to know... **I WILL NOT SILENCE THEIR VOICES. I WILL WELCOME THAT VOICE INTO A SPACE THAT IS SAFE AND EMPOWERING SO WE CAN MOVE TO UNDERSTANDING AND LEARNING.**

I am **NOT** sorry if this scares you.  
I am **NOT** sorry if this angers you.  
I am **NOT** sorry if you think this makes me a **DANGEROUS** educator.  

**STOP!** Listen to what you are saying? Can you hear it? Can you see it? Open your eyes! Indigenous knowledge is valued. Our students are coming **EMBODIED** in teachings. It is **ME** who is **LEARNING** from them. The balance of power shifted.

**WHO** do **YOU** think you are?! That you have such power that when an Indigenous student or educator comes to tell you how they **FEEL** about something you have done or said ...they are told that you **APPRÉCIATE** their perspectives but you **DISAGREE**! Why do you get to decide on the qualifiers of what is acceptable or not? These are **NOT** perspectives to agree or disagree! These are **FOUNDATIONAL** to who someone is as a **HUMAN BEING**! We are taught **NOT** to become the voice **OF** the oppressed. Yet we continue to tell them how they are supposed to **THINK**. Our words diminish Indigenous belief systems and illuminate how the **COLONIAL** system goes to great measures to keep their system **INTACT** even when looking in the faces of the individuals we are **HARMING**.

You say things like education is about taking **RISKS**. It’s about being **MESSY**. It’s about having **UNCOMFORTABLE** and **NECESSARY** conversations. As I watch and I listen time and time again I wonder if you are **TRULY** ready for those things. You wear it on your side like **ARMOR** but when the oppressed challenges you, you say these things as **PROTECTION** instead of truly **ENGAGING** in them. What happened to **RISK** taking? What happened to the **MESSY UNCOMFORTABLE** conversations? Why can **YOU** force people to have them,
but not engage with them? Isn’t EMPOWERING the voices of the OPPRESSED supposed to happen? Are YOU ready to take some risks? Are YOU willing to clean up the mess? YOU don’t get to decide the BOUNDARIES.

This is white privilege at its worst. Why worst? Cause we can’t even SEE it. And we are CLOAKING it in the guise of THEORY that is meant to disarm the OPPRESSOR. Instead we’ve found a way to COLONIZE these terms: to EMPOWER the theory for OUR benefit. To work towards decolonization and reconciliation and every other buzz word of the day that we lap up like thirsty animals going to save the world. Only to MISUSE and APPROPRIATE theory for our pleasure. We are CLEVER in keeping our position intact. We use MILLION dollar words in a way that privileges WHITENESS and REFRAMES colonization. And in doing so, we continue to RECOLONIZE.

I have gone thru many emotions. I am no longer sadden, hurt, or silent.

I am angry. I am NOT sorry if this offends you.

After all WE are not so DIFFERENT.

I am STILL móniyáskwêw

Inquiry using Holistic Framework: January 30th, 2018

ahcâhkowi (spiritual): My spirit feels angry. It is not hurt in this moment. It is like the grief has lifted and I am ready to fight again. Why did I cower away? Am I afraid of the professional consequences? Am I afraid that someone will take me to an ethics committee because I am pushing back? I feel pulled in what my spirit wants to scream and what my head thinks is safe. How do I reconcile these two extremes? Why do people think Indigenous knowledge is scary? I feel safe in this knowing. How can I share this in a way people will understand?

mâmîtoneyihcikan (mental): The things that others do that make me so angry, I have also done myself. In those moments did I stopped to listen to the ‘other’? What are they trying to help me see? It is about my own journey through the theoretical jargon and confusion of the academy. I know I have misused it and appropriated it for my own benefit at times.

mosihtâwin (physical): I have shifted away from using this language. It was too easy for me to cloak it in colonialism and move towards a path of further hurt and destruction. Without traditional teachings and people to guide me from community, I think I would still be walking the path of securing a ‘settler futurity’ without even realizing it. How can I inform others of this shift? How can I explain this? Why am I feeling such a resistance?

mosihowin (emotional): As I revisited the reflections over and over I become angry. I have been careful to not allow anger to become central to my story, but it is important to illuminate it as well. How can I do this in a good way that does not bring harm? The conversations I had with non-Indigenous educators directly or conversations I witnessed between non-Indigenous educators and Indigenous students, teachers, families and community members have left me questioning if we really want to learn. I am guilty of these actions, words, behaviors… I cannot just point the finger. How can I share in a way that illuminates this?
**Volitional Insight:** I assumed I am not guilty of these behaviors. But I am. When have I overstepped and cloaked my actions in colonial behavior? It is important I am vulnerable in my truth telling to help others see learning comes from mistakes. I know better now and I can see that this language does not ignite fire in my spirit. It takes me only to a place of mental awareness and sometimes emotional. I did not physically change my language. I did not spiritually shift within my knowing. I need to share this. But how?

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**May 26th, 2017: Ghosts in the Halls are Louder than Most**

Why don’t you come around anymore???? We used to chat all of the time. But now you do not even look at me in the hallway. You walk by my classroom and look inside… with a look of disgust, a laugh or a shrug you walk away…

What have I done? …my eyes are now open to something…

I start to notice more and more the comments floating around…

“*She is such a bully.*”
“*She’s an Indian Lover!*”
“*Why does she push that Indian stuff on us?*”
“*Whoa! She’s the new Indian Whisperer!*”
“*How come you only help the Brown kids?*”
“*Is that really appropriate to be teaching?*”
“*You preach hate to all white people!*”
“*She spreads anti white propaganda!*”
“*What do students even learn in that class?*”
“*How’s this going to help you in the real world?*”
“*Anyone could win the Governor General’s award.*”
“*She is dividing the school.*”
“*She’s setting Indian kids against us.*”
“*She brainwashes and coaches kids what to say.*”
“*She is a dangerous educator.*”

I want to quit! I want to run away. I am hurt. But wait… this has nothing to do with me!

There is something much bigger happening here. But what is it?! There’s been a lot of changes. Slowly community is getting strong. Fierce advocates are appearing. Voices emerge empowered and empower others. Energies and knowledge are shifting. This is beautiful. This is POWERFUL. This is STRONG. We are ALL joining together. We are learning from one another! Aren’t you excited?

What are you afraid of?

Maybe I do come across hard and aggressive. I advocate strong. I am passionate. If I ever hurt you, I am sorry. That was not my intention.
We were coming from very different places. But that didn’t mean we couldn’t have been friends. I wish more people had walked thru my door. It was always open to come share and learn.

My spirit is tired. Maybe this journey isn't supposed to be easy? My tears are falling hard. The spirit is awoken and is wounded. Maybe nothing will change………

Maybe lots already has…

Inquiry using Holistic Framework: September 16th, 2017

ahcâhkowi (spiritual): I am confused why people do not speak to me anymore? Why do they say mean things about the program? The spirit of the students is strong. Maybe I am pushing my colleagues too hard? Am I bully? Why is this hitting me so deeply? Think about this further. Pray. Do not carry this alone.

mâmitoneyihcikan (mental): There have been too many experiences like this. It is getting harder to come to school. Is anyone else experiencing these things? What is it that they are afraid of? Do I suck as a teacher? Why do I care what they think? What is really going on? This has nothing to do with me. Think about the system.

mosihtâwin (physical): I stay in my classroom. I work with my students. Even during lunch we discuss our learning. I have withdrawn from my colleagues. I have sought out supports in community. The school is feeling very lonely. But the students keep me going. I must surround myself with supports. Whoever I can find in the building that supports the students and what is happening. I will reach out to community and the families and students who I know. Don’t’ walk this alone.

mosihowin (emotional): I could not see that this had nothing to do with me. This is something bigger happening. I need to be stronger and know I cannot take colonialism personally! How do I grow thicker skin? I will continue to pray and reach out to community. Who else is feeling this way? How can I use this emotion in a good way? What is it I need to say?

Volitional Insight: I assumed that this was all about me. Typical! Ha! But I am seeing there is something deeper happening. I need to figure out what people are so afraid of. Why they are angry and pushing back. Is this what keeping the dominant intact looks like? Do they really think we are going to take over the school? I need to write about this because these things are not new. They need to be named, addressed and called out. Nothing will change if these cycles continue. If I leave… what happens? Is that the goal to get people to burn out or run away? Maybe not intentionally but it is happening.
Chapter 4: Moving Towards miskâsowin

In this chapter, I share my analysis. Using miskâsowin as a holistic framework of analysis to search and re-search, the following five themes emerged: iskotêw: Awakening the Spirit, I Detest What You Do: Staring into the Face of Resistance, “F the Haters! We Gotcha!”: Learning Alongside My Students, Stop Telling Our Stories For Us: sihtoskâtowin, and Keep Walking: Indigenous Knowledge as a Foundation to Resilience. Throughout my analysis I have embedded excerpts from my reflections. These have been written in a different font in order to distinguish their significance within the analysis.

4.1 iskotêw: Awakening the Spirit

Throughout my thesis journey, and within my teaching, I have felt spirit at work. This intuitive ability guides me. I believe this to be true. There are things that have taken place and knowledge that has emerged that I believe spirit was at work. One of the methods used often in my class is story. Opening up stories allows for lessons to unfold organically as the spirit of the story emerges. “Telling stories is a spiritual act”
(Whiteman, 2010, p. 7) and therefore it is important I value, care for and listen closely to stories. I have experienced these understandings many times as the simulation unfolded within my classroom. This is where allowing the spirit to guide became integral. It was intriguing how each semester things would organically emerge. Lessons would come to life both in the classroom and in my own learning.

I believe this was possible because this journey of teaching in a holistic way embodied in the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual began long before I arrived. It is important to honor and give thanks to those who came before me. I believe their spirits are within my learning. They have left pathways for me to follow. Each and every time a story was shared, either during the class or at noon when students would stop by and visit, ideas would emerge on how to continue with the simulation. We started to let spirit guide us, and the energy started to connect and draw us in. The energy took control and it was beautiful. An entire semester-long simulation evolved and continues to evolve. It became a way of teaching that would allow me to learn along with my students.

I remember vividly one semester during the simulation, the energy in the classroom became very heavy:

A student said to me, “why you gotta make us relive this! The past was painful enough!” We had been watching videos of the Water Protectors who had gathered at Standing Rock to resist the Dakota Access Pipeline. I remember hearing the officers’ yell “MOVE SOUTH,” as they forcefully pushed people back. My heart hurt. That very morning in the simulation I had been yelling those same words as the students lived out the experience of getting moved out of the way of the railroad. Was it possible we had awoken that spirit? It no longer felt appropriate to continue in a forceful way with the simulation. The students commented they felt they were feeling the spirit of those in Standing Rock. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students that semester chose for us to not ‘relive’ parts of the simulation because it was too deep. – (February 23rd, 2017)

I regret what was brought to life that day because it was hurtful. It was not fair to my students. I am learning that things come to life for a reason. I needed to be open to
learning. When I think about the damage I could have been doing year after year without knowing the stories and spirit that existed within my space, I understand it is vital that I am in constant reflection with students. What I learned is that there must be an existing relationship created before embarking on these learnings. I need to create spaces that are safe because when we open up our stories, we become vulnerable (Anuik & Gillies, 2012; Goulet & Goulet, 2014). I understand now, utmost respect, care and attention must be given when carrying out the simulation. I spend months of relationship building before we even begin. It is not something I can just throw kids into. It is necessary we adapt as we go. Some want the emotional piece deeply awakened, others do not. It is alive and I must always be checking in and paying attention to the emerging energies.

I have also come to understand empowering self-care is very important. This takes a lot more energy and maybe that is why educators teach in a western way as it rarely evokes more than the mental realm. I was not equipped as an educator to understand what I was awakening, so it was important that relationships with community formed so I could seek guidance and understanding. A student reminded me once, ‘this is NOT a game’. He was absolutely right. I cannot teach something or carry out a project that leaves my students or community in pieces. I think this is why the term messy bothers me so much. Because when I carry out projects and conversations meant to evoke uncomfortable feelings, I rarely thought about what happens when people leave the conversations or activities. Who cleans up the mess or hurt I have left in my path of learning? It is the aftercare that became extremely important in my awareness.

These experiences have taught me to be very mindful while sharing stories and living out the simulation. I offer guidance to other teachers who are sharing or doing
such activities. The Kairos Blanket Exercise is one such activity that comes to mind (https://www.kairosblanketexercise.org/). It is being used as a way quick way to engage people in extremely powerful learning as people reenact moments of Canadian history while standing on blankets. With every policy and event within our history, a small piece of the blanket is removed to illustrate the oppression of Indigenous peoples both with land base and in community. Participants are holistically engaged and the outcome can be very emotional. I believe we need to be mindful of what we open up when carrying out such experiences:

After taking part in the exercise, I sat with my students. Many of them were visibly rattled. Two non-Indigenous pre-service educators had led the exercise during a large gathering for reconciliation. At one point, the exercise was stopped and the students were given heck. They had been giggling and talking during the readings. A young Indigenous woman had been observing and yelled at the students, ‘how dare you be so disrespectful and not care about my people. This isn’t funny’. My students afterwards were so hurt. This was an entire class of First Nations students. These were their stories too. They had not known what they were taking part in. They had been hurried in; shoes removed and told to stand on blankets. Due to time constraints, directly afterward brief closing circles were held and they were given lunches and told to eat quickly to get to the next session. I sat with my students during lunch and asked them what had happened. One student said, “I didn’t know who these people were and all of a sudden two white girls were yelling at us. Cha…I started to visit with my friends during the part about foster care. I didn’t want to open that up so I was distracting myself.” Another student said, “My mosom always told me stories about how the y used to joke around at residential schools in their own language so the nuns couldn’t understand them. It was their way of surviving. I was telling jokes cause that is how I was taught to cope. I was laughing cause I didn’t want to cry.” – (April 14th, 2016)

Caring for those who have taken part or facilitated the activity is extremely vital. The caring needs to start before and continue on after the activity is over. Our experience with the exercise was not fair to the students. If I had known what was involved, I would have prepared with them, or had not participated at all. I apologized to them for putting them into the situation. I should have known better. They had many suggestions about how to make the exercise even stronger. From this experience, I believe it is not ethical
to awaken such things without further engaging in relational understanding, caring and community before, during and afterward. It is important I take the time to walk carefully.

Ermine (2007) reminds me that *ethical space* is an essential understanding when bringing to life our stories. The “unstated, unseen level of thought and feeling that is overwhelming” (Ermine, 2007, p. 195) begins to arise and opens up conversations that do not often get shared and we need to be aware of the energies that dance between us. I need to begin to come to an understanding of what capacity I have to ‘harm or enhance’ the wellbeing of my students with the stories we share in our spaces. There is spirit in this work and that is why I need to be careful what I bring to life. When I engage the spiritual, emotional, physical and mental realms together within my classroom, I need to understand I have a responsibility to care for what is brought to life. I know that re-traumatization can happen and I do not want to wound anyone’s spirit. I must also be careful of my own. Cote-Meeks (2014) explains, “vicarious trauma could potentially be experienced when one is exposed, through film, video or narratives, to elements of historical abuse, violence and trauma” (p. 31). Many educators and facilitators of activities that are created to engage the students holistically are not equipped or prepared to understand the responsibility of what is awoken. This was a deep learning for me.

The following experience is one that truly illuminates the power of story, spirit and the need to walk carefully:

After visiting the “Walking With Our Sisters” exhibit dedicated to the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, students became inspired to dig deeper. In the circle with our elder afterwards, many discussed the energy they could feel and the need to know more. The advocate and I arranged for a fellow colleague to come in and share her story. As we sat in the circle, student after student began to share as well. One young man bravely shared his story about his cousin who had gone missing. The young man chose not to share her name out of respect. As we listened, many of the students were shocked that these realities were so close to home. There was about a month and a half left in our
semester and I had something completely different planned, but I knew we could not just put this to rest. I needed to pause with my own plans and see where this took us. Something had come to life.

Students decided they wanted to bead their own vamps as a tribute to the installation. We discussed this with our advocate, elder and colleagues. They all agreed it would be an important journey to walk and we sought permission from the organizers of the exhibit. Organically, once they started beading, other classes became curious. Students began to share and teach one another. The students could feel the energy, power and spirit behind what they were doing. They decided they wanted to share even more and put the vamps together in display. They wanted their families, friends and community to know about these realities.

This evolved into their final project for the semester. They proceeded to organize an evening called “Through Our Eyes,” dedicated to raising awareness and honoring the women and girls. I will never forget how inspired the students became. They made invitations, organized an exhibit, created a video presentation, wrote a script and practiced musical dedications. They created resources to share with those in attendance to allow them to learn more or reach out to support. The young man in the class who had lost his cousin decided to perform a song dedication as the closing of the evening.

The students gathered and shared their stories, learning and visions. Upon closing the presentation, a smudging and talking circle was offered for those who wanted to engage further. Students knew we could not just share these stories and say, “have a nice evening!” Before everyone left the auditorium to go and view the art installation, the young man performed a song as a dedication in memory of his cousin. Before doing so, he said her name. He was choked up but he was able to get through it knowing her family was in attendance that evening.

I will never forget what happened as we were leaving the auditorium. Another one of my students came up to me and looked quite shaken. I asked him what was wrong, and he replied, “The girl that he was singing about….I was the one that found her.” I honestly could not even comprehend what I was hearing. He recalled the story that had been shared in the circle weeks ago but had not made the connection until he heard her name that evening. Something was alive that night. Something had guided this. This young man was able to meet her family and together they shared in healing. - (January 30th, 2014)

I realize from this experience how devastating this could have been if we had not carried things out in a good way. I came to understand how small community truly is and how interconnected our stories are. I also find myself wondering what we left people to carry with them after our evening of learning. I wonder what we asked the kêhtê-ayak to carry without realizing or intending. I see how powerful spirit can be.
I have come to understand that connecting with kêhté-ayak during our projects is vital to how things are carried out. Students can invite their families to share about their own protocols and understandings, which opens up spaces to move learning into community. Because I have come to learn there are so many differing teachings and understandings, I have become mindful of whom I speak to before carrying out projects, lessons and conversations. I used to think doing this would be impossible, but it is not. When the spirit is open to it, the teachers appear and guide us. When people come to share that are not in support of what I am doing, it is essential I listen and learn. In the end, I navigate carefully how I move forward. As Aikenhead (2011) explains, “respecting people’s spirituality, whether Indigenous or non-Indigenous, is a core value for all teachers” (p. 93).

It is through relationality I have learned this. I now understand relationships must be cared for. I never wanted to use someone for a smudging ceremony, permission or vision and then not have him or her become part of our journey. This happens often because of institutional constraints on kêhté-ayak time within our schools and contributes to the ‘add and stir’ mentality. It is my responsibility, however, to navigate these obstacles and ensure I do things in a good way. Even if that means pausing and waiting until I can meet with the kêhté-aya. Sometimes the kêhté-aya might not be available for weeks. I have come to understand the necessity to wait may very well be the spirit telling me more learning is needed before moving forward.

When I think back to the energies and spirit that emerged during our projects, I do not think it is ethical for me to ask things of people if I am not going to continue the relationship. I need to be sure the person is part of the journey and continues to be long
afterwards: especially afterwards. Too many times I have witnessed kēhtē-ayak be invited in to speak about their experiences, presented tobacco and asked for their stories. The bell would ring, we would shake hands at the end and then that was closed. Afterwards, I would find myself wondering what we had just opened up. And I would make an effort to follow up with the kēhtē-ayak to visit. Teaching in a good way involves holding relationships at the core of what I do.

Without the balance of the mental, emotional, physical and spiritual I do not think my learning would be as deep. The curriculum is a guide but the real guide is the spirit within my classroom. When we talk about spirit in my classroom, we call it our Home Fire or iskotēw. We work hard to create an environment within the classroom that has a ‘good vibe’. I encourage students to come in a good way: both clean in mind and body. Because we keep the drum in our space and often have kēhtē-ayak visit our classroom it is important that students are not under any kind of influence when they attend classes. It seems to provide a safe space, almost a sanctuary for student to cleanse, detox, and to let go of some of the lifestyles that seems so prevalent in our communities:

At the beginning of the semester we discuss the understanding of our iskotēw. As it was explained to me ‘in many traditional First Nations understanding, every person, every home, every community has a HOME FIRE. We must feed the fire in a good way to keep it burning, to keep us warm and to keep our relationships full of light and love.’ We apply this understanding into my classroom and we discuss what each of us shall bring each day: our gifts, our strengths and our weaknesses. What we bring feeds us, shapes us, guides us, and impacts how we proceed with the rest of the day and how we may unknowingly impact others. We also talk about how this fire burns in each one of us. We need to be aware of what we feed into our own fires: Love, kindness, substances, gossip, etc. What we put into that fire will create the energy that surrounds us. If I bring hate, disbelief, anger, harm, the energy of my space and self will feed into this. If I bring love, understanding, compassion, forgiveness, the energy will become strong to welcome, create, engage and inspire. This is not a concept that takes massive belief. We have all experienced people or spaces that carry energy. – (May 5th, 2017)
Opening up good energies in a space invites in a learning spirit (Battiste, 2013). And what we feed each and everyday creates a space in which students feel welcome like human beings, regardless of their stories, baggage and labels. In return they feed the *iskotêw* in a good way. Returning often to remind me to carry on, for what I am doing is important. Understanding *iskotêw* has taught me to be humble and give thanks for what I am offered from each person who walks into my space. It helps me be mindful of what I am passing onto them as my *iskotêw* can burn others if I am not careful. I am always open to learning; even when I get burned. As Ermine (2007) reminds me, “what remains hidden and enfolded are the deeper level thoughts, interests and assumptions that will inevitably influence and animate the kind of relationships” (p. 195) that exists between us.

I think it is possible to follow these pathways but my need for control must be surrendered to allow things to unfold. And when I chose to walk this path, I need to be mindful that many others have been softly treading these roads for years with great care. I must put ego aside and recognize I am not the first to do these things. I should not just forge ahead in a destructive manner that leaves a scar but instead I must seek, navigate, and reach out to those who can guide me. My teachers have been at work for longer than I can comprehend.

I have made a lot of mistakes on this journey and so I know it means I must have understanding and compassion for people who are also on this journey of learning. I need to remember that sometimes I needed to be shown so clearly the writing on the wall that I could not turn away. Those moments shifted me. They shook me. But I believe they have made me a better educator. In those moments I had a choice: to turn and face
my teachers who had come to help me learn or ignore what they were trying to teach me and keep walking my colonial path. Sometimes I needed to apologize for the hurt I caused or the mistakes I made. I needed to seek and ask for guidance. *tipéyimisowin* or self-ownership became central to how I walked. It was important I owned my actions when I made a mistake. This sometimes meant revisiting someone with cloth and tobacco. This sometimes meant taking time to talk to a family who had been disrespected. Sometimes it meant swallowing my pride and modelling forgiveness even when I was angry with those who had harmed or hurt me. I do not think we do this often in the western world. I have had students, friends and community tell me “white people NEVER have to apologize!” They tell me “Indians are always the ones having to say sorry.” Sadly, I have witnessed this over and over again, and it stings. We are flawed as people. We are pitiful. We have been taught to believe we control it all.

4.2 I Detest What You Do: Staring into the Face of Resistance

One of the major themes that emerged from my research was that of resistance. I viewed this resistance as attacks on me personally. As time went on, I realized there was a much larger story at play. I realized the system was working to resist the knowledge that was surfacing. Clever ways were used to push back and to silence the work we were doing when Indigenous students and knowledge became vocal or projects started to gain momentum. I started to understand that educational institutions are complex bodies of epistemological and pedagogical dominance. What I was experiencing was the push back of western systems in their effort to silence Indigenous voice.
The more I started to see the hidden messages as people acted out towards me, the more I realized how embedded it was in every aspect of the institution. It was not just about teaching my Indigenous Studies class. It was much deeper than that. It was the outright resistance to include Indigenous truths in the curriculum or the willingness to address inadequacies in the system itself. I started to realize that there was a definite pattern that included rejecting Indigenous epistemology and the successes of Indigenous students. In my work with Indigenous Education, I have directly seen the consequences of challenging the dominant. I first thought of these experiences as extremely negative. I often took them very personally and had thoughts of quitting, giving up and transferring schools. However, throughout recent years, surrounding myself with Indigenous peoples, understandings, engaged allies and looking beyond myself to address what was really occurring, I have been able to see that what was happening at a personal level is an indication of a much larger pushback from the dominant group to undermine and discredit the value Indigenous epistemology and success has to guide us.

I was beginning to see the accepted curriculum was made up of lessons that instill and perpetuate dominance, privilege and racism. Within the accepted curriculum are underlying lessons that teach students the way the world should work according to the dominant group, instead of allowing students to explore and consider ways the world could work outside of the dominant discourse. Tupper (2011) explains, “at a simplistic level, curriculum privileges certain content over others: some material gets included and some material gets left out” (p. 41) this is necessary in keeping the status quo in place as it gives “preferential treatment to certain visions/content/stories over others” (p. 41). Through the hidden curriculum and discourse within my building people began voicing
their concerns over what projects, activities and conversations were beginning to emerge. It was no longer within the boundaries of the normalcy they had come to know. Kumashiro (2015) explains this as, “the ‘hidden’ curriculum of oppression that permeates our schools and that complicates any movement to reform curriculum” (p.37).

It was clear that the systems in place were continually devaluing Indigenous Knowledge systems as being worthy, valuable and essentially blocking the possibility of movement forward. As an educator when I worked against these norms, I found out there were consequences both professionally and personally. I lost membership with many of my colleagues and friends. It seemed I was a bully, pretentious, annoying and radical and was no longer deemed fit to hang in conversational circles. Colleagues who used to stop by and visit, no longer came into my classroom. I would hear stories around the school about how I carried myself and what messages I was teaching my students. I know it was frustrating and hurtful to experience the backlash, but for Indigenous peoples, this is nothing new. Without community guiding me I think I may have run away.

What I was doing became vilified and discredited because it was countering the dominant curricular objectives: keep the dominant intact. Conflict started to occur when Indigenous students and the Indigenous Studies classes began to assert their own understandings of the world and how to meet curricular objectives outside what was considered normal. This became problematic because we aimed to critically examine the institutions and systems surrounding us in society. Students were taking these experiences beyond the classroom and challenging others. And as a result, the students and I started to receive resistance.
As years passed, our school began to highlight the successes of our Indigenous students. We began building relationships among our students and community, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. With the addition of school kéhté-ayak, an Indigenous advocate and an Indigenous Advocacy team, more Indigenous students were attending classes. The community of our school started to change. Sadly, that did not sit well with many of my colleagues. I remember a conversation with a colleague where we were discussing the movement towards specialized schools. I asked him, what he thought people in our city thought our school was known for. I said “School A was sports, School B was arts, School C was academics…what are we known for?” To which his response was “Indians.” Looking back now, I see how loaded that statement was. I immediately thought it was racist, but I did not realize it was an indication of a much larger systemic opinion. It was devaluing our school because we were embracing new ways of knowing. We were increasing graduation and retention rates of Indigenous students. Our students were being successful. This demonstrated to me, that despite the shift that was occurring, I did not feel as a larger community we were really learning.

It illustrated for me that we as a school were some how becoming inferiors because we were working with more and more Indigenous students and Indigenous epistemology and pedagogies. It was an attempt to subvert and diminish the change that was happening. Although this example may seem trivial to some, it is an indication of a much larger epistemology within the school system, and I would argue within our communities. These micro conversations, when left unaddressed, perpetuate the creation of what is acceptable and unacceptable within our schools.
Another such example occurred when we were having a feast and hauling food into the gymnasium. One of the consultants who had helped to organize the feast went to grab a handful of candy. I said, “Wait the food hasn’t been blessed yet.” She responded, “Kim, it is just candy.” My heart sank. I did not understand if she had been part of the planning, why was she not respecting protocols? Another example occurred when students, community and I decided to put the Indigenous Studies simulation forward for a National award:

In fall of 2015, receiving the Governor Generals History Award for Excellence in Teaching sent a message loud and clear that what we were doing in Indigenous Studies was valuable. It did not take long for students to report inappropriate conversation and heckling that was occurring in their classrooms. The devaluing and discrediting began as comments trickled in. Several comments about how the award did not count because I had applied for it and that anyone could have received it. Or how what we did in that class was a waste of time and the award must be a joke.

On several occasions I spoke with students explaining that by devaluing the award, they were really trying to devalue this history and what we were empowering to shift with our community. They were trying to discredit the work we were doing because it was challenging them to learn. We were showing them it really was possible to do things different. Instead of getting angry, the students and I agreed we should continue to use it as motivation to move forward. We had disrupted the normalcy of the school and that was upsetting for many colleagues. I was reminded that these are all weapons the dominant uses to create feelings of rejection and alienation in those pushing against the system. So, perhaps they hoped we might just give up. And I know sometimes I felt like it. But I was always pulled back to my students and often thought of the words of the elder, “The government has always been afraid of educated Indians.” He was right. The community in which I taught did not know how to cope with a changing energy.

Winning that award shifted a lot of things. Something came to life and energies from all sides began to emerge. In my speech receiving the award I said, “WE ARE ALL TREATY PEOPLE” and “we dedicate this award to the reconciliation of Treaty relationships in Canada.” Feeling on top of the world, my student and I attend the banquet. As we were finishing our meal, a woman came up to me. She was non-Indigenous and her husband was a First Nations professor at a university in Ontario. I laugh now as I thought she was coming to congratulate me. But instead she knelt beside and said, “I want you to know that my husband and I absolutely detest what you do and what you stand for.” I was shocked. I replied “How so?” I was so glad to engage in that conversation. In my speech when I had acknowledged, “We Are All Treaty People”, they had become extremely offended. There I was chowing down my dinner on unceded Algonquin territory. My words did not make sense to them and seemed very ignorant, as this was indeed not Treaty
land. As we talked further, I explained the purpose of the simulation and the deeper understandings that emerge. We left on good terms both having learned, but HOLY was something awoken in me! I stepped out of a community I was familiar with and into another community that I was not. Now, not only did we have non-Indigenous peoples pushing back, but Indigenous peoples too. I knew right then and there I had so much MORE to learn! - (August 15th, 2017).

Even now, when I think of that award, I am questioning why I was able to win it. Had these things not been done before? What I was teaching was not new. Why had I been able to be recognized for the work Indigenous peoples have been doing for decades within the education system? I know I have been told it is not traditional for Indigenous peoples to put themselves forward for recognition and accolades such as this. This was a conversation I had many times after winning of the award. I see now, even though I had put the award forward to lift the work of the students higher and to show that Indigenous Studies mattered, I was still the FACE of the award. I realize that reconciliation and building of relationships is about stepping aside as we lift Indigenous voice higher. Why do we work with Indigenous peoples but still put ourselves in front? I actually wish I could take back the award that was given to me and give it to those who had laid this path before me. This is something I struggle with now that I see how unbalanced every layer of the system is. Was me winning the award just another clever way of silencing Indigenous peoples and knowledge? It was saying “it is only okay when white people do it.”

Despite the award, the struggles continued year after year. Kumashiro explains, when doing this work “teachers face political pressure in the form of public bashing” (2015, p. 147). I saw this resistance more illuminated and fierce as Indigenous students began to lead the charge. Students would call out moments of racism they saw and began questioning the systems around them. I was sometimes disturbed by the conversations I
witnessed and the rhetoric that they were doing something wrong. In class, we would often discuss the education gaps that existed within our communities. I shared data about graduation and retention rates. These conversations often led to extremely intense and rich discussions about decreasing the gap. Sadly, there were several different educators tell me point blank, “This was inappropriate to discuss.” This data was published in the newspapers and reported in the media and discussed regularly in community. This was not top-secret data I was sharing. What were they afraid of? I remember vividly one day after discussing such things:

A student yelled, “I HATE the whiteman!” He had tears in his eyes and other students shifted in their seats. This young man was a big fella and looked much older than he was. He was tired of getting profiled. I remember when he first came to the school he would often be mistaken for a much older student or even an adult. I remember being being surprised when he sat in my grade 10 Indigenous Studies class with his big smile ready to learn. As we listened to his story draped in racism he experienced day to day, I began to understand his words. He shared stories of walking down the street in our city and getting stopped by police and asked for ID. I asked if other students had experienced this. They had. He told us about walking into a classroom and being told he MUST be in the wrong class. I asked if others had experienced this. They had. He talked about being followed in the hallway one of his first days of school and asked why he was in the building. Again, others nodded along. He went on about being asked by teachers if he was in a gang. Again hands went up in the air when asked who felt the same.

This kid looked tough. No doubt about it. And I knew people in my building were afraid of him. But that day, when he said those words, instead of being offended, scared or hurt, I found understanding in listening to his stories. Some non-Indigenous classmates were shocked and disgusted at the stories he shared not realizing Indigenous youth faced situations like this everyday in our building. I remember that year, there were many students who voiced their anger about the racism they were experiencing. This upset many teachers. Maybe this is what they were afraid of. And I had several conversations about whether or not what we were discussing in my classroom was appropriate. There were even conversations with administration if I was perpetuating anti-white propaganda in an attempt to divide the school. What was really happening? - (September 16th, 2017)

A similar response was received when I would push back during professional development days designed to address the gap through our strategic goals. Throughout my research I was able to see example after example of initiatives that evolve as
‘solutions’ but I realized they were all from the gaze of the western pedagogy. Very rarely were we engaging with the voices of our students and community in way that pushed against the typical professional development experience. As explained by Alfred (1999), this state of mind is so internalized that “it prevents people from seeing beyond the conditions created by the white society to serve its own interests” (p. 70). As a result, I found myself questioning often. In addressing these goals we were not really planning for anything to change. I struggled with seeing how ticking boxes or filling out graphic organizers was going to lead to shifting the system. I felt it did not matter how many initiatives we put in place to "better" the lives of our students if we were not willing to disrupt the knowledge that surrounded these goals. As Cote-Meeks describes it, we were “perpetuating images of hurt and wounded people in need of healing and help from the colonizer” (p. 24) in order to create solutions for the gaps within our systems instead of actually addressing the system itself. It seemed we were always creating the same package with different wrapping.

Sometimes, I would challenge these understandings at large gatherings of social studies teachers. I would hear big words that would make me angry. I remember hearing phrases like “as settlers” and “let’s unpack this.” Words like discourse, intersectionality, epistemology, and pedagogy were thrown around constantly. At the time, I did not understand their meaning and I would find myself frustrated. I did not have the data and research to back up what I was trying to explain. But as time went on, I began my first few grad classes through anti-oppressive education. I started becoming equipped with these words. I could talk like the leaders and administrators who ran the meetings. When reading Absolon (2011) Kaandossiwin: How We Come to Know, I actually
laughed out loud when she explained the meaning of the word epistemology in the terms of *Anishinaabe* understanding: *how we come to know what we know.* I could not understand why it took me five graduate studies classes and a transfer into the Masters of Indigenous Education for me to understand what epistemology embodied. Something shifted within my spirit when I started learning from this new worldview.

The more I learned about Indigenous understandings, the more I could see that it was not the big words I was using that mattered. There was something I was missing in trying to really express what needed to be done within our system. I found I would continually leave theorizing the situation and go back to telling stories. We need to hear the students’ stories I would say because our approaches and solutions for engaging students continually result in more of the same: and that needs to change. I found often people would express it as one-sided coin where the onus was still on the Indigenous students to follow a set of criteria to improve their lives within our system. If they accessed certain supports then they would be able to reach the threshold of graduation. In doing so, we continued the ongoing cycle of being the saviours of our students to ensure a settler futurity (Tuck & Yang 2012).

I am not meant to be a saviour. I am here to facilitate a process of learning and by not engaging community in professional conversations about what supports or pedagogies are needed; I could see that not much was going to change. It did not matter to me how many sessions of sharing resources I went to, if community was not considered a resource. The project “Following Their Voices” is one such initiative that works to collect student’s stories to initiate change within our communities and
education system (https://www.followingtheirvoices.ca/#/landing). It gives me hope that policy makers and administrators will be able to access a resource that illuminates story.

I do believe nothing will change unless we speak to the communities impacted by the realities we are discussing. If I continue down our same old paths, I continue putting myself on the pedestal of “helping them”. This bothers me on a deep level. I can no longer go to outside places to address realities in my own community. It starts here. It starts with community. It starts with telling the truth. Otherwise it is kâh-kiyâski: the concept of telling lies repeatedly. This understanding helps me to see what I am doing when I engage in western pedagogies and epistemologies in my movement towards decolonization and reconciliation. I am telling lies. I am contributing to continuing more of the same so that nothing changes. Until I begin to tell the truths that exist within the system and actively work to create change I continue walking the pathway of colonization. tâpwê.

4.3 “F the Haters! We Gotcha!”: Learning Alongside My Students

Despite experiencing continual resistance, I realize that my students were the key to continuing on. Their acceptance and perseverance time and time again showed me, it was necessary to keep going. Throughout my experience teaching Indigenous Studies, it became fundamental that I shift the power from place of all-knowing teacher to learner. In doing so, I empowered students as teachers and we all became learners together. This allowed me to become engaged with understandings alongside my students and our community. It has always baffled me why teachers are placed in front of students as power figures who seem to have all the answers. I think this pedagogy is actually toxic to
the teacher and students. Why are we not willing to acknowledge that students come into our spaces equipped with knowledge beyond our capacity? This will always trouble me. I believe that part of decolonizing is decolonizing my pedagogy. I agree with Goulet & Goulet (2014) who suggest, “teachers use a holistic approach in creating culturally meaningful learning environments” (p. 200) so that we can all become learners together.

Without the guidance from students, I can only imagine the destructive pathway I may have taken while teaching the course. I remember the first year teaching the course, I felt a sense of not belonging in the space. This was not due to my students; this is my own struggle with belonging. I was pulled to a memory of the same feeling I experienced when living in Italy. A dear friend who shared so much about his community with me once said to me, ‘Kim, you can't become part of the place until you let the place become part of you.” I have never forgotten these words. They guided me while teaching the Indigenous Studies course. Relationships with my students and community had to be at the heart of what I was doing if I wanted it to be meaningful and truthful. I could not just dip my toes into community and take off when I felt restless, uncomfortable or did not feel it was practical. I had a responsibility.

I have come to understand relationality is an important foundation as I seek to understand how tied together stories and experiences are. By doing so, in a holistic way, a birth of pedagogical shift occurred. “When everything is related and relationships requires responsibilities, the whole of existence is made up of a web of interrelationships sustained by responsibilities” (Aikenhead, 2011, p. 79). Nurturing the importance of community within the course opened up pathways to understand the educational system as more than just classroom lessons that are individualistic and separate of the greater
system. The sharing of story in a safe space became a vessel for the course. For example, when students were creating their final projects and sharing with the class, viewing their projects alone did not do justice to the story it embodied. It was when we connected to spirit and started sharing that things came to life.

I believe our students are our best teachers and their ability to show leadership in the face of adversity leaves me in awe. I have acknowledged and shared this many times with many different educators but it is not always received well. This challenges typical classroom protocol when we flip who is steering the ship. This is scary, but why? A conflict of worldview occurs in pedagogy. It is about facilitating spaces where students become leaders and guide the learning. As an educator it would be easy for me to develop an incessant need to control and hold all the power in my classroom. But this directly contradicts Indigenous understandings of community and collaboration. One person holding all power is not conducive for community to thrive. We all have a role in learning together.

For example, how do students develop a responsibility and understanding of giving back, if I do not help them see how important they are within the community of education? I once asked a grade 12 class, how will you give back to community once you graduate? It was a powerful discussion that emerged. We acknowledged that none of us had thought about education in that sense. Many students said they saw school as something they needed to get to the next step in life but they had not considered that they owed community something for it. This conversation led to a shift in my own final evaluation that semester. As students shared their final projects and learnings, they also discussed how they could give thanks and give back for our learning that had occurred. It
was one of the most powerful evaluations I have ever experienced. Students shared their stories and their work. They conveyed strong messages of what exists in the ethical spaces between students, teachers and within community. They help me to understand the capacity we have to foster and destroy the wellbeing of one another (Ermine, 2007).

I know many times I was questioned about my final evaluation, as a ‘sharing of learning’ does not sit well with some educators. But I invite any of those people to come and experience one of our circles. I leave the evaluation learning so much each and every time. To me that demonstrates taking learning beyond the classroom and to a higher level. I do not think many educators would leave those sharing circles without trying to connect themselves as part of the story. The final project seeks to engage the larger community as “it is vital that the school and community recognize the importance of community involvement in education and the involvement of students in the community” (Goulet & Goulet, 2014, p. 210).

During our circles, it becomes about truth telling. Passing a stone from person to person within the circle is not just passing a stone. Asiniy (stone) is not inanimate. It is alive and has spirit. The wâsakâpi (circle) also has spirit as community joins together. As asiniy is passed each story becomes entangled and cared for by the next person whom is to tell their story. As Graveline (1996) explains:

*Speaking in a circle can also be a process of finding one’s own voice: Circle talk requires all those that do speak, to address their own experiences and feelings rather than generalizing or theorizing about others. This, I have found, is a new and sometimes terrifying possibility for those who have been acculturated to be cut off from their hearts (p. 197).*

The importance with this approach is not to only create a resistance to colonization that involves disrupting the dominant way of learning, but also engages students to recover
and renew traditional ways of knowing and being. The *circle as pedagogy* is an initial step in opening up space to deeper learning when done in a good way (Battiste & Barman, 1995; Graveline, 1996; Stiffarm, 1998; Weenie, 1998).

These understandings would not have occurred if I had taken a traditional western approach. I could have used books and structured lessons to teach the course, but I believe the students would have seen right through me. King (2004) explains “students natural ability to go inward and draw vision from the spirit place, to understand and appreciate our knowing of the interrelatedness of all things in life” (p. 107) can guide us. Students are intuitive and they know when someone is not teaching with their heart. I needed to learn to let things unfold and let the students lead. They showed me what issues were important to them and we were able to connect those to our curricular outcomes.

I also found that it was necessary to move thru and process bumping points and tension that emerged within the classes. This is where powerful learning took place. I had to allow myself to be vulnerable and be open to be a learner with community. Through my experiences, it seemed every semester something or someone was challenging me. Looking back, after each experience, I emerged differently. Things within me had shifted as a result of these moments of tension. I now believe this learning is not meant to be easy. I am reminded to be mindful of my intentions. The knowledge pieces will always come but I must let my spirit guide me. Teaching in this way seeks to engage learners in a holistic experience of organic evolution.

Because I was coming from a place of little knowing, I thought it would be best to learn along with my students. I thought it was important what we were doing was not
surface but instead became a way of finding our place within our colonial history. My hope was that through simulation and experiential holistic learning this would be possible. My first year teaching the course there were so many moments where I knew I could not possibly understand what the student had experienced. I thought if we could recreate some of the social conditions in which this history was set perhaps I could evoke new ways of knowing and internalizing. This involved creating moments of discomfort that challenged us to question the way we saw the world. This was a successful approach because of the students I had in my room that year.

However, as my demographics began to change and more Indigenous students started taking the course, I had to shift away from the same strategies. I did not believe it was my place to evoke that same discomfort from my Indigenous students that I was trying to help my non-Indigenous students understand. Cote-Meeks (2014) explains, “if the classroom is one site for making history come alive, it is important to consider who the subjects are in that classroom and how they receive that content” (p. 33). I only realized this after being challenged with both kind and aggressive feedback about what we were doing in the course. These new understandings of relationships required me to see how we were all entangled in what was unfolding in the classroom and with that came responsibility (Aikenhead, 2011; Aluli-Meyer, 2008).

Many of the ideas for the simulation evolved out of conversations that would take place during noon hours in my classroom. Because I would stay for lunch, and often bring extra, students started to hang out in my room. This became a rich sharing environment and created a safe space for further dialogue beyond our lessons. I think what I valued most about our learning, is the safety the students felt to question,
challenge, evolve and share. Aluli-Meyers (2008) explains students will engage in authentic connectedness as, “genuine knowledge must be experienced directly” (p. 224). I encouraged them to question because I know it is when some of my greatest learning came. The moments of frustration would transpire into ideas of evolving the simulation or projects we were doing. I have come to see the resilience and beauty that resulted. I am constantly pulled to remembering the beautiful learning and sharing during our final projects whether individual or community gatherings. These experiences have taught me that the understanding of relationality is so important to the foundation of my course.

As we sit in the circle sharing our projects, deep learning and connectedness to one another started to emerge. At times, this spirit of learning spiraled into larger class projects. I quickly realized that students in their leadership illuminated the necessity of social action and activism. One such project was when students challenged and petitioned the school board to fly the Treaty #4 flag. A few years later, another much larger project emerged. The “Building Our Home Fire” was ignited by the need to challenge one another about what reconciliation truly means moving forward for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples:

This project was sparked, when students became aware that every school in our division had been mandated to hang a copy of the Government of Canada’s 2008 Residential School apology. The students felt that simply hanging the apology was just NOT enough. After meeting with our school elders, a call out to all teachers interested in taking part in a project surrounding reconciliation was emailed out. All interested teachers were given a package of lesson plans and activities, including background information for personal learning. The elders, Indigenous advocate, head of French Immersion and myself put these packages together. Although the initial project planning requested three weeks of teachers class time, it was beautiful to see teachers put their other units on hold and continue with learning that was opening up.

We began with a large gathering in the auditorium and for weeks over 250 students and teachers shared in learning about the legacy of the residential school system and impacts that resonate today in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. As we engaged
in learning, everyone involved received a wooden medallion to contribute to a large art piece. They were encouraged to express their feelings, hopes and visions about moving forward together from this dark history while creating their medallion. Together we created over 550 pieces. It was amazing to see many classes took the project much further writing letters, creating artwork and stories and other projects to build upon their learnings. One such project led to the creation of our very own Calls to Action for Reconciliation. It took a little convincing and curriculum spinning to help teachers see this was truly worthy and intertwined in their already existing outcomes for their classes. But witnessing teachers break away from curricular structure and seeing that Indigenous knowledge can be flawlessly intertwined into their classrooms was challenging and extremely rewarding!

Learning about such a dark chapter in our history evoked many feelings for us. It was hard to hear the stories, but even more difficult to realize that the impacts of these schools are still alive in our families and communities today, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Many students and teachers felt the urgency to share this information with their family and friends. As a result, the culmination of the project organically resulted in a community gathering where the massive art installation was unveiled. Students, families, teachers, elders, dignitaries, school board members and community shared their visions for moving forward. We created programs, informational inserts, culinary treats, and decorations. We worked tirelessly to prepare the auditorium with lights, sound, videos, and ambiance. Even the school choir volunteered their time to share a song. Over 400 signatures were collected in support of the students work that evening. Our Drum Circle performed four songs to close the evening in a powerful way as we gathered to view the art installation. One of the most impactful moments was the presentation of our schools Calls to Action to our Director of Education. All were standing, the drummers singing, the envelope of students’ visions was handed to the director. I was told from many people in attendance the energy at the moment was very powerful. - (May 10th, 2017)

The uniqueness and beauty of the project was that it had been guided and led by Indigenous peoples from our local community. We felt that when learning about reconciliation our pathway must look different, as the work of reconciliation cannot be done without Indigenous peoples as key stakeholders. Brayboy & Maughan (2009) state “Indigenous Knowledges are processes and encapsulate a set of relationships rather than bounded concepts” and they are “rooted in lived experiences of people” (p. 3). Without grounding our project in Indigenous pedagogy and epistemology, key learnings essential to understanding how to move forward would be missed. Intertwining Indigenous teachings while deconstructing Canadian history allowed us to critically engage our
understandings on a deeper level. My advocate and I put a list together as we reflected on the projects that have been carried out within our building. We shared it with other educators who wanted to learn. I think it would be beneficial to share within this work:

**What made these projects successful?** (1) Students led the projects and guided where the learning evolved (2) Teachers MUST become learners WITH their students (3) Shift of “control” or “power” to the students as teachers (4) Created safe spaces for those with very little knowledge. We are ALL always learning (5) Always oriented to grassroots ideas and movement (6) Community engagement and involvement in the journey (7) Interdisciplinary involving many subject areas (8) Learning needed to feel REAL for the students. Something that mattered in their lives (9) Engage Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (10) Goal: to SHIFT relationships (between one another and how we see ourselves in these stories)

**What resources did we use?** (1) Students often became the leaders and identified resources of value (2) Community (3) Elders (4) Land (5) Oral teaching (6) Social Media (many books on these issues do NOT exist… YET!) (7) Current Events (events unfolding as we ‘teach’) (8) BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS IS HUGE!!! It will open up many many pathways.

**What obstacles did we encounter?** (1) Call out to those who WANT to be involved… get the momentum working in your favor... Others will follow (2) Can be lonely road... Surround yourself with ALLIES (3) Things get POLITICAL (4) Addressing uneasiness regarding spiritual/religious values/beliefs (5) Questions of validity or connection to curriculum (6) Administration “buy-in” (7) Preparing students, families and teachers for trauma that may be triggered - (Dawne Cassell and Kim Sadowsky, 2017)

When I think back to why these projects were successful, relationships become the underpinning of it all. With each project, the students were the ones navigating which pathway it would take. This took much patience and pausing on my part as both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students suggested there might be people or questions we should ask before we start the doing. That opened up our first relational opportunities to build with community. I do not think this learning would have been possible without students guiding the pathway. I have come to learn that if the students and families are on board with what we are doing, they end up guiding and supporting the process.
However, due to a colonial history of disruption, I must be careful not to assume Indigenous youth or families are engaged in cultural practices or teachings. I must find ways to open doors for students, families and community members who are willing to share to feel welcomed. “For educators, it will become important to know what the existing protocols are, and to develop a deeper understanding of the ways that First Nations knowledge keepers are contemporarily defined” (Whiteman, 2010, p. 15).

Familial knowledge differs within community and is distinct within the differing nations, territory, and communities. It is essential that I am not selective in my understanding. I must learn to acknowledge with respect that something learned in one experience may be very different in the next. It is important as I learn with community, I am sure to acknowledge, honor and respect the protocols of each of the lives, families and communities I am invited into. I must be open to learn and navigate these pathways with respect and diligence as not all communities follow the same protocols. Just because I have learned how to be respectful in one community does not mean it is a blanket protocol for all Indigenous peoples. As summed up by Joseph Couture, “there is an integrity and purity required as you step into Indian ways of knowing” (as cited in Kaplan-Myrth & Smylie, 2006, p.17).

In addition, one of the most important challenges to address is the emotional triggers that can be ignited when such sharing and asking takes place. I must tread carefully in how I approach engaging in such learning. When I invite kêhtê-ayak or community members to share their stories, I have a responsibility to care for that individual before, during and most importantly afterwards. Re-traumatization of survivors is a common occurrence when memories open up. I need to ensure support is
in place if necessary for both those sharing and those listening (Cote-Meeks, 2014; Ermine, 2007). It is important to be flexible allowing for evolving moments. Turning off bells, situating ourselves in a circle, offering tobacco to begin and gift in closing are often very simple ways to ensure there is trust and respect involved in the process. These moments offer opportunity across disciplines to allow teachers to engage in learning with their students. But it is in the moments after, that I have come to understand, are so vital to caring for the relationship and what has been opened up and brought to life.

The underlying foundation of these projects was about relationality to community. Who are we within this story? The goal was to see ourselves in community and our relationship to colonial history. Engaging with community members willing to share their stories and be part of our learning was key. I believe historical learning loses its strength when we do not have the interconnectedness of story and we do not see ourselves as part of these stories. I see now, how much of what I did prior to this learning was activities and projects that evoked sympathy. I see how destructive that was to understanding these realities. I needed to shift to finding our place within these stories. I do not believe there is growth or change otherwise. As Hampton & DeMartine (2017) further explain, “making conscious and subconscious decisions about what to pass on to [my] students” must become central to my pedagogy (p. 247). When I become aware, I begin to see that how I teach and what I teach must be directly related to WHOM I teach. Education becomes connected to the entire community and relates to the everyday lives of the students/teacher all the while working to disrupt the system and dismantle oppressive policies.
Without the connection to community and learning personal stories, I would not have transformed my teaching. I would have remained with an extremely apathetic and sympathetic approach to teaching. Transforming the learning space from creating ‘finite’ lesson plans to allowing spirit to evolve has shifted me as an educator and as a human being. I found that the relational experience is essentially shared between teacher and student when I was willing to engage in new pedagogical practices that move beyond western pedagogy, by utilizing Indigenous Knowledge systems. Connectedness is needed in order to nurture the process of decolonization (Iseke-Barnes, 2008). I could not see my place in the story. I did not realize the harm I was causing by teaching my colonial version of our story and how I was teaching it. I am a life long learner. I will continue to be open to what students are willing to teach me.

4.4 Stop Telling Our Stories For Us: sihtoskâtowin

My experiences have shown me the vital role I have as môniyâskwêw in being an Engaged Ally. Many of my students love video games. In particular war games, whether killing zombies, battling on the front lines in Normandy or saving the galaxy from the empire. I think the metaphor of battle is helpful to understanding what it means to be an Engaged Ally. It means following the rules of engagement in battle. After all this is a battle against colonialism. It is essential to remember I would not go into battle with my OWN plan for my OWN victory that would advance my OWN cause. This would not move the group forward, only my own intentions. Instead, I would work with my comrades for what is best for the end goal for the larger group: even if that meant retreating or surrendering at times. I would use the knowledge of the community leading
the charge (in this case Indigenous community) and respectfully follow the plans of action that ensue. I have come to understand this pathway deeper as I engaged with the understanding of sihtskâtowin. This understanding embodies standing shoulder to shoulder: together as community. Supporting one another in a way that I do not let those I am standing with fall down. With the understanding of sihtskâtowin, I am holistically standing shoulder to shoulder with my comrades as I help move forward the call to action.

As an engaged ally working towards reconciliation, sihtskâtowin deepens my understanding of this role. It involves recognizing when standing still or pausing is essential. I have come to understand that just because I think an issue needs to move forward or be addressed, it does not mean it should move forward on my terms or move at all. I must learn to be patient and assist the community to be empowered to move their own voices forward. This requires taking up arms and being vocal at times. Also, knowing when to be silent. I do this by standing shoulder to shoulder being guided by community. The connection to spirit in sihtskâtowin calls for unity. I cannot push action forward on my own

No longer do I put myself forth as the expert and share other people’s stories. With the understanding of sihtskâtowin, I am holistically standing shoulder to shoulder opening up spaces for people to tell their own stories. Sarain Carson Fox, an anishnaabe artist, activist and storyteller from the Batchawana First Nation reminded me the importance of not telling other people’s stories. I have come to understand that the stories I often share in the name of allyship, are actually not my stories to tell. In a video that went viral on Viceland media she says,
“Let’s not have a conversation where it’s like ‘how can I support you and then tell YOUR stories?’ The conversation IS ‘how do I stand behind you, with my hand out like this (gesturing holding someone up), while YOU tell your story and make sure YOU don’t fall back. How do I STOP talking and let YOU be the one with the voice?’ Because the narrative for so long is ‘I’m going to help you tell your story.’ Well that’s BULLSHIT! Let us tell our OWN stories and SUPPORT it! Like REALLY support it! That’s allyship!” - (Fox, 2017)

Her words reminded me of the very important understanding of telling stories as an ally. Often in my teaching I have a platform to share stories. I have come to believe I do not have the right to share intimate stories without permission. I have been guilty of sharing someone else’s very personal story as away to evoke emotion from my students. I began to interweave their stories as my own personal narrative. Even though my intentions were good, I see now, that those stories were not mine to share.

It is only in my own truth telling that I am learning to tell MY own story in a way that will not bring harm to others. I understand that unless I have been told, “Kim, this is now your story to share,” I question myself. I find I am questioning myself often, as I did not realize how much I did this. In sharing those very intimate stories, I could have destroyed my relationship to community and harmed many people in doing so. I am fortunate that students guided me through those times in letting me know the things I had shared were not appropriate. I am thankful my spirit guided me to listen to what my students were telling me instead of thinking the benefit of evoking emotion outweighed the harm I was causing. As a result, the students were more than willing to connect me with people in community who had stories to share.

sihtoshkâtowin illuminates this so clearly. In standing shoulder to shoulder with community, I would not take someone else’s story and share it if they were standing right beside me. It would not make sense to do so. The visual it provides embodied in its
meaning helps me see that I would literally be speaking for the person standing beside me. This demonstrates so clearly a colonial pattern. *sihtoskâtowin* pulls me to honor this understanding, whether the person is physically beside me or not. I should not be telling other peoples stories.

These experiences helped me learn that connecting to community creating *sihtoskâtowin* is so important. Many people tell me that building these relationships and connections is not realistic or practical. But I believe when you follow the spirit of allyship that is grounded in community, relationships will open up. I must always acknowledge that this journey is fluid and that stories shared in one space may not be deemed appropriate in another. And, just because I have been sharing certain stories all this time, does not mean I can continue. As now, I know better. I must always be mindful of the space I hold as an ally and how easy it is for me step over those boundaries thinking I am helping. I must remind myself, that every time I tell someone else’s story for them, I have indeed used my privilege in a way that could be viewed as recolonizing. Instead, I should focus on how to open up spaces for people to tell their own stories assisting to make the voice stronger. I should remind myself, my voice does NOT need to be heard, unless I have been invited in by community to indeed tell my story within the larger story. It is important to shift depending on the community I am in. It is something within my own classroom we are practicing. One major question students must respond to in order to earn the credit, is *what is my place in all of this?* We search for respectful ways to advocate, ally and move forward in a good way as both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

Chantelle Bryson, a celebrated lawyer and community activist, delivered a talk
entitled “Allyship in the Context of Indigenous Rights” at Lakehead University. She urged that “being an ally isn’t a role you can claim for yourself, she cautioned; rather, it is a state achieved by an active, lifelong, and ever-changing commitment to relationship building with Indigenous individuals and communities,” based on invitation from community (Bryson, 2018). I agree with this whole-heartedly. I cannot call myself an ally if Indigenous community does not acknowledge me as one. Just because one community may recognize me as ally, does not give me the right to barge into another claiming allyship. Her words resonate deeply as I reflect on the community projects and initiatives my Indigenous Studies classes have participated in over the years. Without invitation and guidance from community, they could have resulted in further harm and colonial pathways instead of building towards stronger relationships. Invitation into community is embedded within understanding sihtskâtowin. It would not make sense for me to stand alone claiming allyship. Only in sihtskâtowin do I know that I am walking a path that is helping community in a good way.

It is also important to recognize, that I may be invited into a space one day, but not the next. It is essential to reflect on who is inviting me into this space. Who is doing the asking? Which community? I should never assume the space is mine even if I have been invited in before. I see this a lot when it comes to the work of reconciliation. In fact, allies have led most presentations, conferences or gatherings I have attended. I have always found this troubling. Allies talking solely to allies is something that bothers me. I feel like something is missing. How can we truthfully understand allyship without engagement with community? In further engaging with community, I have learned that I should never speak on behalf of Indigenous peoples unless I have been asked to by that
particular community to do so. This is fluid. One community may want me as an ally or voice, another may not; no matter how good my intentions are. Again, sihtoskâtowin reminds me how pathways open up in learning to walk as môniyâskwêw.

I am bound to do it wrong. But this should not scare me away. When met with questions or concerns, I need to place my ego aside and listen to what is being said. I adjust my behavior and actions, as they are not static. I have learned that traditionally, the deferral principal should guide me. I need to ask myself, is there someone more equipped, more knowledgeable who should be speaking instead of me? Traditionally there is always someone. I must learn what boundaries and spaces are okay and understand it is not fixed. It is always changing and always transforming as spaces are opened wider and people are welcomed in. I need to ask myself, *what are my intentions in occupying this space? What message will I send? What gives me the right to say these things? Is community guiding me?*

It is important to understand I am not giving allies a ticket out or saying I do not have a role in reconciliation. There is no shirking the responsibility of the role I have. Instead, it is about being mindful, considerate, respectful and asking before doing. This might mean I need to step back and listen before I move forward with something. It might mean changing my plans completely. I cannot jump headfirst into something that is not mine to steer. I am part of it. That is undeniable. But I do not do it without community whether a project, presentation, a conversation or anything else. Again, just because I did something once, does not mean I continue without asking. Each and every time this is necessary. Navigating western spaces has been difficult for Indigenous peoples for many reasons. Navigating allied spaces should not be easy for me. I believe
that is truly part of the learning:

This means setting aside ego. I must pause. Patience is key. Of course I want to set everything in motion quickly especially in regards to things like reconciliation but this takes time if it is to be meaningful. This is something as mōniyāskwēw I am not used to. I want things to change quickly. Make it all better. But that does nothing long term. An investment in true community is ongoing. And when push back results I should not become resentful. I should not think I'm doing all this work and no one cares, or community owes me something. I should not mutter, “I guess they don’t want my help.” Instead, it is about a constant communication of what my space looks like. When relationships become authentic I will know how to navigate these waters. The moment I lose connection with community, the work is no longer about community but instead about my ego. This is the ethical space of being an ally. I will no doubt find myself in muddy waters. And that is when I need to seek guidance. And sometimes I must be silent and listen. Especially when it comes to differing protocols. I have learned that individuals, families, communities and nations all have distinctness that should be respected. I should not complain and pout about ‘well who am I supposed to listen to?’ If community relationships are authentic, they will guide me. And this means establishing new relationships with each community, family, and individual I engage with. I do not get to just take one thing an elder told me once, and use it as a blanket policy to cover whatever I do. That in and of itself is cultural appropriation and recolonization. Relationships are fragile and take great trust. I must be mindful of those I have built and give thanks to those who have invested in me and shared their learning. I should not abuse what they have shared by using it for my gain. I must continually ask myself, why am I in this space? Who has invited me in? And why have I been invited in? – (December 26th, 2016)

I believe resistance from Indigenous community is important and has guided me on my journey of being an ally. It has kept me honest and sometimes forced me into situation where I had to admit mistakes, seek out guidance and learn what I should have done. For example, I have given a kêhtē-aya tobacco when I was on my moontime not knowing the protocols surrounding doing such a thing. I have put students in uncomfortable situations for the sake of learning only to find out after I opened up very deep wounds. As a result, it made these wounds worse. I have many students who can feel and see things on a deep level of understanding that I cannot comprehend. Bringing stories to life had impact on these students in a way I could not fathom. I thought I was healing, but they helped me understand, some things were not mine to open up. I did not
I understand that spirit was present with us. I do now. I did not understand *sihtoskâtowin*. 

If I had been walking with my students in a good way, standing beside them, I would have known I was hurting them.

This is not a clear decisive pathway. One example, I am still navigating is with our girls hand drum group that emerged at my school. Although I first decided not to include this reflection in my thesis, I have since decided it is important as it highlights the complexity of bringing cultural teachings into our classroom spaces. Because of the deep controversy that emerged as a result of opening up my classroom space to female hand drumming I want to be extremely careful in what I say. I do not want to cause further harm, offend or damage relationships. In telling this story, my intent is to share highlights of one of my deepest learning experiences as *môniyâskwêw*. There are layers of complexity that I fully understand are not mine to engage in. I have become aware of the diversity of protocols that exist within the community in which I teach. I understand now the importance of *sihtoskâtowin* in knowing my community, families and individuals I am working with before walking in these spaces:

The Drum Circle was a student led undertaking. Both the boys and girls groups worked with our school elders, their families and community members to get the groups up and running. Myself and another colleague worked to organize performances, gatherings, transportation and most importantly a space for the students to sing. My classroom became the noon hour space for the jam sessions for the last seven years. The space has been filled with powerful teachings and song.

A few years ago, a First Nations educator brought her hand drum and taught some of her lessons through song. One day a couple of the students stayed after class to ask her about it. They asked if they could learn. We said it was important to speak to their families about protocol first. And we consulted our school elders about protocols we should follow. The girls group started growing from there. They began meeting during noon hours to sing and learn teachings surrounding the women’s songs with our female elder. Anything we did we always consulted with our elders and our families so everyone could be included. We wanted to be sure to honour the traditional teachings of all our families as some differed and we wanted to be respectful to that.
Eventually the boys and girls groups started performing together. It was beautiful as they stood alongside one another. The female singers whose families asked that they only sing alongside the boys did so. The female drum group would sing a song, the male drum group would sing a song and then they would all sing together during our performances. Despite the differing protocols within our Drum Circle, the families all came together during our performances to support the students. They even brought their younger siblings to stand with us and sing.

It has been really special watching it grow. We had over 30 students involved at its peak. Some of them have realities outside our building that make it hard to want to come to school everyday. This provided a community and a sense of belonging where other students can say, “we get it. But we're here. And we're strong!” As a group students supported one another in staying clean. They actually encouraged us to book performances on weekends because for teenagers free time can bring out tough choices. So they’d rather be drumming and singing than dealing with drama!

They have performed in so many places including arts festivals, both in the city and on reserve, music festivals, national science fairs, cultural nights, graduations, retirements and many other events. The group was even featured on Indigenous Circle local TV and CBC Unreserved nationally. The sense of belonging and strength that our students show during their performances was awesome. The connections and relationships we build when we engage with community in this way had far reaching impacts. Families come out and support us and it makes us all very proud. To see a group of youth so kind, so respectful, leading one another in a good way... showing the younger ones that it's a beautiful thing to be Indigenous and connected in this way.... that's what it's all about. – (June 18, 2017)

Despite seeing these powerful moments, when our female drum group started there was push back. I had not started the group but I also could not excuse myself from the responsibility I had in advocating to keep it going. I was implicated directly. I had opened up my space and helped bring it to life. In understanding sihtskâtowin, I cannot just turn my back.

There was push back from some community members who explained in Treaty 4 territory women do not touch the drum. I have had some harsh words said to me and I think I deserve them. I did not know we were doing something wrong. I thought our intentions were good. That is not an excuse. There was a lot of hurt, anger, tears and frustration that resulted because of what we were doing. I know there are people in
community who no longer see me as an ally because of what we chose to do. I am still confused about how I feel truthfully. What I do know is that this is dangerous territory for me to walk as mōniyāskwēw. I do not believe it is my place to take up space in the conversation with my voice. It is my place to listen and to learn. I cannot just say it has nothing to do with me because I helped bring this to life. I have a responsibility to sit and listen to those who disagree with our drumming. I have a responsibility to understand that I do not get to disagree when someone says, “we don’t do that here.” It is not my place to try to shift traditional teaching just because I see the benefit it provides to students.

Regardless of the positive outcomes I was seeing, it was not my place to negotiate, influence or determine protocols. It is not my place to question which family is correct in their teaching. My understanding of feminist rights does not get to take up space and trump traditional teachings either. I have come to understand these are dangers spaces for me to walk as mōniyāskwēw. These are not my conversations to lead. This is to be decided in community. I do have a responsibility to listen and learn the complexity of bringing such things to life. Understanding sihtoskâtowin guides this. Learning is a life long process. Cultural ways are complex and I am on a learning journey in following proper process and protocol in all things.

Deep learning has come from such things for me. I was told in traditional society there are people whose role it is to scold. I have come to understand the importance when this happens and not take it personal, but instead embrace it as an opportunity to learn. I must remember there is a long history of mōniyāwiwak coming into community and taking, pretending, hurting, stealing, and a long line of broken trust and promises
(Absolon, 2011; Kovach, 2009; Vowel, 2016; Wilson, 2008). So when someone from community tells me I hurt them, I should learn from it and listen. I should not ignore it and continue on the same path of destruction. This is tipéyimisowin.

If I am truly an engaged ally working towards decolonization, ultimately it must become about giving up space. I believe space is metaphorically land in the education world and I need to know that it is not just about space in my classroom. This space involves pedagogy and epistemology within myself. I need to ask myself if I am willing to open up emotionally, mentally, physically and spiritually to understanding that the way I do things and why I do things must be shifted in order to truly understand what changes are needed within my spaces. What I do must be embodied in traditional understandings and ways of knowing. Otherwise being an engaged ally allows me to remain comfortable in my educational space while continuing colonial behaviors. When I stand with community, sihtoskâtowin, I am guided in knowing where to walk as môniyâskwêw.

4.5 Keep Walking: Indigenous Knowledge as a Foundation to Resilience

Something I am struggling with as I finish writing this chapter is the feelings of loneliness, alienation, and loss of belonging enraptured in these stories of resilience and beauty. These understandings appeared many times as I carried out my research. A friend of mine asked me, “do you think Indigenous Knowledge is engulfing you?” In my spirit I feel the answer is yes. I cannot walk the same or see things the same. I am hurting, but the strength that is embodied in Indigenous ways of knowing and being keeps me walking forward. It is leading me to wonder how much longer I will continue
within this system of education that hurts so many spirits day to day. In doing this research, I wondered how many people leave our system because of this feeling? Students? Teachers? Parents? I catch myself angrily questioning, do we even want things to change? Or maybe that is the underhanded plan. Eventually I will leave like the others. It feels as though the goal is to break down the spirit:

I know my spirit is weak and I wonder if they will notice when I go. I am not sure how much I have left. And this is not meant to pull sympathy. “Oh poor little white girl!” I cannot even imagine how strong spirit has to be to feel and experience these energies every single day. I have a bitter taste in my mouth. My eyes have only been open for a short time and I am already tired. Maybe that is why people are afraid of opening their eyes because it leads to our spirit. I find myself continuing on because I know Indigenous peoples do not get a choice. It would be too easy for me to take my privilege and say, “okay, time to rest.” No. I must continue on. But I also must replenish my spirit. I need to find a place of belonging where I will not be shunned for the things that I do. Where holistic knowledge is valued, empowered and sought out. You cannot kill this spirit. It is resilient and someday those who try will know how it feels. I pray they find learning, compassion and strength. That’s what will get them thru. I’m blessed to have friends, family and students guiding me.

I will never truly understand what it is like to be Indigenous but I have had a taste of how the system ostracizes, outcasts, pushes down, belittles and damages the spirit. I cannot even fathom what this journey is like for Indigenous educators and students. A pre-service teacher once told me, “I go into the staff room or see colleagues in the hallway. I see them staring at me. I meet their eyes and smile. They look away. That is the furthest engagement gets. I don’t like going in there anymore. It’s like they see me as some kind of animal.” I believe her. I have seen those same looks and felt those same energies. I am tired of those energies. But I am becoming strong in who I am. I stand by my actions and the things I have helped move forward. Despite the name-calling and the negativity, the students have surrounded me and held me up at times without knowing it. Their visits, enthusiasm, actions and passion are a beacon of light and keep me walking towards what is necessary. I cannot just close the door and go back to who I was before. In my spirit it is no longer possible. I have been awoken and will carry on - (November 10th, 2017).

There is a deep hurt inside of me, but I do not believe it is solely my own. I am not the first to feel these things. I will not be the last. Without beginning to understand how Indigenous knowledge offers a foundation of strength, love, compassion and resilience, I do not think I would still be walking this path. Cajete (1994) explains, “true learning and
gaining significant knowledge does not come without sacrifice and at times a deep wound” (p. 228).

I tried to approach this learning from a settler perspective but there was nothing strong enough to keep me going. I was ready to leave the system, both teaching and in my masters journey. The theory embedded in walking the path of a white settler on a journey of unsettling was not enough to keep me questioning. I agree in the spirit of unsettling. In my research I acknowledge I have learned understandings of what it means to recognize and deconstruct my privilege. I need to unlearn much of what I have been taught growing up about Indigenous peoples. As Regan (2010) explains in the work towards decolonization, non-Indigenous Canadians must listen to Indigenous stories as part of this process and release the incessant need to be peacemakers and saviours. I need to learn truths that include how our relationships have been damaged. I have learned I need to disrupt my knowledge.

However, even in these conversations, writing and readings, I did not feel engaged with spirit. I struggled to deconstruct my identity in a settler environment. My eyes had started to open, but my spirit was resisting. It was only in engaging with Indigenous community I truly felt my spirit open up to learning. I needed to engage with community in a way that showed who I was as móniyâskwêw and how my actions are both dangerous and powerful in community within Indigenous understandings. I know that relationships underlie the very essence of what I do. Again I am pulled to the understanding of sihtoskâtowin.

I honestly do not think I would have lasted over the years without the support of community. Starting to understand the teachings shared with me, gives me resilience to
know the interconnectedness of what I do is so important. These understandings have helped me to build strength in learning and carrying on. Without Indigenous Knowledge systems as a foundation I see the danger and damage I could cause in community. The falseness that could emerge in what I do. It is my relationship with community that keeps me honest:

On this path, I was taught about resilience. It has always been about resilience. I do not think I would have lasted as an Indigenous person. Full truth. I would have given up long ago. I just cannot fathom what the system has done to the spirit. And when I say I would not have lasted as an Indigenous person it is because I have not been equipped spiritually to embody the beauty, the strength, the resilience, the patience and the perseverance that lives within the people. I think that is truly what the western system is afraid of. Cause I believe that spirit is unstoppable. And for that, I am grateful for the teachings and kindness that has been shared with me. It is what is keeping me going. When you can go thru struggle and pain, and come out on the other side with something beautiful, that is transformation. That is strength. That is resilience. – (February 13th, 2018)

The pathway that keeps me walking is embodied in my learning about Indigenous Knowledge and the ability to embrace understandings. It is within and it is all around. It is all encompassing, transcending physical into the metaphysical realm. It is relational. And it is self in relation to it all. I have always felt different for the way I feel connected to the earth and to nature. I had no idea that maybe this is something innately within me. Indigenous knowledge has given me a foundation to know these ways of experiencing the world are valid and honored. There is understanding and deep respect for the ability to connect with our environment, creatures and beings. On this journey, I was able to take some classes that allowed me to experience Indigenous knowledge within the western academy. It was like a whole new world opened up. It made sense to me. I felt safe. It is opening my eyes up to who I am and why I am connected: most importantly, to value my intuitive spirit.
Chapter 5: My Spirit Speaks

_We carry the embers of all the things that burned and raged in us. Pains and sorrows, to be sure, but also triumphs, joys, victories and moments of clear-eyed vision. People give us those. People cause flames to rise in our hearts and minds and spirits, and life would not be life without them._

- Richard Wagamese (2016)

As I write the final chapter of my thesis, it is important that I connect how the self-study has led me towards *miskásowin*. Carrying out my research in this way allowed me to become holistically immersed as I explored my experiences and the deep learning they provided me. I have come to a place where I understand the foundational role relationships have in leading me towards *miskásowin*. My connection to community allowed me to find deeper meaning and learning within my stories. My stories illuminated pathways acceptable for me to walk as *môniyâskwêw*.

Despite the deep woundedness I feel, I feel hope. The self-study allowed me to overcome many of the challenges I encountered by reflecting deeply about my stories. I sought refuge in my writing. I found myself counting down the days until the weekends where I could immerse myself in writing. There I discovered comfort, peace and healing. The prayer walks, reflections, artwork, poetry and journaling have given me an outlet to process and inquire into what was really happening during the moments of tension that I encountered. The self-study provided me a foundation to lean on spirit in a way that is acceptable and valid in the academy. The deep woundedness I have felt during these experiences, I now see as building a foundation of resilience. My wounded spirit is a spirit of resilience. Carrying out my self-study has changed me. There is deep learning
that has occurred and will guide me as I continue down the path of teaching Indigenous Education as môniyâskwêw.

5.1 *sihtoskâtowin*

Using the miskâsowin holistic framework there was much learning that emerged. Based on my findings I offer the following emerging model: *sihtoskâtowin*. I chose the understanding of *sihtoskâtowin* (standing shoulder to shoulder) because this model demonstrates what I hope to embody being a helper to community in learning and engaging in an ongoing process of relational exchanges. As môniyâskwêw teaching Indigenous Studies, *sihtoskâtowin* becomes central to how I walk.

Understanding *sihtoskâtowin* guides me to facilitate a learning process as I open up spaces for Indigenous knowledge to be valued, encouraged and grown. It is important to understand that this model is not complete and is ever evolving. As môniyâskwêw I have come to learn who I am, and what I am learning about myself, is in constant growth and evolution. It will be through the process of ongoing reflection and life long learning that I will navigate the spaces I feel are safe to walk as môniyâskwêw. When I say safe, I am not meaning comfortable. I am referring to the mutual understanding of respect necessary in walking with community. Relationships are at the foundation of *sihtoskâtowin* and underlie the very essence of how I walk.

The power in understanding *sihtoskâtowin* illuminates the responsibility I have in walking forward in a good way. I was once told ‘everything in life is a ceremony’ and I believe this to be true. I believe teaching is ceremony as it has been explained to me. My job as a teacher is to assist in this learning and to keep *iskotêw* burning. As
môniyāskwêw, I must care for what is fed into iskotêw. To keep iskotêw burning is the best act of reciprocity I can give back to those who gave, and continue to give, me so much through this journey. I must be mindful my role will change in each community and conversation I enter into. I must work to always be aware of and honor the protocols of the lives of those I am in community with each and every time. I must remember I am always learning and I need to wait to be guided. In that waiting, I need to ask in a good way for that guidance. I must seek humility as I seek to learn. I must come to understand that what I learn must not be taken lightly. sihtoskâtowin is a way of life. The way I walk in this world changes.

As môniyāskwêw I must remember, the iskotêw dies without me. môniyāskwêw does have a role to play in keeping the iskotêw burning and I cannot step back and say it is not part of my responsibility. sihtoskâtowin deepens the understanding of my role much clearer in terms of reconciliation. I must always ask key questions when moving forward because I must think critically about how I may be contributing to the continuing of colonization through my actions. I no longer move forward without guidance or being invited in. Guidance may require asking in a good way with ceremonial tobacco. Giving that tobacco signifies I am ready to move forward. It illuminates my intent.

Good intentions can no longer serve as a legitimate excuse for me because my intentions will have been brought to life through conversations with those I have sought guidance from. Too often I can cloak my destructive actions in the understanding of “good intentions” after the fact when a situation has caused harm. Living sihtoskâtowin takes time to learn. I cannot expect answers to come quickly as the learning is in the
experience. I need to suspend the belief that it will take too much time and demand answers immediately. I must listen, learn, watch and understand. Then, maybe, I will be given permission to move forward. If, still, an outcome causes harm, together as community we will walk rebuilding, together. *sihtskâtowin* helps me learn deeper understandings of what my actions may incur prior to walking the path. *sihtskâtowin* takes spirit work as I learn each and everyday new meaning of what it means to be *môniyâskwêw*.

**5.2 *sihtskâtowin* Model**

The model embodies *eight moons surrounding *môniyâskwêw* learning* *sihtskâtowin*. The model represents the interrelated experiences I have had with community, both physical and metaphysical. I chose to illustrate my model with eight interconnected moons because the moon has always guided me. She reminds me to continue on and gives me strength. It was on many of my walks I would find myself sitting and acknowledging her, praying and asking what I needed to learn. She has guided me not only on this thesis journey, but also on my journeys around the world. She has always been there lighting my path. I wanted to honor this relationship within my model.

I have chosen eight moons to acknowledge the cycles she goes through each lunar journey. In the center of the model, I have placed a reflective artwork of the understandings of interconnectedness and relationality I have learned. Surrounding the artwork: the teachings I feel will guide me in walking in a good way as I continue on the relational journey as *môniyâskwêw*. The moon radiates her knowledge upon me and I am
encapsulated within. I have placed both English and nêhiyawêwin concepts because I am still learning these understandings. The nêhiyawêwin concepts are placed above because they are lifting me towards new pathways.

Figure 5.1 sihtoskâtowin model

The model reads clockwise as I walk through each understanding just as the moon travels her lunar journey. The understandings are embedded within one another to represent the interconnectedness of my learning. The model is not meant to be step-by-step instructions or all encompassing. It is only emerging and it will forever be evolving.
For the purpose of this thesis, I have tried to provide insight into the teachings I feel I need to be mindful as I walk. But as I walk, I feel more phases will be added as I begin to see the moon more clearly in her journey as she is reflected in my journey as môniyâskwêw. sihtskâtowin reminds me we are all on this journey together.

5.3 sihtskâtowin Emerging Teachings

The miskásowin framework of analysis allowed me to pull out these final understandings. It is through the sihtskâtowin model I will try to demonstrate my holistic learning. These are important to hang onto and remember while teaching Indigenous Studies and walking the pathway towards decolonization and reconciliation as môniyâskwêw. The sihtskâtowin model aids me in building resilience while walking this path. The eight moons of knowledge embodied in sihtskâtowin will continually guide me as I walk forward: wâhkôhtowin (relationships), itêyihtamowin (intention), wîsâmitowin (invitation), kistêyihtowin (respect), kiskinohtahiwêwin (guidance), tipêyimisowin (self-ownership), wâh-wîcihitowin (reciprocity) and mâmitonêyihtamowin (reflection). Although the model is separated into independent circles for the purpose of making clear my learning, it is important to note that they are all interconnected. One cannot exist without the other. It is also important to acknowledge that as my learning continues, more and more teachings will be added to my model.

I attempted in a good way to translate my model into nêhiyawêwin understandings as my learning continues. Learning and using language is part of my process. Throughout my thesis I met with different language speakers to begin to come
to know the complexity of learning these understandings. Translating from English to *nêhiyawêwin* is complex as the understandings often cross paths and are embodied in one another (Goforth, 2018; Ratt, 2018; Weenie, 2018). The understandings are alive, grow and change with each new learning. Throughout my thesis, I have embedded understandings that I am beginning to come to know. I have tried to do this respectfully as a way to honor those in my life who have shared with me. I have framed these understandings in terms of continuing the path of teaching Indigenous Education as *môniyâskwêw*. I believe these understandings guide me to walk with community in a good way that extends far beyond the classroom and embodies a true intent of reconciliation and decolonization. Indigenous understandings are a holistic embodiment of engaging relationally.

![wâhkôhtowin](image)

*wâhkôhtowin* *(relationships)* are the foundation of my model. I have placed it as the first moon. Without *wâhkôhtowin* it is difficult to move into other teachings and understandings in the model. The other teachings within the model help lay the foundation for strong *wâhkôhtowin* to be built and remain. They are undoubtedly interconnected. Building *wâhkôhtowin* takes time. It is the understanding that all things are interconnected and deep respect must be given for the relational exchanges of energy we encounter each and everyday. It is the understanding that we are all relatives. It guides me in understanding that I would not want to harm my relatives. My intentions must be carried out in a good way.
The constraints within my school system for curricular outcomes make it is easier for me to want to ignore this teaching without truly embodying it. I must understand this relational understanding does not just exist within the confines of my classroom. It is an ongoing process that is embodied in how I walk. Engaging with Indigenous community in learning and understanding is not done as a process of observer-participant relational exchange. It is about actively engaging with wâhkôhtowin that surround me each and everyday in the community I teach. I must work to nurture wâhkôhtowin.

So, what does wâhkôhtowin look like in terms of reconciliation for môniyâskwêw? Even in writing this I am struggling with the term reconciliation. It indicates there is wâhkôhtowin to rebuild. But time and time again, I saw educators used reconciliation in a way that they controlled wâhkôhtowin. I could see our approaches were lacking. My western worldview encourages me to push into these spaces because action is necessary now. I have learned that patience is necessary. Indigenous peoples do not address these realities in the same way as the colonizer. What I was not seeing was that prayer comes before everything. I am learning that prayer is central before walking.

I have also come to understand that in wâhkôhtowin, a shift in our system is vital. Part of the journey is listening to how I NEED to do things different and not be offended or hurt when these things are asked of me. I need to be open to learning and put aside the urge to think I know best. I need to see this as an opportunity to learn and not feel that someone is putting my work down. Instead they are trying to guide me so that I may be both authentic in intention and impact. For example, to be authentic in any project about reconciliation I do, it MUST involve relational building with community or it is not actually reconciliation. Without wâhkôhtowin true reconciliation does not exist.
I must also understand that reconciliation is embedded in responsibility to community. What frustrates me is I often hear that it is not practical to look at reconciliation in this light, as there is not enough time to carry out projects in this way. Building wâhkôhtowin takes time and because wâhkôhtowin lacks it would be impossible to seek permission or guidance each and every time I do something. But that is exactly my point. How can it be reconciliation if there is no wâhkôhtowin? I do not believe that not having enough time can be an excuse. There is always time to do things in a good way. If there is not, perhaps the project should not be carried out. wâhkôhtowin within the model of sihtoskâtowin guides me. môniyâskwêw should never carry out an action without being guided or given permission. wâhkôhtowin is foundational to walking as môniyâskwêw. I do not want to harm or damage wâhkôhtowin.

**itêyihtamowin**

The second moon within my model is itêyihtamowin (intention). As I walk I need to be clear with itêyihtamowin or I risk damaging wâhkôhtowin (relationships). itêyihtamowin guides me to understanding intention more deeply. It is deeper than a promise or deeper than words. In bringing forth itêyihtamowin, I have prepared for what I am vowing and what it is I will be giving back. I am embodied within itêyihtamowin and cannot detach from the responsibility of it. It calls for responsibility in how I walk as môniyâskwêw.

More than ever, I need to stop and listen to what Indigenous peoples are trying to teach me, trying to show me and trying to bring to life. Deep in my spirit I know that voices and stories need to be empowered. I can help by opening up spaces for that to take
place; even in the face of adversaries who continually try to silence Indigenous students. In walking forward as môniyâskwêw, I need to do this with such great care and willingness to stop walking and start listening when asked to. Too often, I want to run and fix things, but it is not possible to undo 150 years of colonialism with one project, class, conversation or #thoughtsandprayers. It is so important as I move forward that I am careful, considerate and mindful. Even if my intentions are good I must understand I can cause much harm if I am not careful in how I walk.

This is where itêyihtamowin guides me to think deeper about my actions, lessons, activities or behaviors and how they are attached to my intentions. As môniyâskwêw, even when I think I have the best of intentions, I must acknowledge when I have harmed. itêyihtamowin guides me to take ownership when this happens and pre-plan to avoid such trauma. I know as môniyâskwêw much harm has come from people like me. itêyihtamowin helps me to truly engage with my actions knowing they may have deep consequences, both positive and negative. sihtoskâtowin keeps me true in itêyihtamowin. We are all only beginning as we are all life long learners. itêyihtamowin will shine through my actions: so I must be clear in how I walk.

\[wîsâmitowin\]

For reconciliation to be authentic it must be grounded in community. The third moon reminds me that wîsâmitowin (invitation) into community becomes essential in walking in different spaces. There is so much learning that can happen once I am invited into spaces. As my learning deepens, it is my hope I will be recognized as an authentic engaged ally working towards sihtoskâtowin. The understanding of wîsâmitowin

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involves a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of relationships and action as I wait to be guided and supported by community. Without wīsāmitowin I am essentially carving my own path of what I believe reconciliation should look like and that is not acceptable.

It is important that I am clear in my intentions in entering into such spaces. This takes relational building and patience. A lot of people have said to me, “well you are coming from a different place. It’s easy for you, you have those relationships.” My relationships have taken years to build. I did not have these relationships when I started. They emerged while walking this pathway and I opened up my spirit. It started with my students, families and so on: one person at a time. With each relationship learning came. Saying people do not have relationships, or know any Indigenous people, is part of the colonial logic. It is an excuse to continue to race towards healings as a further means of colonization on my own terms.

Relationships are out there. They take time to build. Without authentic relationships, I have to question what my projects of reconciliation really embody. I must understand in covering certain topics wīsāmitowin from community is extremely important. When I decide to walk the path of deconstructing intimate stories, I must not do so unless I have community walking with me. If I feel there is push back or I have overstepped, I need to step back and ask for guidance. This is continual and can happen many times during a single project. I must remind myself this work is not meant to be easy. Understanding my place within sihtoskâtowin helps connect me to the understanding of wīsāmitowin:

One of my student suggested projects of reconciliation are often furthering cultural appropriation. I asked why. She explained, “teachers choose the bits they want to use, but
don’t understand the teachings behind what they are doing. This is NOT reconciliation and this is NOT decolonization. There is permission needed for a lot of the work being done. But no one is asking.” This young lady always shakes me with her words. She is so right. She is a daughter of a chief and comes from a very traditional family. She told me, “If you’re doing projects about us… it needs to involve us. Otherwise it’s just appropriation,” she continued. Teachers are still cherry picking what is easy and necessary to meet an outcome many times. And in doing so, they continue the colonial cycles of silencing the oppressed as we share their stories for them. I need to ask myself, if we are having the conversations don’t they need to involve the people we’re having conversations about?! Doing projects ABOUT and FOR Indigenous is no longer acceptable. The aim is to do projects alongside and with Indigenous peoples. And hopefully, get invited into spaces where projects are happening within Indigenous community. – (December 15th, 2017)

There is no reconciliation if my work does not involve Indigenous peoples. My involvement must involve Indigenous communities in a real way to gain understanding of sihtoskâtowin. Pushing ahead with a colonial mentality and urgency to heal is just another way to justify my taking up of spaces and reframing reconciliation to benefit mōniyāskwêw. When I say real, it means I must work hard to build these relationships and value them in a way that they grow and are nurtured. Community should not just be used when it is convenient but instead should be at the heart of my projects and those relationships should carry on long after the projects are over. "wīsâmitowin from community is what initiates the direction I walk.

\[ kistēyihtowin \]

The fourth moon calls for learning the deep \( kistēyihtowin \) (respect) necessary for engaging in and honoring traditional teachings. These understandings must be part of my learning and projects of reconciliation. Centering reconciliation in the traditional understanding of sihtoskâtowin allows me to put traditions, protocols, language, relationships, responsibility, intention and teachings fundamental to all I do. With my projects I must understand that when I engage the emotional, mental, physical and
spiritual elements there is also the responsibility of caring for what I bring to life. There is spirit within learning and within each one of us. kistêyihtowin guides me in understanding this. kistêyihtowin helps me see I am a learner with community.

kistêyihtowin teaches me that I must absolutely understand there are some projects and topics that are not mine to touch in intimate ways. With those topics, getting approval from a few individuals is not enough. This is where relationships become foundational. Those I am in relation with will help to guide my steps if projects and topics are too intimate or cultural protocols need to be honoured before moving forward. What I have learned is that these conversations are ongoing. I do not just ask permission in the beginning. It is integral that those I am seeking permission from become an essential part of the journey with me. This means I must be flexible in my timelines and allow for organic opportunity to grow during the project.

If there are traditional teachings or protocols that must be followed, it might mean pausing my project or changing direction. This becomes difficult in the strains of the western classroom, but this is where kistêyihtowin guides me. If there is not enough time to do things in a good way, than I need to be mindful of that. It might mean recreating my initial vision. It does not mean just wiping my hands and saying, “forget it. What’s the point?” It means pre-planning and being flexible. Being creative with how I meet my outcomes and being willing to see learning as a circular worldview.

I have also learned that it is not my place to carry out certain traditional teachings and protocols. In my learning, it is not my goal to ‘play Indian’. I can embody deep kistêyihtowin that is essential to traditional teachings, but I must pause as môniyâskwêw and know it is not my place to carrying out certain traditional practices. For example, in
giving tobacco I am showing kistéyihtowin for initiating a relationship and learning to begin. I have also received tobacco embodied in this same understanding. This is a safe space to walk as môniyâskwêw. I do not feel it would be my place as môniyâskwêw to teach students about these medicines. Providing some surface understanding is one thing, but creating tobacco ties for offerings or leading smudging circles is an area in which I will seek guidance as môniyâskwêw. I can model my understanding of the deep kistéyihtowin I have for protocols by initiating the relationship with tobacco in front of students as I ask others to guide us. Deep kistéyihtowin is essential to how I walk.

kiskinohtahiwêwin

As I reflect on the ever-evolving space as môniyâskwêw, I thought it would be useful to provide some reflective questions I could ask myself when seeking kiskinohtahiwêwin (guidance) and supports. The fifth moon reminds me that I must continually be questioning how I move forward. kiskinohtahiwêwin surrounds all I do and is built within my intentions of what I am doing. The relationships that I have built will help direct me on who or where I should seek kiskinohtahiwêwin. The following are some questions that guide me while walking:

- Why am I doing this project? What is my intention?
- Who is guiding this project? Community? Students? Me?
- How do I begin to build relationships?
- What am I taking, borrowing or removing from community?
- Have I been respectful? What does respect look like?
- What will this project leave behind? Will anyone get hurt?
- What do I gain? What am I giving back?
- Does it involve community? Who is community?
- Who needs to be involved in the project?
- Have proper protocols been followed? Do protocols honour the individuality of the people and community?
Has permission been given to carry out this work? Who do I need to seek permission from?
What happens when it is over? What follow up will happen?
Do I have responsibilities once it’s over?
How do I keep the relationship going?
Am I doing this FOR, ABOUT or WITH Indigenous peoples?
What makes this project authentic?
Have I honoured those who have taken part or shared?
Have I asked in a good way for guidance?
What do I do if I make a mistake? What if someone gets hurt?
Who are my supports during this project?
How do I ensure I am not speaking FOR Indigenous peoples?
How might my voice be silencing others?
Who has invited me into this space?
Am I being a helper to community?
Am I taking from community without permission?
Whose community am I taking space in?
Is there someone else who is more equipped to speak?
Is what I am doing provoking sympathy, empathy or action?
Can I care for the things I bring to life during this project?
How might my actions further colonial trauma or cycles?
Am I allowing the project to grow organically as it unfolds?
What will this project do to community?

These questions help me to be mindful of the space I hold as môniyâskwêw and allow me to seek kiskinohtahiwêwin from the supports in community necessary to carry out my work in a good way. sihtoskâtowin becomes stronger when I seek kiskinohtahiwêwin.

**tipêyimisowin**

Throughout my experiences, there have been many bumps. I have made many mistakes. This is where some of my deepest learning emerged. The sixth moon embodies tipêyimisowin (self-ownership) becoming central to how I walked during these times. For example, when carrying out lessons and activities, I realized that they looked extremely different for my Indigenous students versus my non-Indigenous students. Although at
times it was necessary to ‘make white people feel uncomfortable,’ I realized this same rhetoric did not work with a largely Indigenous class. I ended up hurting people when I applied that understanding. I do not think it is my right to harm Indigenous students for the sake of helping my non-Indigenous students learn.

Students brought this understanding to me in their direct honesty. I am thankful for that. I learned, if someone tells me I have caused him or her harm, I need to listen. Pam Palmater explains, “you don’t get to judge the harm when you inflict it. Then you have to accept that harm as fact” (February 15, 2018). I do not get to decide if their hurt is worthy of being acknowledged or explain the benefit of the project is more worthy than their hurt. I have witnessed educators dismiss the harm inflicted on students for the sake of learning. I do not agree with this. I will continue to voice concerns when I see it.

Following tipēyimisowin helps me avoid causing harm. Indigenous teachings guide me to know my community before engaging in such learning. Care and attention surrounds all I do. If I harm someone it is important I own up to my actions instead of placing blame. I put ego aside and understand that harm can happen. I have the potential, regardless of intention, to harm students, colleagues, families, kēhtē-ayak, community, or the environment. Despite my best intentions, I will still make mistakes. I need to be humble and seek guidance when this happens. tipēyimisowin guides how I move forward. sihtoskâtowin is not possible if I do not take ownership for my actions.

**wâh-wîcihitowin**

wâh-wîcihitowin *(reciprocity)* is more than just giving back as a one time action or experience. The seventh moon is guiding me to understand wâh-wîcihitowin as
something much deeper as I come to know that relationships embody a circular way of living. It helps me to see deeply, that everything and everyone is interconnected. This means I am in a constant state of wâh-wîcihitowin with each every interaction I encounter. I must be mindful of what I am putting into the circle in sihtoskâtowin. In my western understanding, I saw it as giving something directly. For example, a token of thanks after completing a project or sharing might be given. However, this understanding pulls me much deeper to see that we are embodied in one another and whether I am giving back in a good or bad way, community is impacted.

I am continually giving to community as community is continually giving to me. We are not separated in this understanding and interaction. When I see wâh-wîcihitowin in this way, it calls for responsibility and relationality as I move forward. It guides me to embody how the other teachings in my model are interconnected in my action. Within my model, I speak of itêyihtamowin (intention). Understanding wâh-wîcihitowin pulls me to ensure that whatever outcomes are created from my actions, will contribute to community in a positive way. If I harm or offend someone despite having good intentions, tipêyimisowin is important because I do not want harm to be what I give back to community for the learning that has been shared with me. Each and every interaction and experience I have is enveloped in wâh-wîcihitowin within the sihtoskâtowin model.

\[ \begin{align*}
\text{mâmítowinëyihtamowin} \\
\end{align*} \]

The eighth, and final moon, is mâmítowinëyihtamowin (reflection). During the sihtoskâtowin process, I will always be in mâmítowinëyihtamowin. This is where deeper learning begins. It allows me to see where I can do things differently and what has been
truthful, respectful and beautiful learning. It allows me to see where I need to grow. I will continue to walk and pray as my source of deep mâmitonêyihtamowin. For others this may look different. I believe that whatever method used, mâmitonêyihtamowin provides a pathway to opening possibility in strengthening understanding.

To put it terms of sihtoskâtowin, I believe that mâmitonêyihtamowin is the underpinning of continuing in a good way. Through mâmitonêyihtamowin, insight into wâhkôhtowin (relationships) helps me to build honest itêyihtamowin (intention) as I receive wîsâmitowin (invitation) into community. When this happens I will work to learn the deep kistêyihtowin (respect) that is necessary in moving forward as I walk. In doing so, I will seek kiskinohtahiwêwin (guidance) in my continual learning. When I make mistakes, or need more learning, I will commit to tipêyimisowin (self-ownership) and adjust how I am walking. In the end, mâmitonêyihtamowin provides me with understanding the acts of wâh-wîcihitowin (reciprocity) that are embodied in the process. mâmitonêyihtamowin creates the pathway to further learning on my journey and brings all the teachings of sihtoskâtowin together for me as mòniyâskwêw.

5.3 Final Thoughts: miyopimâtisowin

miyopimâtisowin embodies the understanding: it is a good way to live or living in a good way. In learning to walk in a good way as mòniyâskwêw, this self-study allowed me the opportunity to take my experiences and deeply reflect on them personally. I am able now to offer my very personal experiences to others as a possible way to inform their practice. As I finish the final chapter of my thesis, I am reminded of the responsibility to give back for the teachings I have gained through this journey. I hope
that my words find their way to others who might be looking for a deeper learning experience. My words are for those willing to engage Indigenous pathways in their journey towards teaching Indigenous Education, reconciliation and decolonization. A goal in writing in this way was to make my work accessible. I have been intentional in the language I have used, holding Indigenous understanding central to how I move forward. This includes empowering Indigenous language that broadened my understandings and my place within community.

As my journey evolved, I realized in telling my story, it was important that I engage in learning what it means to be môniyâskwêw in community: from community. This community evolved and shifted with each and every experience I encountered. I could not talk about being môniyâskwêw in an Indigenous space without finding meaning from Indigenous community. This included speaking and learning directly from community. I could not talk about decolonizing without doing so with Indigenous peoples and pathways. I see and feel it more than ever the absolutely integral learnings that exist only within community.

There is still a lot of work to be done in navigating my space as môniyâskwêw. But I feel I have begun to walk in a good way and I will continue on the learning journey. In weaving my way throughout the self-study, I must always come back to miskâsowin. It has been during this holistic cyclical process of reflection that I have found understanding in being môniyâskwêw and what that means as I move forward with Indigenous Education. I have come to understand it means engaging holistically with the curriculum. It is not about becoming Indian. It is about developing a humanness and relational understanding with each and every community I interact with. The
nêhiyawêwin understandings that I have engaged with help me to see that it is about living a good life: miyopimâtisowin. In an effort to give back, I have created the sihtoskâtowin model to illustrate the teachings that emerged as central to my journey of môniyâskwêw.

In doing so, I am continually pulled back to the understanding of iskotêw. My iskotêw is still burning, but I know I have started to hide my flame. I started to put it away because I was scared that the smallest breath would blow out anything that remains. I am wounded from all the encounters and the embers that are left still burning. But I am resilient and these are deep lessons I have learned. This has been a massive learning journey full of heartache, pain and beauty. I teach differently. I think differently and see the world differently.

In the end, I need to understand that no real change happens if I am not willing to walk a new road that is unfamiliar to me with boundaries that have not been created by my own people. It is necessary to ground my work in traditional teachings and understandings. I need to make strong my understandings of language and knowledge because it opens up a new way of seeing the world that is not from my western gaze. I know I must open up my spirit to learning. I believe if I shift to educating with my spirit, while nourishing the learning spirit of my students, spaces of engagement will open up and empower Indigenous Knowledge systems to return. As I walk forward, I will constantly go back to the teachings I have learned along this journey of self-study and always go back to the teachings I have learned with community. I will do my best to be mindful of my place as môniyâskwêw as I continue on my life long learning journey.
Because I have focused on stories of tension throughout my research, I want to draw upon the beauty that has emerged as a result as I close this chapter. Beautiful things come from broken hearts when we are willing to cry tears of healing. I offer a list of what I am thankful for: what walking this pathway has shown me. I am thankful for the students, their cheekiness and sharing that keeps me going. I am thankful for community projects that showed learning transcending beyond our classroom. I am thankful for the sharing that sparked projects of action. I am thankful for the friends and colleagues who are there to listen and share in the journey. I am thankful for those whose stories illuminated truths. I am thankful for educators who are willing to engage in new learning. I am thankful for people in the system working to open up pathways of change. I am thankful for inboxes from former students sharing future learnings and experiences. I am thankful for excited students ready to embed their learning into their future careers and paths. I am thankful for families giving thanks for opening up spaces. I am thankful for the community who was so willing to share and teach us. I am thankful for the adversaries who taught me to walk more carefully. I am thankful for the creatures and the elements that grabbed my attention to deepen my learning. I am thankful for experiences that transcend this physical world. I am thankful for prayer that grounds me always. I am thankful for the laughter. Because I have been taught that laughter is healing. And man have we laughed. I am most thankful for the spirit that guided it all. Despite the hard stuff: there is so much beauty. *miyopimâitisowin nanâskomowin*
môniyâskwêw niya
Kim nitisiyihkâson
akâmaskihk ohcí niya mâka niwikin nêhiyaw-askihk
êkwa miyikosiwin
ninânâskomon
nimâci-kiskéyihtênsihtskâtowinêkwa miyo-pimâtisowin
ê-kitimâkisiyân
niwanipitênsâkaw
 mâka miywâsin osâm ê-mâci-kiskéyihtamân
nikâkisimon
nimâci-kiskéyihtênenêkwaninânâskomon
askiy, pisiskiwapawâcikanak, kisikâwipišim,
êkwa tipiskâwipišim
kahkiyaw niwâhkâmâkanak
nimâci-kiskéyihtênnêhiyaw-kiskéyihtamowin
êkwa ninânâskomon
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