

# Ethical Relationality and Indigenous Storywork Principles as Methodology: Addressing Settler-Colonial Divides in Inner-City Educational Research

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## Abstract

In this article, we share our engagement with Indigenous methodologies in a research study focused on teacher candidates in inner-city education. The study is conceptualized through ethical relationality as developed by Dwayne Donald (Papaschase Cree), and the principles of Indigenous Storywork as developed by Jo-ann Archibald (Stó:lō and St'at'imc). The study was enriched through encouraging a wholistic embodiment of ethics, revealing the presences of land and more-than-human teachers, and providing opportunities to transcend dualisms. We conclude with a consideration of the complexities, possibilities, and limitations of ourselves as Euro-descendant researchers, and the ethical requirements of Indigenous mentorship, time, and responsibility.

## Keywords

ethical relationality, Indigenous Storywork, settler-colonialism, teacher education, inner-city education, decolonial, land based, walking analyses, urban

## Introduction: The Research Study and the Significance of the Methodology

We initiate this discussion of our research project and methodology by acknowledging the land and relationships that set the context for our work. This study is located in the heart of Turtle Island<sup>1</sup> at the confluence of the Assiniboine and Red Rivers, now also known as the city of Winnipeg. This area is the historic meeting place of Indigenous peoples, and traditional territories of the Anishinaabeg, Nêhiyawak, Dakota, Oji-Cree, and Dene peoples and homeland of the Métis Nation (Huck, 2003). We live and work on Treaty 1 territory, and aspire to understand and honor the spirit and intent of oral understandings of this Treaty (Starblanket, 2018). This research project is located in an elementary school in the inner-city<sup>2</sup> of Winnipeg. Statistical data continue to show that Winnipeg's inner-city communities are composed of significant numbers of highly diverse Indigenous and newcomer immigrant peoples, and that they continue to disproportionately experience inequitable economic opportunities and educational outcomes (Statistics Canada, 2016; Toews, 2018; Winnipeg School Division, 2018). The differences in experiences and perspectives in this place reflect deep divides emerging from historic and

ongoing settler-colonial encounters (Dorries, 2019), and this influences how we approach our research and understand our complicities in the issues we seek to address.

The research project is a case study of eight teacher candidates' experience of an enhanced practicum team approach during the 2017/2018 school year in their first year of a 2-year Bachelor of Education program at a post-secondary institution in Winnipeg. We refer to this host school by the pseudonym Heartfulness School and refer to the post-secondary institution as the University. The research was focused on supporting knowledge translations across University and elementary school contexts and provided an enhanced practicum approach that drew together the teacher candidates, cooperating teachers, university instructors, and practicum advisor in ongoing dialogue with each other and the researchers in support of the mentorship of teacher candidates. The study relied on the concept of *ethical relationality* as developed by curriculum scholar Dwayne Donald

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(Papaschase Cree) (2012a, 2012b, 2016), and storied practices based on the principles of Indigenous Storywork (ISW<sup>3</sup>) as developed by Jo-ann Archibald, Q'um Q'um Xiim (2008) (Stó:lō and St'at'imc). All of the participants were from White, Euro-descendant settler ethnicities, which is a common dynamic in teacher education in settler-colonial contexts (Janzen & Cranston, 2016; Marom, 2019).

In this article, we are attending specifically to our understanding and engagement with ethical relationality and ISW within the methodology of the study, and provide study information where needed for context. We will discuss our reasons for engaging with the work of Donald and Archibald, clarify our understanding of their work and how it was reflected in the study design and analyses, and provide a (re)consideration of this methodological choice. We will share the ways we believe this approach enhanced the study, as well as our own learning and relationships. We are also providing greater consideration to the complexities involved in relation to our own limitations as Euro-descendant, White scholars as well as concerns regarding appropriation of Indigenous knowledges.

### Reasons for Engaging Indigenous Methodologies Developed by Donald and Archibald

Engaging Archibald and Donald's methodologies in this research project was a complex and multilayered choice. The actual research focus is on settler interactions and narratives within educational systems and institutions, and not Indigenous peoples, communities, or experiences. In designing this study, a methodology was sought that could engage the complexities and ethical tensions inherent in the divisions between the University and Heartfulness School, and the divisions between people/communities in a settler-colonial city with significant systemic and institutionalized racism (MacDonald, 2015). Both ethical relationality and ISW as theories and research methodologies are immersed in the priorities of ethics and relationships—central concerns of the study. This research project is also focused on understanding the complexities of participants' identities, affiliations, and participation within institutional relationships in this complex context. There is not an expectation of developing a reliable list of *best practices* to solve the problems of inner-city education through this study. The hope is to develop deeper understandings related to embodied participation, and thus is better suited to a research approach that engages wholistic<sup>4</sup> experience. The personal experiences of the principal investigator in working with these methodologies in collaboration and mentorship from Indigenous scholars, and in particular Drs. Archibald and Donald as mentors, have also provided an embodied appreciation that these approaches are highly suited to the complexities of this research project.

The choice to engage Indigenous approaches and theories in the methodology of this study also relates to addressing the epistemic limitations of Eurocentric research and knowledge practices (Battiste, 2005; Kerr, 2014). Mignolo (2012) highlights that both the social sciences and humanities in academies reinforce the dominance of Euro-Western traditions, despite the critique of modernity found in hermeneutics and taken up broadly in the humanities. Mignolo argues that inquiries should bring into relief the silenced knowledges and the possibility of thinking beyond the borders of Euro-Western ontologies and colonial dominance. Mignolo (2012) articulates that non-dominant and pluriversal knowledges and perspectives are not revisionist or intending to “tell a different truth,” but rather “geared toward the search for a different logic” (p. 22). This study seeks to engage in research through a different logic than the ontologies we have been educated within. We also engage ethical relationality as a way to also be personally taught ethical relations in our work as researchers. Starting this article with a recognition of land that acknowledges the traditional Indigenous relationships on that land (Marker, 2018) is an important teaching of the Indigenous methodologies we are engaging in this research. This is crucially important in the settler-colonial context of this research in the North End of Winnipeg that embodies inequitable colonial divisions (Toews, 2018).

### The Theoretical Framework of the Study

#### *Ethical Relationality*

The research as a whole was guided by Donald's (2012a, 2012b, 2016) conception of ethical relationality in his written work, as well as discussions with him about his work. We would clarify that our ability to understand and express our understanding of ethical relationality does not express the fullness and complexity of the ethic. Donald shares that key Cree concepts within ethical relationality are more complexly understood in the verb-based active language and engaged in ways that exceed written/academic engagement (D. Donald, personal communication, April 27, 2020). Due to the noun-based structure of English, and the reduction that emerges from writing academically, the meanings here will only be partial. Despite these limitations, we work to balance these challenges by drawing on the ways Donald has worked to share these ideas in academic publications, while also being mindful of our own limitations in translation of these ideas to our work. In Donald's view, informed by Cree and Blackfoot teachings, “[e]thical relationality is an ecological understanding of human relationality that does not deny difference, but rather seeks to understand more deeply how our different histories and experiences position us in relation to each other” (Donald, 2012a, p. 103).

In his work, Donald emphasizes the ethical imperative of relationality that requires “attentiveness to the responsibilities that come with a declaration of being in relation” (Donald, 2012b, p. 535). Donald points out that we cannot be ethical unless we appreciate that we are related, and that our future as peoples with all living beings on Mother Earth are already tied together (Donald, 2012a). Ethical relationality is positioned as a way to *unlearn* colonial logics that disregard Indigenous peoples’ knowledges and perspectives, and that portray Indigenous and settler peoples as occupying separate realities, and their different perspectives, experiences, and knowledges as incommensurable (D. Donald, personal communication, April 27, 2020).

Donald (2016) draws together the Cree teachings of wicìhitowin and wahkohtowin as promoting ethical relationality when taken together. He shares that wicìhitowin refers to the “life-giving energy that is generated when people face each other as relatives and build trusting relationships by connecting with others in respectful ways,” and wahkohtowin is to recognize and extend kinship relations with more-than-human beings (Donald, 2016, p. 10). Ethical relationality encourages us to work to unlearn colonial logics, and recognize the responsibilities of working to be in ethical human relations across divides of difference, and to see ourselves as “enmeshed in webs of relationships with each other and the other entities that inhabit the world . . . those entities that give and sustain life” (Donald, 2012a, p. 103). Donald emphasizes that within ethical relationality, there is no requirement of sameness or expectation of agreement, rather there is a requirement to recognize and be responsible in all of our relations.

### *Engaging Archibald’s Indigenous Storywork Principles in Study Design—Jeannie*

In the research design,<sup>5</sup> I sought to honor ethical relationality through engaging with Archibald’s (2008) ISW and the ethical principles in her approach: respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, [w]holism, interrelatedness, and synergy. Each step of the design was considered through the principles, which sought to engage the human and more-than-human presences in the research activities through this framework. Archibald (2008) conceptualizes ISW as a methodology with the capacity to engage complexity through story’s ability to wholistically engage the heart, mind, body, and spirit. Archibald initially developed this methodology through her PhD research to embody an approach that is Indigenous and academic (Archibald & Parent, 2019). The ISW principles are guided by Stó:lō knowledges and concepts, and teachings from Coast Salish Elders. I began to learn this methodology through reading Archibald’s work but was also fortunate to have the exemplary experience of being taught directly under her guidance in my PhD work, and also through my experience as her teaching assistant in

her graduate course on Indigenous knowledges. This mentorship continues with Dr. Archibald’s guidance on this article. I believe my experiences learning from Dr. Archibald have been generous and life-changing gifts that have enriched my more embodied understanding of her approach. I further worked on learning to understand the principles of ISW through collaborative projects with Indigenous scholar Dr. Amy Parent (Nisga’a). We were both co-teaching assistants for Dr. Archibald and have also worked as co-teachers and collaborators on research projects (Kerr & Parent, 2015, 2018). Through this mentorship, learning, and collaborating over 10 years, I have developed different ways of engaging the principles of ISW in teaching and research, but importantly I continue to share my work in ISW with these scholars for their continued guidance.

The participants in the study were brought together in three talking circles over the course of the school year at Heartfulness School. Before each circle, food was shared with acknowledgment and thanks. The protocols for the circles were based on my oral teachings from Dr. Archibald and then Dr. Parent, and my experience in talking circles with them. These talking circles are geared toward academic and educational contexts, and, while drawing on Indigenous knowledges, do not engage in ceremony, medicines, or practices that should be led by an Indigenous Elder. Each circle started by identifying my Indigenous academic teachers and the place where the teachings originated, and acknowledging a rock that had been gifted to me from one of my mentors.<sup>6</sup> This rock was considered by me to have spiritual significance as it was gifted as well as the connection to Mother Earth. The rock remained at the school in the care of a participant in between circles. At the start of each circle, I shared a personal experience story that reflected my own common challenges from my previous experience as an inner-city educator. The stories were intended to draw out the wholistic feel of educational inequalities and complexities, and the tensions embedded with identity and place.<sup>7</sup> The participants were invited to reflect on the story through careful listening and attending to personal connections, and then invited to share emergent stories. The basics of the protocol that I have been taught from my mentors is that after introducing and welcoming everyone to the circle and sharing the story or purpose of the circle, the rock is then passed to the left and each participant takes turns sharing related personal experience stories uninterrupted as the rock is passed. There is freedom to pass without comment. The energy of the participants is shared with the energy of the rock—drawing the circle together in reverence to the discussion and the participants. All participants are part of the circle with hearts facing each other. The priorities of this approach are bringing stories together in shared ethical space to enable greater insights through the synergy of the interrelated stories—offering emergent and generative understandings. This protocol draws on

Indigenous knowledges specific to my mentors and is meant to be engaged in academic settings in this form.

### *Analysis Through Ethical Relationality and ISW—Jeannie and Katya*

We attempted to keep ISW and ethical relationality at the heart of our analysis through continually questioning our shared insights and emergent themes. We asked these questions in a cyclical way: Are we being respectful to our participants but also to the students that our participants work with and their communities? Are we being responsible to those committed to meaningful education in inner-city contexts and the particular community in which the school exists? Are we showing reciprocity and reverence for the stories that were shared with us? Are we considering the heart, mind, body, and spirit of ourselves and participants as we consider our iterative learning and findings? Are we remaining open to learning and finding human and more-than-human teachers? We tried to maintain consideration of the interrelatedness of participants and emergent themes as we engaged the synergy of shared stories.

We also engaged priorities within Gadamerian hermeneutic analysis to acknowledge the potential impositions in interpretation that we brought to our analysis (Gadamer, 2004). While we recognize that Gadamer's approach can reproduce Euro-Western dominance (Kerr, 2020), we chose to use strategies within hermeneutics to help us in revealing our biases. Gadamer explains that a person who is engaged in meaning making is always projecting onto the text, situation, or event in a way that serves to get in the way of understanding. They will have particular expectations and hold meanings that will be projected onto the interpretation and, in being unaware of these projections, can be poised to obscure or erase meanings (Gadamer, 2004). Donald (2011) acknowledges that stories help to "see ourselves implicated in and in relation to what it is that we want to know" (para. 13). In our discussions, we raised the consideration that having had time away from demanding K-12 settings, that we might have gained learning experiences that our participants had not. We were attentive to our propensity to be judgmental as a way to avoid dealing with our own complicities. We have both worked as inner-city teachers and we might make assumptions due to problematic patterns we have seen in schools. We also felt we had a lot to learn about ethical relationality and ISW and might misinterpret the ethical concepts when engaging the stories.

### *Extending the Framework—Sentience of Land (Marker)*

Jeannie has also been mentored over a number of years by Indigenous scholar Dr. Michael Marker (Arapaho), which has left a deep impression on her regarding the significance of land to knowing (see Marker, 2018). Inspired by the idea that

places are sentient through the land and more-than-human relatives (see also Basso, 1996; Cajete, 1993; Simpson, 2014), and to attempt to engage wakhochtowin in our work (Donald, 2016), we arranged three walking discussions of our analyses of each talking circle 1 month apart in significant places on the land.<sup>8</sup> We did not have any particular expectations of what would emerge from engaging in walking analyses, but we hoped that this would open up opportunities for enriched engagements and extended relations. We chose Heartfulness School, The University, and The Forks, and prior to each walk, we took time independently to read and re-read the transcripts and make notes on our potential projections, emergent themes, and findings. We then met and walked and discussed our ideas orally in spring 2019 over 3 months.

### **Metaphorical Findings Through a Storied and Land-Based Approach**

Through the storied approach and walking analyses on the land, our findings in turn became storied and metaphorical. Our walking analyses at the confluence of the Assiniboine and Red Rivers influenced our (re)turnings to a river story we refer to as *Up the River; Down the River*,<sup>9</sup> as well as Donald's (2012a) notion of *pedagogy of the fort*. These metaphors became ways to understand the complex interconnections between past, present, and future, and the sociocultural and political elements within this research in inner-city education. This story and metaphor were constant teachers for us and helped us to keep ethical relationality as a priority in our relations. We share the story here as well as a brief consideration of findings we call *down the river in the fort* to highlight the impact of the methodology.

#### *Up the River; Down the River*

*A man is walking down the river and sees a child that seems to be in peril splashing in the water. Without hesitation, the man jumps in the river and saves the child, but then sees another child in similar circumstances. The man jumps back in the river and saves the next child, but then notices more and more children. The man is committed and exhausted, he implores passersby to help him save the children in this down the river location. As such, more people help, and the cycle continues—more children struggling in peril, more people saving them, more people exhausted. One woman walks away. Another woman who is pulling a child out from the water yells to the woman who is leaving: "Where are you going? We have to save these children!" The woman responds "I'm going up the river to find out who is throwing these children in the river."*

#### *Down the River in the Fort*

The participants shared stories of being physically and emotionally overwhelmed by a sense of responsibility for teaching and caring for children living without basic necessities. We began to see the participants as being immersed in trying



to save children from the turbulent down river waters. The river story teaches us that being immersed in pulling children from the river can preclude recognition of *up the river* factors such as dispossession of land, and other ongoing forms of settler-colonialism, as being primary causes of the violences experienced by children in the inner-city. The teachers' stories also revealed a significant disconnection from parents and community, who were seen more as sources of problems for students, rather than potential collaborators who are deeply invested in their children's well-being and education. This disconnection was reminiscent of Donald's (2012a) notion of *pedagogy of the fort*. We found that colonial logics of separate realities and deficit perspectives, taught through the logics of the fort, emerged through the teachers' stories. We also found that the study design was limited to a consideration of knowledge translations between the University and Heartfulness, and therefore Jeannie also enacted exclusion and disconnection from community as potential mentors for emerging teachers. While the study design engaged up the river teachings in mentoring teacher candidates, the design also constructed a fort around the teacher candidates within settler-colonial educational institutions.

The fort was represented in a variety of ways in our findings. The fort became a deeper part of our findings when during our walking analyses we encountered an illuminated 440 ft steel public art piece built off of the remains of historic Upper Fort Garry near The Forks. This emergent encounter with an art installation that depicted settler entitlement while minimizing the long history of Indigenous peoples' presence in this place became a teacher and informed our findings. In our view, the participants' stories symbolically portrayed the school as a fort—a safe haven from a community immersed in danger. Within the conceptualization of the fort, colonial systems of governance were viewed as solutions to support children. Parents and communities were positioned as invisible or as problematics existing outside and disconnected from the school community. Through our analysis, we took note of constructed metaphorical fort walls between teachers/parents, theory/practice, university/practicum, Indigenous/non-Indigenous, knowledge/culture, and had to be reflexive about our own risk of separation of researchers/participants and our moves to innocence in these settler-colonial dynamics. While the upstream sources of the students' inequalities were absent in the stories of teachers, ISW helped us to bring presence to the constructed divides of settler-colonial encounter. Our walking analyses on the land illuminated the ways that the fort teachings are present in the schools, on the land, and in the design of this study.

### **A (Re)Consideration—Being Taught Through Ethical Relationality and ISW**

Through engaging ethical relationality and ISW principles in our research methodology, we became aware of three aspects that we believe enriched this research.

### **A Wholistic Embodiment of Ethics**

The engagement with ISW helped to keep our focus on ethical relationality at the forefront of our work. Ethical frameworks from Euro-Western traditions often impose ethical considerations as something that can be applied, and thus positions them as ontologically separate or separable. Through engaging ethical relationality and ISW, the research design embodied ethics, and the analysis thus was led from that orientation; our beings were wholistically immersed in ethical considerations where we considered the human and more-than-human in the research as relatives. We are learning to understand *relatives* as those with whom we recognize as being in relation, and in turn are responsible toward. We considered if we were being respectful to the participants in our interpretations of the stories they shared. We considered our responsibilities to the students and their parents and communities in looking carefully for the patterns that are reconstituting inequalities in their lives. We considered our responsibilities to the many people who live in inner-city communities and the ethical requirement to do responsible work in revealing the contexts of inequalities they resurge against. We were very cognizant of the land and place and our connections and disconnections to the land. This led to our walking analyses which provided opportunities to be taught by the land. We appreciated the ways that ethical relationality and ISW helped us honor the contributions of our participants within the practicum team and engage their stories wholistically as teachers, and helped us recognize problematics in the study design. We have also prepared a full report on the research project, including findings and recommendations. We have shared this report with all participants, collaborators, and supporters to show our respect for their contributions and responsibility for participating in ongoing ethical relations.

We have realized that the requirements within ethical relationality and ISW as methodologies are so ethically comprehensive that engaging with Gadamerian hermeneutics did not provide any meaningful contribution. In reflection, hermeneutical methods were actually the only part of the research where ethics became applied rather than organic. In considering the colonial problematics that have been identified with Gadamer's theorizations (Kerr, 2020; D. Donald, personal communication, April 28, 2020), this research project would be more theoretically and ethically consistent without the addition of hermeneutics in the methodology. Gadamer's work was engaged to help us consider what we might be projecting onto the texts of the stories in our interpretation. The guidance from ISW would suggest that in respecting the principle of interrelatedness, we learn how to listen to stories in a fully embodied way so as to learn from stories, rather than seeking to interpret stories. Overall, we feel we have learned from the stories rather than interpreted them. Thus, hermeneutics was an unnecessary and conceptually awkward inclusion in the design.

## Revealing the Presence of Land and More-Than-Human Teachers

Drawing on Fikele Nxumalo's (2016) *refiguring presences* in settler-colonial encounters, we share the *presences* that were revealed as significant teachers that would have been absent or erased through a methodology based solely on a Euro-Western ontology. In that regard, the rock from the sharing circles became an important teacher. The focused presence of the rock in the circles, and attention to its need for care in between circles, helped to connect to ethical dimensions beyond humans. The collective encounter and caring for the rock helped to engage with the principle of reverence and to acknowledge more-than-human beings that are not acknowledged or welcomed in traditional Euro-Western research. The relational component was embodied within the care and attention and collective responsibility of the rock between circles and during the talking circles. The rock was a teacher who invited participants into a space of vulnerability and uncertainty—encouraging the emotions and interconnections between the stories to guide the experience. The rock held our energy and supported the circles.

The rock also helped to maintain ethical relationality among participants. There was a reverence for the rock and the protocol of the talking circle, which invited each person to have a voice. Each person was encouraged to listen more than they spoke. As the talking circles progressed, the participants seemed to get more comfortable with the protocol and began to articulate shifts in thinking and shared that their thoughts were getting more convoluted. In our desire to engage the complexities of inner-city mentorship, this growing lack of certainty signaled that we were reaching another layer of depth. Some members of the circles were willing to be vulnerable and share questions and worries, and narrate their lives in more extensive and wholistic ways.

The walking analyses helped us to become more related to the land we now call home. From walking in specific places on the land, the spatial, temporal, and spiritual aspects became felt presences. Even the quality of the walk such as pace and directionality informed our interpretations and what we attended to within the talking circles. We felt invited to engage with the land to give us direction. In our first walk which circled around Heartfulness School, we were attentive to the felt quality of the air, the sights and sounds of birds and squirrels, and entangled histories present in local buildings. We were also attentive to the fort like quality of the school which directed our walking around instead of through the school grounds. On the second walk, we meandered in and out of various institutional spaces of the University and along winding paths—noting fort like obstructions but also invitations.

On our final walk, we walked through The Forks area, crossing many paths, roads, and public spaces to get to the remains of Old Fort Garry. This final walk was guided by

the river as we moved through paths along the Red River to walk along the Assiniboine. Having a baby in a stroller along for our walk and stopping several times to attend to his needs prompted us to slow down and engage in caring ways. The Forks site is a popular Winnipeg location, which includes a market, shops, museums, train station, the Oodena celebration circle, a river walk, and numerous meandering walking paths and public art installations. The site is also home to the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR), chosen for its symbolic placement at the convergence of the rivers. The CMHR's imposing structure casts a shadow along the Red River and another river story. While we speak metaphorically about trying to save children from the river, it must be noted that this river is also a burial ground. In 2014, Tina Fontaine's body was discovered in the Red River right next to the CMHR. Tina was a young girl of only 15 years of age from the Sagkeeng First Nation who was "in care" of a child welfare agency when she was murdered (see Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth, Special Report, 2019, for a fuller story of Tina's life that was compiled with family). We observe there are connections between the responses of teachers in this study and the overwhelming role that child welfare agencies play in the lives of more than 10,000 Indigenous children in Manitoba (Malone, 2019). The *Up the River, Down the River* story provides perspective to the complexity of this study, but we acknowledge that for many families and children, these are appalling lived realities. As we walked, we thought of Tina Fontaine and the many Indigenous children who have been subject to extreme and ongoing colonial violences. This began to haunt the analysis as we walked alongside the river.

## Analysis and Findings That Transcend Mind/Body Dualisms

The walking analyses worked synergistically with ethical relationality and ISW, and enabled us to focus on moving throughout important places on the land and sharing our ideas orally, rather than typing or writing, as is commonly part of Euro-Western-oriented research process. Our mutual interest in learning from Indigenous methodologies, and learning more about teaching and researching within inner-city contexts, connects to Donald's words: "What we want to learn cannot be separated from the process we go through while learning" (Donald, 2011, para. 14). The walking analyses in significant places to the research helped us to listen and learn, to be taught by land and place and the participants' words, and also to have the felt sense of the divisions and violences here and within ourselves. Our minds and bodies were invited to work together.

The primacy of orality in the walking analyses and engaging each other with stories triggered particular topics, invited us to listen to each other more deeply, and to make

connections to past experiences and memories. This added another complex dimension to the analysis and highlighted the deep contextual divides that prompted our engagement with ethical relationality in the study. The informal but organic flow of talking to each other made it natural for other stories and our own stories and journeys to become woven into the analysis. The primacy of orality in our walking analyses disrupted naturalized ways of recording and writing information. In recalling and returning to this experience as we write about it here, we can recall the strong affective component of different places and the multisensory feelings through the sounds and smells in each environment. This insight also highlights the limitations that are inherent in reducing knowing to written expression. Through ISW, we engaged in a more storied approach ourselves through being influenced by mind, heart, body, and spirit, which opened up the possibilities of sharing findings through stories and metaphors and helped us transcend the mind/body dualism that is common in research practices.

### Considerations as Non-Indigenous Researchers With Indigenous Methodologies

There has been a well-documented lack of ethics, relationality, and understanding by non-Indigenous scholars, who have problematically *gazed* at the enriched and diverse knowledge systems of Indigenous Nations, communities, and knowledge holders and *mined* these knowledges at the knowledge holders' expense (Smith, 2012). As White settlers and researchers, we are entangled in these problematic colonial relations and dynamics. Our engagement with Indigenous methodologies is situated within a much larger politics of Indigenous/settler relations that have been marked by violence, appropriation, and a callous disregard by White Euro-descendant peoples. We attempt to maintain reflexive awareness of our propensity to deflect attention from our complicities in ongoing settler-colonial violences through narratives of good intentions and similar settler moves to innocence (Tuck & Yang, 2012), as well as the need for White settlers such as ourselves to tell the stories of embodiment of complicities within "the ongoing settler violence(s) against Indigenous peoples" (Sium & Ritskes, 2013, p. IV). While it is not within the scope of this article to address the multiple problematics within Indigenous/settler relations in regard to knowledge practices and appropriations, we would like to share the considerations we had within this research about the personal problematics we negotiated, and the limitations we saw in ourselves.

Our first consideration was the potential for our lack of capacity to understand and meaningfully work with theories and approaches based in Indigenous knowledges. We have been raised and educated within Eurocentric contexts, and thus have limitations in really understanding the ontological

and epistemic complexities of Indigenous knowledge systems. Martin Nakata (2007), Torres Strait Islander, theorizes the *cultural interface* as a complex contested space where Indigenous and Euro-Western knowledges come together. Nakata argues that it is ill advised to draw on Indigenous knowledges and "plonk" them down in Western frames of reference, as these knowledge systems have key standards that differ on "cosmological, epistemological, and ontological grounds" (Nakata, 2007, p. 8). He clarifies that the ontology informing these knowledge systems, among other things, differently frames who can be a knower, what can be known, what counts as evidence, how truth might be verified, and how knowledge is validly expressed. Our question then becomes: Are we able to understand and engage Indigenous methodologies in this study in ways that are attentive to ontological and epistemic differences between knowledge systems?

Throughout this research, we have worked through some of the differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies, and the limitations of our understandings. We know that this will be a continual, revealing and humbling work in progress, as even the awareness of difference makes itself known in moments of confusion. Some of the Indigenous teachings we have engaged in this study, such as recognizing land as teacher, or a rock as an ethical guide and relative, are not within the ontologies that we were educated within. We sought to engage these teachings with an openness that would maintain their complexity and not seek to reframe them within a "western order of things" (Kerr & Parent, 2018; Nakata, 2007, p. 10), but would follow the ethos of ethical relationality in ecological appreciation of these differences. We have also been committed to learning from Indigenous knowledge holders for a significant period of time, recognizing that this is not something we learn solely from reading academic articles (Battiste, 2005), or should engage lightly. The choice of working with Indigenous methodologies that are developed for broad academic engagement was a design choice based on taking the lead from Indigenous academics who have deeply considered the complexities of engaging Indigenous knowledges in Eurocentric settings. We frame our engagement as trying to expand our ontological understandings, and not trying transpose ourselves into a cultural orientation that is not our own, nor trying to make any claims to understanding these teachings in the same way as an Indigenous scholar raised and/or educated within the ontology of these teachings would be able to do. We would clarify that we are not asserting any expectation of being or becoming researchers with authoritative or expert knowledge in Indigenous methodologies. We completely acknowledge the elements of linearity of Eurocentric approaches that are engrained within us. We too are always already down the river in the fort as White settlers, yet seeking through ethical relationality to pull out of these downstream currents and engage out of the



fort to learn. Our approach has been to continually question how we are learning through provoking both moments of comfort and confusion.

Nakata (2007) speaks to epistemic complexity at the interface but also the ways these complexities manifest in real places that are constructed through colonial power. We also recognize that our settler positionalities locate us within a long history and current reality of appropriation of Indigenous lands, cultures, and knowledges. In the study design, we chose to engage with settler stories that position ourselves within the complicities of settler-colonial systems of violence, rather than design and conduct research that was more specifically telling Indigenous peoples' stories (Sium & Ritskes, 2013). In terms of appropriating the Indigenous knowledges that we draw upon in our methodology, we follow Nakata's advice in not separating the knowledge from the knower. In this article, we have worked to keep knowledge, knower, and place explicitly together, while also emphasizing our own limitations. We also have engaged in mentorship within writing this piece, and have incorporated the guidance and feedback from Drs. Archibald, Donald, Marker, and Parent into this article. At the same time, we are engaging Indigenous concepts in this work that differ from Eurocentric frameworks from which our knowing begins. In this regard, we are moving carefully through what Celia Haig-Brown (2010) articulates as the messy divide between *deep learning* through engagement with Indigenous peoples and knowledges over long periods of time, and appropriation of Indigenous thought. Haig-Brown (2010) refers to deep learning in the way that a person can acquire knowledge that transforms one's worldview, with the effect that it is now so incorporated that it changes how that person is able to see the world. Importantly, she argues—it is important for a non-Indigenous scholar to remain vigilant about appropriation and not allow oneself the "luxury of inertia—continually posing the question to ourselves and our work" (p. 947). In this research, our unlearning, teachings and learning have helped prepare us to engage in this methodology, but have taught us also to do this with humility and create the space and time for mentorship and guidance from Indigenous scholars. We expect to engage in this process repeatedly with an attention to honoring our relationships.

This research is enriched by the methodology as discussed in the previous section. In particular, through the ways the stories manifest in the findings, and the shifting teachers throughout the work. While this article has received guidance from the Indigenous authors noted who have reviewed this article, we also appreciate that there is great variability among the perspectives of Indigenous scholars on this topic. Experiences in the *cultural interface* have myriad differences that are worthy of consideration. We are absolutely not trying to communicate through this piece that non-Indigenous scholars should take up Indigenous methodologies in instrumental ways that serve to disregard

Indigenous knowledge holders. We would characterize that kind of instrumentalism as enacting problematic colonial relations through research. Rather, we are working to follow Marie Battiste (2005) wherein she notes the need to disrupt the "cognitive imperialism" that is maintained when Euro-Western thought is universalized through academies as part of colonial dominance (p. 124). Battiste insists, "we must centre Indigenous knowledge by removing the distorting lens of Eurocentrism so that we can immerse ourselves in new systems of meaning" (p. 127). In this article, we are suggesting that there is a great deal that non-Indigenous scholars can learn from the richness of Indigenous knowledges that inform Indigenous methodologies, but such learning requires relationships, mentorship, and significant time—led from the priorities of ethical relationality. Importantly, a relation of reciprocity needs to be maintained throughout. We still feel the tensions with regard to the ways we might be appropriating Indigenous knowledges in this research project and article—but that is probably a good thing. While we identify as White settlers throughout this article to note the politics and privilege that frames our subjectivities, ethical relationality embodies the ways of working toward living and researching as relatives on this land without trying to smooth over the complexities.

## Conclusion

In this article, we have shared our approach as Euro-descendant scholars to engaging Indigenous methodologies in a particular inner-city research study. We extend our deep appreciation to Drs. Archibald and Donald for their thoughtful and ethically based work that has helped us to expand our own ways of engaging research and our ethical responsibilities, as well as their continued guidance. We also would like to thank Dr. Parent for her thoughtful reading and feedback, and Dr. Marker for his ongoing mentorship. The findings in this study were enriched through Indigenous methodologies that invited us to engage embodied ethics; land as teacher; and wholistic engagement of the heart, mind, body, and spirit. This approach also raised difficult stories of historic and contemporary settler violence on Indigenous peoples that are held on the land, and reinforced our responsibilities to enact research that seeks to unlearn colonial logics and relations. The findings and recommendations of this research project recognize the strength and resurgence of inner-city communities within the violences of a settler-colonial context. We are working to share the findings of this study, and more specific recommendations for change in K-12 and teacher education institutional practices, in the hopes of addressing the systemic divides that continue to structure educational contexts. Engaging Indigenous methodologies, theories, and approaches has enriched this study, but we cannot minimize or ignore the complex political context in which that choice was made. In this regard, we considered the complications of non-Indigenous scholars engaging



Indigenous knowledges in the cultural interface as articulated by Nakata and the complexities of appropriation by Haig-Brown. We have understood the disposition of humility that needs to be maintained throughout. We have learned that the notion of expertise is something that is immersed in a Euro-Western ontology and would stand firmly in the way of a non-Indigenous scholar being able to do this kind of work. We share this article to emphasize the requirements of time, mentorship, ethics, and responsibility required of non-Indigenous scholars in engaging Indigenous scholarship and methodologies. We share this article in the spirit of challenging cognitive imperialism through disrupting the dominance of Euro-Western ontologies in research practices, and to open possibilities to visibilize settler-colonialism in our *North American* context. Importantly, we seek to share the ways we have been taught by Indigenous scholars to engage in research practices that can support and maintain complexities, difference, and ethical possibilities.

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### Notes

1. Many Indigenous Nations and peoples call the land we are on "Turtle Island." Settler governance structures name the land North America. See Simpson (2011) for a Nishnaabeg version of the creation story of Turtle Island.
2. We use the term inner-city to visibilize racialized inequalities. See Khoo (2017) for a broader discussion of the signifiers of inner-city as a term that exceeds geographic

description with implications for racializations, stereotypes, and inequalities.

3. We follow Jo-ann Archibald's shortening of Indigenous Storywork to ISW.
4. Spelling wholistic(ally) with a "w" is intentional and reflects Archibald's understanding of Indigenous wholism (Archibald, 1997).
5. Katya joined the research project to support data analysis and was not part of the design or data collection. The sharing circles were supported by Indigenous PhD student Vanessa Van Bower, who left the project to focus on her PhD candidacy.
6. Jeannie's mentorship from Dr. Archibald focused on the rock as a sacred object and relative that supports interrelatedness. For a broader discussion, see Tinker (2004).
7. Abridged versions of these stories are available in a larger study article (Kerr & Adamov Ferguson, in press).
8. This methodology emerged from Dr. Marker's mentorship, and Jeannie's discussions with Dr. Brooke Madden years ago about walking data collection (Madden, 2016), and is ontologically distinct from post-humanist informed walking methodologies such as Springgay and Truman (2018).
9. Jeannie encountered the *Up the River; Down the River* story in Andreotti (2012) and this story has emerged in multiple conversations. This version is the way Jeannie constructed it and shared it with Katya.

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