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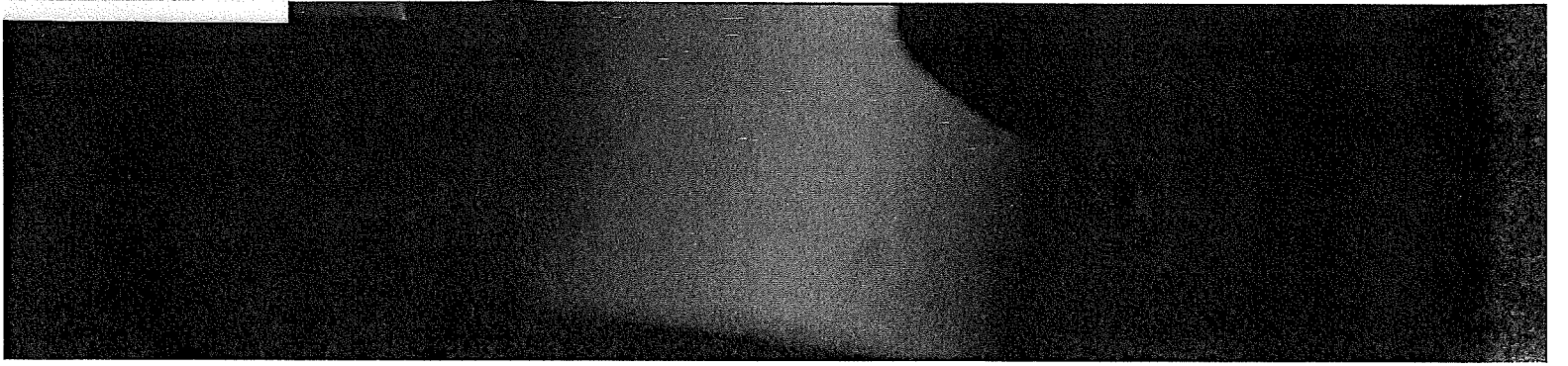
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INDIGENOUS AND DECOLONIZING STUDIES IN EDUCATION

Mapping the Long View

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WITH ROOTS IN THE WATER

Revitalizing Straits Salish Reef Net Fishing as Education for Well-Being and Sustainability

Nicholas XEMFOLTW Claxton (Tsawout) and
Carmen Rodríguez de France (Kickapoo)

We have been here a long time. During that time we lived with the sea songs, the elements, the lands. Our ancestors continue to teach us through our ancient language through our presence here.

—STOLCÆL (Dr. John Elliot, Sr.)

The WSÁNEĆ People have been living on their territory for thousands of years tracing their existence back to the time of creation, living sustainably, and in prosperity according to their teachings, philosophies, beliefs, and principles. The SXOLE, or Reef Net Fishery, was at the core of this existence; an integral piece for maintaining balance and a sense of well-being. As a knowledge system, the Reef Net defined their existence and relationship to the land. This knowledge system was effectively dismantled through the colonizing efforts of Western education and schooling, and was nearly lost after being outlawed by the Colonial Government of Vancouver Island roughly 100 years ago.

This chapter will describe the process of revitalizing the WSÁNEĆ Reef Net Fishery at The LÁU, WEL, NEW Tribal school where community members, school administrators, and teachers have been involved in exposing the students to the principles and philosophy of the WSÁNEĆ people, their worldview, and ways of being as a way to reignite ways of life prior to contact. The school is located in the Territory of the WSÁNEĆ People, on Southern Vancouver Island in British Columbia, and serves five surrounding First Nations communities: Tsarlip, Tsawout, Tseycum, Malahat, and Pauquachin.

Through practical examples, main author Nicholas Claxton will describe how he has been working at the Tribal school along with elders and knowledge keepers in order to maintain and sustain relationships with the land, the people, and

the culture as a W̱SÁNEĆ man who began revitalizing Reef Net fishing three years ago in his community at Tsawout, and as the focus of his doctoral work at the University of Victoria. Carmen Rodríguez, Indigenous scholar with heritage from the Kickapoo Nation working at the University of Victoria, will discuss how this cultural practice has shown great potential in informing the future directions of education using Indigenous knowledge to support decolonization. Through these experiences and examples, the authors will emphasize the shared responsibilities to the environment as Indigenous Nations and non-Indigenous citizens of what is now known as Canada.

The S̱OLE and the W̱SÁNEĆ People: Situating W̱SÁNEĆ Reef Net Fishing Practice

According to W̱SÁNEĆ oral history, the W̱SÁNEĆ people lived sustainably, peacefully, and in prosperity according to the teachings, philosophies, beliefs, and principles of X̱ALS the Creator. The S̱OLE, or Reef Net Fishery, was at the core of this existence; it was the “backbone” of the W̱SÁNEĆ traditional society.

Fishing for Pacific Salmon with a Reef Net is an ancient fishing technology and practice. This fishing method was unique to the Straits Salish People, and practiced in what is now known as the Salish Sea (the waters in and around the Southern Gulf Islands and the San Juan Islands). The Reef Net was W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples main fishing technology. In SENĆOŦEN (the Saanich language), the Reef Net was called the S̱OLE. This name both refers to the material with which the net was constructed (the inner bark of the Pacific Willow) and the net itself. The W̱SÁNEĆ utilized the Reef Net as the main method for salmon fishing (particularly Sockeye and Pink), which was conducted in the tidal waters of the Salish Sea rather than in rivers and streams. The Reef Net technology was very sophisticated technology, requiring people to have an in-depth knowledge of the salmon (their habits and travel routes), tides and currents, weather, plants, and a solid foundation of the laws and beliefs inextricably linked to this practice. The Reef Net Fishery could not be successful without the W̱SÁNEĆ people's deep respect for the salmon, the earth, and each other. Fishing with the S̱OLE instilled and reinforced W̱SÁNEĆ philosophies and worldview.

The S̱OLE was hand constructed from natural materials specifically harvested from the local landscape. The Reef Net itself consisted of a lead and a net. The lead of the Reef Net consisted of cedar log buoys, cedar ropes to form the sides and the floor of the lead, and specially made rock weights. Dune grass would be threaded through the twinning of the ropes that formed the floor and the sides, which would appear to the salmon as if they were actually swimming near the bottom. This made the salmon feel safe. Ropes to permanent anchors secured the front of the lead, and the rear of the lead was connected to the fishermen's canoes and to the net itself. The lead also served to funnel salmon into a net that was suspended between two canoes, and it would bag out with the flow of the

tide. The net was anchored in specific (here ally at the mouth of a south-facing bay. The to the bottom with ropes and anchors. When stopped, the rear of the lead was tied to the Reef Net remained in the water, usually for had to be made. The gear would also remain the use of giant rock anchors. During the fish people would also remain at those fish ple to their territorial homelands. This is a fishing technique, and a very sophisticated the S̱OLE, or Reef Net Fishery formed society, including the core of the W̱SÁNEĆ which fostered a deep knowledge, connection to the lands and waters.

According to Dr. Verna Kirkness (1999) in the community and the natural environment survival of the family and the community knowledge necessary for daily living. They learned how to hunt, trap, fish, farm, and of the community transmitted such knowledge by telling, ceremony, ritual, and celebratory attitudes necessary for daily life. While it original communities are diverse and are in and practices that differ, it is also important cosmologies, values, and ways of doing a Hawaiian scholar Aluli Meyer (2008) discuss and specificity of culture, suggesting that knowledge while specificity relates to standings of the world, which includes not just a physical place but also a space knowledge is contextualized. She continues which one interacts with the land or the shaping, in turn, one's values, ways of thinking and with the land, one is more disposed to organize knowledge in meaningful ways. The Cajete (2000) affirms, place is taken for everyone. Within Western perspective established and agreed upon a priori (i.e. that in order to know any kind of physical

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tide. The net was anchored in specific (hereditarily owned family) locations, usu- ally at the mouth of a south-facing bay. The sterns of the canoes were also secured to the bottom with ropes and anchors. When the net was hauled and fishing was stopped, the rear of the lead was tied to those rear anchors and the lead of the Reef Net remained in the water, usually for the duration of a season, unless repairs had to be made. The gear would also remain there for the entire fishing season by the use of giant rock anchors. During the entire salmon fishing season, the Saanich people would also remain at those fishing locations thus connecting the peo- ple to their territorial homelands. This is a simple description of a very complex fishing technique, and a very sophisticated and sustainable way of life. Simply put, the SXOLE, or Reef Net Fishery formed the core of the WSÁNEĆ traditional society, including the core of the WSÁNEĆ traditional educational system or way, which fostered a deep knowledge, connection, beliefs of the people to the salmon and to the lands and waters.

According to Dr. Verna Kirkness (1999), prior to contact, education was rooted in the community and the natural environment, and was strongly linked to the survival of the family and the community. Learning was aimed at gathering knowledge necessary for daily living. Through observation and practice, people learned how to hunt, trap, fish, farm, and gather food. The elders and members of the community transmitted such knowledge in informal ways, through sto- rytelling, ceremony, ritual, and celebration, which provided youth the skills and attitudes necessary for daily life. While it is important to acknowledge that Abo- riginal communities are diverse and are immersed in beliefs, traditions, languages, and practices that differ, it is also important to remember that there are shared cosmologies, values, and ways of doing and being that are similar among nations. Hawaiian scholar Aluli Meyer (2008) describes these differences as universality and specificity of culture, suggesting that universality is based on spirituality and knowledge while specificity relates to one’s ancestors and one’s “local” under- standings of the world, which includes one’s landscape. Meyer argues that land is not just a physical place but also a space where knowledge emerges and where knowledge is contextualized. She continues to say that, to her people, the way in which one interacts with the land or the ocean reveal aspects of one’s identity, shaping, in turn, one’s values, ways of thinking, and ways of being. In learning from and with the land, one is more disposed to learning about oneself and to reorgan- ize knowledge in meaningful ways. This can be challenging when, as Gregory Cajete (2000) affirms, place is taken for granted or if it is conceived as the same for everyone. Within Western perspectives, place is represented through criteria established and agreed upon a priori (i.e., maps and scientific notions). Cajete says that in order to know any kind of physical landscape, one has to experience it.

In his book *Saltwater People* (1990), Dave Elliot Sr. recounts how life used to be for the WSÁNEĆ people who depended on the sea, the marshes, and the lands for sustenance, and how the movement from one place to the next during the summer and winter months exemplified the values and beliefs of his people

of taking from the land and sea only what one needs and respecting the territories of other communities with whom the land was shared. "We were saltwater people. We lived on islands and water so that made us fishermen, sailors, navigators, boat builders, travellers, and workers of the sea" (Dave Elliot Sr., 1990, p. 55). Elliott says there were no boundaries among people until 1856 when an international boundary was established by the Treaty of Washington, and later when the territories were separated due to the treaty with the Hudson Bay Company.

In 1852, the WSÁNEĆ signed a treaty with then-Governor of Vancouver Island Sir James Douglas. From the WSÁNEĆ people's perspective, this treaty was an agreement between the two nations. Also, the Douglas Treaty states that the Saanich People were entitled to "carry on their fisheries as formerly," a sustainable practice that formed the foundation for the WSÁNEĆ identity and way of life as a nation. With the arrival of the colonizers, the opportunities that children, youth, and communities had to experience land and seascapes changed drastically, preventing knowledge from being contextualized, experienced, and reorganized. Colonization brought along new ways of thinking and being, new ways of reading the land (a pragmatic view based on economic development and gain), and new ways of organizing knowledge. Colonization also robbed people of their physical space, their livelihood, their sustenance, and their organized cultural ways that formed the bases of their existence. Along with the imposition of new ways of learning from the land, colonization established a new world order and structure where people and communities were uprooted from their original homes and transplanted into foreign landscapes, hence being forced to adapt to a different context, rely on alternative modes of subsistence, and conform to imposed ways of being and understanding the world.

Learning was no longer aimed at gaining knowledge for life. With the establishment of residential schools, education and learning became a set of organized and structured activities that carried little or no relevance either for life or for people's immediate context. This was in complete contrast to the ways in which learning took place prior to contact and in which expertise developed. Reminiscing about his childhood, Elliott (1990) describes how Reef Net fishing was a form of livelihood, and how much one needed to learn in order to become an accomplished fisherman: "those people were the equivalent to today's engineers, because they understood the tide, the wind, stress strength of the ropes. How much material would stand that strong tide, that strong wind?" (p. 56)

The winds of change brought about different ways of understanding the world. However, in revitalizing cultural practices, languages, and other ways of life, we have begun to reclaim traditional ways of being, knowing, and learning that need to be connected to the land and the sea, to worldview, language, culture, beliefs, and homelands of the WSÁNEĆ people to help the community regain a sense of wellness and well-being.

According to Cajete (2000), Aboriginal education should seek "to heal and transcend the effects of colonization" (p. 181). Further, Hampton (1995) suggests

that Aboriginal education must address the onize. To stave off the continued onslaught a nation to be confidently rooted in their strong to be able to survive on their lands traditional models of government" (Alfred

Education for Revival and Transce Back the Saanich Reef Net Fishery

We are living in times of reconciliation with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people with the land and with each other will new ways of looking at the world and raising Indigenous knowledge. We ought to follow whose approach, called "Two Eyed Seeing" knowledge within the curriculum so that perspectives and knowledges be available to all peoples.¹

The revitalization of the WSÁNEĆ system, and knowledge system is essential to WSÁNEĆ people. This journey of the Restoring the Saanich practice of fishing of Saanich educational way, and it is essential Restoration of traditional practices such as tant coming at a time when Senator Sim ciliation Commission, has "invited" us in which, together, Aboriginal and non-shared future. Consequently, reconnecting lands and waters will restore the well-being. This reconnection will bring back a sense of traditional practices, ceremony, language, a to the territory. More specifically, to also restore the transmission of Saanich from the elders to the Saanich children

Restoring the Saanich Reef Net Fishery reliance on a diet based on more traditional times, the Saanich peoples sustained the territory and salmon was one of the most salmon, especially in a way that honors lead to eating more salmon and restore create the sense of well-being that can a community since the Saanich Reef Net society.

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that Aboriginal education must address the issue of colonization in order to decolonize. To stave off the continued onslaught of assimilation, nationhood "requires a nation to be confidently rooted in their culture, and be bodily and spiritually strong to be able to survive on their lands independently, in order to support our traditional models of government" (Alfred, 2005, p. 31).

Education for Revival and Transcendence: Bringing Back the Saanich Reef Net Fishery

We are living in times of reconciliation where we aspire to create a shared future for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Learning how to live in harmony with the land and with each other will require unlearning and re-learning new ways of looking at the world and raising awareness of the importance of protecting Indigenous knowledge. We ought to heed the advice of elder Albert Marshall whose approach, called "Two Eyed Seeing," invites us to include Indigenous knowledge within the curriculum so that Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives and knowledges be available to everyone, and thus benefit and enrich all peoples.¹

The revitalization of the WSÁNEĆ Reef Net Fishery as a practice, belief system, and knowledge system is essential to the restoration of the well-being of the WSÁNEĆ people. This journey of the resurgence of the SXOLE began in 2014. Restoring the Saanich practice of fishing as formerly is essential to the restoration of Saanich educational way, and it is essential to Saanich identity and way of life. Restoration of traditional practices such as the Saanich Reef Net Fishery is important coming at a time when Senator Sinclair, the Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, has "invited" us all as Canadian citizens to explore ways in which, together, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people can create paths for a shared future. Consequently, reconnecting Indigenous peoples to their territorial lands and waters will restore the well-being and sustainable existences as nations. This reconnection will bring back a sense of identity through re-establishing traditional practices, ceremony, language, and beliefs that come with the connection to the territory. More specifically, to revive the Saanich Reef Net Fishery will also restore the transmission of Saanich culture, spiritual knowledge, and teachings from the elders to the Saanich children and youth.

Restoring the Saanich Reef Net Fishery will also contribute to an increased reliance on a diet based on more traditional foods like salmon. In pre-contact times, the Saanich peoples sustained themselves on everything from the local territory and salmon was one of the most important sources of food. To catch more salmon, especially in a way that honors the rich history of the local territory, will lead to eating more salmon and restoring traditional sources of diet. It will also create the sense of well-being that comes from relating deeply and spiritually as a community since the Saanich Reef Net formed the core of Saanich traditional society.

Over the short and long term, restoring this traditional fishing practice has many positive implications. While it restores the traditional governance system, it can also restore the foundation in which the Saanich people can interact with the settler state. By honoring the traditional practice that is protected by the treaty, it can also reformulate the relationship back to a nation-to-nation relationship with the state. This could also contribute greatly to the well-being and sustainability of the Saanich community. In the long term, it could also provide the economic opportunity to re-establish a sustainable economy on the fishery.

The restoration of the Saanich Reef Net is a way for the Saanich people to strengthen and renew identity and nationhood, which was nearly destroyed, sadly neglected, and almost forgotten as a result of the success of the colonizers' strategies. Hopefully this can inform and inspire other First Nations in British Columbia and Canada to initiate the restoration of their own practices in their communities and on their lands.

The construction of the ceremonial Reef Net within the school as a part of the Reef Net revitalization project is consistent with and falls within the WSÁNEĆ School Board's philosophical statement, which states that the SENĆOŦEN culture must be maintained, perpetuated, and protected. This Reef Net revitalization project was meant to realize those philosophical statements by bringing the Reef Net technology back to the center of the WSÁNEĆ society, starting with the education of WSÁNEĆ children in the School. This was the premise of this project.

Starting in the spring of 2014, I (Claxton) started to spend time with STOLŦEEL (language teacher and knowledgeable elder) in his SENĆOŦEN language and culture class at the LÁU, WEL, NEW Tribal School. His class was held over three hours on Fridays. I attended most Fridays during the Spring of 2014, though STOLŦEEL continued to work with his students on the project during the times that I could not attend. Together with the students, we harvested some SXŦOLE, or willow. We brought it back to the classroom, where we taught the children the technique and process of harvesting the fibrous inner bark used for twine construction.

First, we went out to a local wetland to gather some willow. This was a way for us and for the students to reconnect with the local territory. STOLŦEEL reinforced the knowledge that the willow tree was a living entity; he taught some sacred prayer words that were spoken to the tree before harvesting its branches. Through harvesting the willow, we learned that the best willow to harvest was the long and straight branches of the new growth in the spring time. The bark came off easily and the rough outer bark could be scraped off quite effortlessly. Through working with their hands, the students ended up with a nice supply of long strands of the inner bark of the willow tree. With this, the students were then able to make cordage, using a twisting technique, which creates a strong, yet, fine two-ply cord. We spent a few classes harvesting willow branches and stripping the outer bark off, until we had an adequate supply for the length of cordage we required to begin making the net.

The students worked with their hands was the chance for some informal teaching a chance to visit. A comfortable learning Perhaps opening each class with a prayer, w this environment. Opening in this way al of the Reef Net and the Reef Net mode students that were normally disruptive in days would settle down and work on the meaning and the significance of the work connect to through their ancestral conne when he says that dwelling consists of the ple maintain with places, for it is solely by acquires meaning" (p. 54).

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The students worked with their hands, and while that was going on there was the chance for some informal teaching of stories and history, as well as just a chance to visit. A comfortable learning environment was organically created. Perhaps opening each class with a prayer, which was a spiritual grounding, created this environment. Opening in this way also acknowledged the spiritual nature of the Reef Net and the Reef Net model. STOLŦEĒ noted that many of the students that were normally disruptive in his classroom on many of the other days would settle down and work on the net. I believe that the students felt the meaning and the significance of the work, and it was something that they could connect to through their ancestral connections. We concur with Basso (1996) when he says that dwelling consists of the “multiple ‘lived relationships’ that people maintain with places, for it is solely by virtue of these relationships that space acquires meaning” (p. 54).

For much of the classes, the students worked with their hands and even worked together twisting the bark to make twine. They expressed a sense of pride and accomplishment in their production. While making twine was the focus of the initial stages of the project, there was ample opportunity for language and culture learning in the classroom in formal and informal ways.

The project, which ran from January 2014 through to the end of the year, became a focal point for the school. For example, some of the students who showed interest in carving began to carve the canoes that would be a part of this model under the guidance of STOLŦEĒ. Others created model halibut hooks and other fishing tools, and even carved miniature salmon. The learning and teaching was fueled by creativity and by cultural connection and relevance.

Momentum within the school continued around the project. During this spring of 2014, one of the other three teachers in the school began to shift the teaching of their subject around the project. Berkeley Lott, the science/social studies teacher in the school, taught his social studies unit based on the Saltwater People text and paid particular attention to the Reef Net chapter in that text. This connection allowed the students to engage with the Reef Net technology in a deeper and more meaningful way; students weren't just learning about it in one subject area, but across the subject areas. This project was not as much about creating a curriculum of the Reef Net, but enacting it in experiential and practical ways, making it a living curriculum versus one that is in print. This project is an excellent example of how the First Peoples Principle of Learning can be explored and lived by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers, students, and community members. Among the nine principles, we found the following to best represent the learning that had taken place as a result of participating in the project:

Learning supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors;

Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place);

Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities;
 Learning recognizes the role of Indigenous knowledge;
 Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story.
 Learning involves patience and time.

The result of the project within the school was the creation of an adequate amount of twine for the ceremonial Reef Net model. STOLŒEL talks about his students' hands-on efforts and participation in making the twine as their "prayers" for Reef Net revitalization. In this sense, their contributions and their learning (and teaching) were their prayers. Without this, the revitalization of the Reef Net could not have happened.

The Reef Net revitalization project continues into the current academic year. The project continues to teach the students about the Reef Net technology. This academic year, the LÁU, WEL, NEW Tribal School has implemented an overall curricular model that is similar to British Columbia's New Curriculum, which was also implemented this year, with a new focus on "Big Ideas" and Curricular "Competencies." In the Tribal School, the SXOLE has been situated as one of those "Big Ideas" in the curriculum. In this way, the WSÁNEĆ people continue to decolonize their education system and ultimately the minds of the WSÁNEĆ students in a very real and tangible way. The Reef Net Project is allowing young people to learn from each other, from the elders, and from the land, along with the changes in landscapes, perspectives, and the emergence of newer technologies.

Environmental educator David Orr (1994) writes about "the problem of education, rather than problems in education" (p. 4). He states that our education systems have prepared us to think about the natural world in industrial and unsustainable ways. The driving force behind mainstream educational reform has been about preparing our young to be successful in and contribute to the global economy, rather than living sustainably in our homelands. For Indigenous people, educational reform is about retaining, restoring, and revitalizing our traditional lifeways. As Basso (1996) suggests, one needs to "deeply root these practices in tradition, wrapped up in relations of reciprocity, respect, and spirit" (p. 54). With roots in the water, the WSÁNEĆ people are revitalizing the Reef Net Fishery both as education and a way of life.

Note

1 As explained in a blog post from 2004, at www.integrativescience.ca/Principles/TwoEyedSeeing/

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