Walking Backwards into the Future with Our Stories:
The Stō:ló is a River of Knowledge,
Halq’eméylem is a River of Stories

by

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Abstract

Storytelling is the original form of education for the indigenous families along the Fraser River. These stories have informed ecological, linguistic and cultural knowledge for thousands of years. This story begins in the time of the oldest inhabitants of the Fraser Valley along the Stó:lō where the river and the indigenous people share the same name: Stó:lō, People of the River. It is a narrative of evolutionary change and transformation that is personal as well as regional to the Fraser Valley.

Indigenous narratives are guideposts for drawing strength when human actions fail in efforts to have all parts of the natural and living world abide in harmony. Correct protocol for coexisting with the river involved adherence to purposeful use of cedar, salmon and the written language.

This narrative begins in time immemorial—a time when stories had a spiritual power to inform a way of life built on respect for all living systems within and along the river. The boundaries of relationship between humans and the environment were tightly interwoven in oral histories. The story of change and transformation at Xá:ytem, Hatzic Rock, B.C. is told as a teaching story that has influenced the Stó:lō landscape of the past.

The tension for correcting or “setting things right” within the river system is relevant and important in appreciating aboriginal pedagogy today. The inclusion of indigenous voice is pivotal to empowering a diverse education curriculum now and into the future.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr Allan MacKinnon for his guidance of this work. From the beginning, Allan’s support, encouragement, knowledge, and wisdom provided the circle I needed to reflect and to write as a river woman.

To Siyamiyateliyot, Elizabeth Phillips, (Chehalis), thank you for your devotion to Halq’emeylem, our river language. You are an inspiration to all people “to hold our languages high” for renewal and revitalization.

Thank you to Stelomethet, Ethel Gardner, for building a beautiful narrative on Riverworldview. It is your work that has inspired this thesis.

To my family and friends throughout Turtle Island, thank you for the support, laughter, comfort, and belief in my process to complete this work.


Ya’lh yex wkw’as ho’y, Thank you
Dedication

This work is dedicated to my family.
May our hearts be united and our stories continue for as long as the river flows.

Into the Mist of Time Immemorial the story began.
Each part flowing through cycle and season.
Towards a passing, like salmon, nearing the channel of origin.
What will I leave my family?
The little one that is waiting seven generations ahead, the one I feel in my heart and will never meet?
To the next keeper of the family stories:
Your roots come from the ancestors of the river.
When you are lonely, go to the shoreline of the water. Give a blessing with words, tobacco or cedar.
Pray for guidance and strength. An answer will come. Sometimes, the message will be to wait. Let the way unfold. Be brave. Trust.
You come from a family with a generous heart. Your spirit is strong too.
Children are the gifts given to our family. Love is the teacher.
Remember the stories.
If you forget, find an elder to help you return to the beginning place.
Our elders are the precious connection to the past and they hold the faith for the future.
Laughter and smiles are the trademarks of our family code.
Know, above all else, “you are loved.” Forever.
The Story Blanket embraces this writing.

It honors my Stó:lō River Grandfathers and Grandmothers as well as my Grandmothers and Grandfathers of the Babine Corridor. Rivers are the heart of my family's stories, traditions and heritage.

Salmon is the bond that unites my family.

The maker of this blanket describes the story this way: A River Woman in a Cedar Hat paddling her canoe at night down the river, with a torch lantern. The story rock and the bulrushes on the bank and the mountains in the background giving strength, and a salmon moon in the sky shining bright.

The Story Blanket has over 300 Buttons.

Deepest Respect and Gratitude to:

Cathie Tonkins, Loxahatchee Florida

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Halq'eméylem Words

Téméxw .......................................................... Earth, Land
S'ólh Téméxw .......................................................... Our Land
Stó:lō .......................................................... River, People of the River
Halq’eméylem .......................................................... Upriver dialect of Halkomelem
Smá:lt .......................................................... Mountain
Sgwóxwiyám .......................................................... Origin Stories
Sqwelqwel .......................................................... Our Own Family’s True History, News
Xá:ls .......................................................... Transformer
Xexá:ls .......................................................... Transformers
Shxwelí .......................................................... River, People of the River
Kw’ótl’lwa .......................................................... Sea, Ocean
Sth’óqwi .......................................................... Fish
Swí:we .......................................................... Eulachon
Sthéqey .......................................................... Sockeye Salmon
Kwóxweth .......................................................... Coho Salmon, Silver Salmon
Spó:xem .......................................................... March Run Spring Salmon (early run)
Kw’ó:lexw .......................................................... Dog Salmon (Chum)
Hō:liya .......................................................... Humpback Salmon, Pink Salmon
Qéywx .......................................................... Steelhead Trout
Skwó:wech .......................................................... White Sturgeon
Éy .......................................................... Be good, it is good
Éy Swáyel .......................................................... Day, Good Day
Xpá: yelhp .......................................................... Western Red Cedar
Ts’éqw’ówelh .......................................................... Weaving a Cedar Root Basket
Pó:xeleqw .......................................................... Yellow Cedar
Sléxwelh .......................................................... Any Canoe
Tl’elá:y .......................................................... River Canoe with Shovel Nose
Sq’émél .......................................................... Paddle
Tel Lálém .......................................................... My House
St’ílém .......................................................... To Sing a Song
Chíchelh Siyá:m .......................................................... Great Spirit
Tl’í:lsthóme .......................................................... I love you
Siyólexwe .......................................................... An Elder
Á: ylexw te Stó:lō Shxweli .......................................................... The Spirit of the Stó:lō Lives
Y àlh yex wkwas hóy, mekw’ewátes .......................................................... Thank You, Everyone
Prayer: “To Write on My Heart”

I pray that my ancestors, all the river ancestors, take kindly to my work. I come to it with a good heart, with gentleness, with consideration for all the stories that have come before and will be told now and into the future. I pray to be guided to express the stories, the knowledge, the language, in the very best way. Let me breathe in the stories and exhale the beauty of their meaning. Thank you Creator for this journey. I pray to be worthy of all that will come this way.
The Bend in the River at X’at’seq

Prologue

I learn through story.

From my oldest memory of living by a river within an extended family, I remember how my elders spoke, the way everyday conversation could turn into story. The complexities of making a living from the land were not always evident to me and yet, my whole young self-absorbed life events, memorized seasons and the harvests of salmon, native plants, fruits, vegetables. I recalled how walking with my elders as they accomplished their daily rounds was an adventure into another world. The sights, smells and textures of living so close to the land were rich indeed and stories were the resilience and durable sinew that tied us closely as family. Those early beginnings were all about stories connecting my family to the land, a river, language and tradition.

When it came time to prepare for the writing of this thesis, I hesitated, not sure of myself. I felt doubt of how to tell the story of this written work. The process of moving from an oral narrative to a written story has always challenged my confidence to maintain the integrity of the telling through written expression. Writing takes time, patience, elegance, transmission and clarity.

What I knew for certain was, “it was time.” What would be needed was a brave new belief in my ability to nurture the words out into the open, to reveal a protocol for sharing how stories can transform and teach. The path I was undertaking was about discovery and discourse that defined a way to be in the world. Stories have always existed by the river, the past has carried our stories forward. Our everyday lives are so much richer, deeper and generous with the sharing of stories.
The river elders of the past have expressed the beauty of living in harmony with one another and in connection to the living world. In this, we share space and time with them. Their words were also reminders of how disharmony can cause chaos and uncertainty and be disruptive forces in all forms of relationship. The brilliance of their story and it’s telling here, is that a “way out” will be shared, implied or made visible enough for the reader to find a path towards “right relation.” It was my most intimate wish to convey a narrative on the power of stories to transform.

I wondered and reflected on how to begin?

And then, I had a dream.

I wrote at the top of the page: Sunday February 7, 2010. As I write down this dream, four Ravens are sitting on the telephone wire directly in front of my window. They are quiet as snow falls.

Last night, I dreamed of Four Bears. Black bears.

The dream was in three parts. In the first segment, I encountered one bear. In the transition to the second were two bears. The third movement was once again, a single bear.

The first part of the dream, I was on snowy, tundra like land. There were very little trees and it was winter. In the dream, it seemed like I was confronted with a mystery. I was in deep thought and reflection. I was standing on this land with a firm stance and footing. Instantly, I was “awake” from my reflection as my whole being sensed a change, something was near. I turned to my left and caught sight of a large Black Bear, head down, climbing a small mound or hill near where I stood. I heard my inward “voice” say, to ready myself. Do not run. Hold the ground. Face the Bear. Send your protective energy ahead, so the Bear will sense you are not to be harmed. I remember standing up as a Bear would, making myself larger, arms up and hands and fingers wide, reaching out to the sky. I faced the Bear. The Bear lumbered away.

Transition to the Second Dream.

There was a continuing of solving a mystery. There were others now in the dream, although I did not see them clearly. They seemed like they were in mist but
definitely present and near by. I was concerned about the story I was thinking about – something I heard or was given, was like a puzzle. Suddenly, I was aware of a Mother Black Bear and her Cub. I was near a waterway, like a small river or creek and the Mother Bear was on one side and the Cub on the other side. I was in the middle near the water. This time, I had no concern or fear of the Bear. The Mother Bear and I were sensing each other with our noses. I can remember thinking how fragrant the cedar trees seemed, how the cold air was fresh by the water and that there was a wild scent of the bear on the breeze. A raw power exacted my thoughts as the Mother Bear sensed me, crossed the waterway, and made her way to her Cub. I felt a deep kinship. The Bear and Cub walked off. I stood still, humbled and somehow changed.

Transition to the Third Dream

There were more people in the fog like mist. I returned to the land where I met the first Bear. This time, another Bear sat waiting for me on the path. I made my mind up that I could cut off one of the legs of this Bear if it moved to harm me. As I got closer to the Bear, I knew something. I understood. The Bear was not there to harm. There was a respect that made it safe for me and for the Bear. I walked by the Bear, and as I did the Bear changed, transformed into a mist. I walked on. End of Dream.

I shared this dream with an elder who in reflection said, “the meaning will come to you, just be with it.” And so I began this narrative at the river’s edge and slowly learned to embrace the journey with instinctual direction. Each story is a universe in motion. I trust in the direction that my dream presented for writing a narrative of change and transformation. Indigenous ways of knowing and understanding carried a message that my spirit was carved from the beauty of the river, and that the “transformer energy of Bear” brought renewed courage. I entered the river to remember the stories.
Walking Backwards into the Future with Our Stories:
The Stó:lō is a River of Knowledge,
Haq’eméylem is a River of Stories

The River, The Stó:lō
by
Iolehawk Laura Buker
Introduction

Everything is in Motion. It Has Been Since Time Immemorial

Story. I am going to tell you a story. It is an old, very old story.

Change. What does change have to do with this story? Everything.

River. The name of the river and the people are the same. Stó:lō.

Language. It comes from the river. Halq’emélyem.

Listen. This story is very old and it is still teaching us about

“setting things right.”

It begins long ago. Far back, even further back when only water and mist covered the land. Before the Salmon People lived, further back still. The ancestors say this is “time immemorial.”

This is a story about the river, the river people, the language, the environment and how respect, sharing, teaching and learning have always been at the heart of Stó:lō culture. The stories of the river and the river people reach back to the earliest oral narratives and are carried forward into the present and the beyond. The past connects to a continuum that spirals forward to future generations. The River and the People have the same name. Stó:lō. The relationship of a river and a people is the double helix
of culture and language. It is often described by Elders who have retained their Indigenous languages that "you can not know your culture without knowing your language."\(^6\)

Everything has been in motion since time immemorial. The river has flowed season after season, the people of the river have interacted with all parts of the water, from travel to fishing. The stories tell the richness of both the language and the culture. Everything is connected. The salmon, the trout, the oolichans, the sturgeon, the eagles, the kingfisher, the otter, beaver, frog, camas, salmonberry, and geese have connected with the river system in a cycle of seasonal life. However, all living systems on the river have faced challenges of epic proportions. The Fraser Valley Floods of 1876, 1894, 1936, 1948,\(^7\) the draining of Sumas Lake,\(^8\) deforestation, urbanization, unabated fishing, farming and industrial pollution in the 20th Century have disrupted the health of the river. Why is this so important to this story?

A connection must be made to understand that the health of all living systems (humans, animals, plants, fish, birds) are tied to the river’s system. If the bonds to the river are disrupted, the connections of unity broken, then a disharmony emerges, and a chasm of chaos widens depleting the knowledge of biodiversity. Loss of identity is a result. Indigenous knowledge disappears with the loss of biodiversity on and within the river system. The stories become silent.

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\(^7\) Personal Communication, July 2010. Mrs. Zena Buker, Elder, Storyteller- *Sqwelqwel.* (Our family’s true narratives, history, news).

The oldest Stó:lō narratives describe how chaos can manifest as a result of disrespect and disharmony for a way of life as well as a way of communicating.

Transformation.

The oldest stories of the Stó:lō are about change and transformation. An ancestral pedagogy that informs “a coming to know” philosophy that describes how change runs through the river, its people, and the environment. A protocol of respect in a time ordered manner that is perpetual, timeless, cyclical, the story of change is all about “setting things right.”

Listen closely now.

This story is an epic journey of change, of transformation. The end as well as the beginning will often seem to be one and the same. It is the way of River stories. This is a story of “change.” The old narratives will inform a contemporary story. The river language, Halq’eméylem is nearly lost, endangered, on the brink of extinction. What is also true is that renewal for Halq’eméylem continues to evolve, and be heroically learned, studied for the strength of personal and cultural ties by Stó:lō people. Halq’eméylem is connected to a vast indigenous knowledge that reflects a unique worldview, a riverworldview.⁠⁠¹⁰

A narrative of complexity has many layers. There is no single, one meaning for the interpreting of a story. What I have learned about storytelling has been found at the edge of the river. From my earliest memories, I can find my way to the river’s shoreline and be surrounded by the sensuousness of the land. There beside the dark clay banks,

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⁹ Stó:lō Shewelix

is the smell of the fresh earth, the cottonwoods, fragrant cedar, and the wild plants growing everywhere. On any given day, there will be the “caw, caw” of the deep throated Raven, the sound of gulls, small woodland birds, and during the “salmon run,” the watchful presence of Eagle.

The spirit of the river itself takes hold of my being and engages my senses from where I watch the motion of the current. Each season, the speed of the river rises and falls according to the spring freshet and the seasonal rains. In order to understand “change,” this story invites you to understand a river.

The Stó:lō, both the People and the River have lived side by side for thousands of years. I have been fortunate to have lived with the river from the time of my birth through the most important learning years of my early life. The lessons of listening, companionship, respect and responsibility are imbedded in my personal narrative. The first places of discovery and wonder were found by living alongside the big river, the Stó:lō (The Fraser River).

From my Grandmother, Theresa and my great uncle, who was known as “Unkie,” I learned about fishing and the “reading of the river.” I listened and learned from my elders. Through their watchful manner, I was free to explore the riverbank, use a knife for building fire, pick berries, sit with them and watch the current, the fish jumping and learn the tracks of animals that made prints along the river’s edge.

At this time, I did not fully appreciate the propensity of change that my elders had experienced with the loss of language, culture and identity. In their honest and natural way, they poured their love of the river, the way of stories and the appreciation
of wealth that came from salmon, cut throat trout, oolichans and sturgeon into those early memories.

This way of understanding and knowing represents the first steps of becoming a memory keeper. As a storyteller, memory engages my sense of belonging to family, the river and the environment. The story flows like the river and change is defined by the seasons. What I have learned is that “change” is constant and that a river has a soul as diverse as the people who live alongside it. In the early 1950’s, I was learning the craft of storytelling from my Elders. The first indigenous knowledge narratives came from the stories that spoke that “all living systems are connected.”
Photo 1. My Dear Ones Who Taught Me: Grandmother Theresa Louise Hairsine and “Unkie” William Richard Henry Newton
The River Is a Living System:  
The Language Is a Living System

Stories of the Past, Present and Future

Stories tell us who we are. (Why is this important?) At the core of indigenous research are stories. Our Elders of the past, present and future are the libraries of knowledge. They are the “keepers of memory.” In postmodern times, there is now a bridge towards the appreciation and the acceptance of Indigenous knowledge as original research. Before western academic institutions of learning, the original researchers, the indigenous cultures, were living with the land, water, animals and environment.

The narrative research within this paper will reflect on how stories of the land, culture and language are a key to curriculum reform, education inventiveness and pedagogical innovation for indigenous learning. As the storyteller of this narrative, I am drawing from a body of research that is specific to the appreciation of narrative research. Bourgeois (1994) wrote that:

We live immersed in stories, the narratives that we tell or hear told, stories that we imagine, sometimes semi-consciously recounting our past actions, anticipating future outcomes or situating ourselves at the intersection of stories not yet completed. Narratives can be viewed as away of knowing or remembering and as a means of shaping or patterning emotions and experiences into something whole and meaningful. Narratives that tell of origins, why the
world is the way it is, why we do as we do, and what we are supposed to do constitute a particular kind of story. (p. 11)

Hundreds of years of knowledge building went into a sustainable way of life by and with the river. Our Stó:lō ancestors were constantly making adjustments to the seasons, the flow of the waters, the giant floods and the ebb and prosperity of animals and plants. A deep process of respect applied to a way of life. If that was not the case, a finality would have fallen over the People and therefore, survival would have been at stake. Instead, respect for the land saw diversity as something to value, maintain, not let greed destroy. It is the stories of survival, sustainability, beauty and love of the people, land, language, and environment that give meaning for a way of life.

For much of my thirty years of teaching, the lived experience of learning involved bridging two worlds. My formal education training was a western-based education system that excluded much of the experiential way that I learned. As I grew in confidence and began to reflect on my teaching practice, what began to evolve was a path that was most true to the core of my learning style. At the heart of this methodology is story. I am reclaiming my indigenous learning style. The empowering included a return to an epistemology that is not separate, but wholly connected to the stories of the river, the language of the river and the culture of the river. Cajete (1994) expressed an idea on the importance of story and education that informs indigenous learners:

Humans are storytelling animals. Story is a primary structure through which humans think, relate and communicate. We make stories, tell stories and live
stories because it is such an integral part of being human. Myths, legends, and folk tales have been cornerstones of teaching in every culture. They teach us how to live fully through reflection on, or participation in, the uniquely human cultural expressions of community, art, religion, and adaptation to a natural environment. The myths we live by actively shape and integrate our life experience. They inform us, as well as form us, through our interactions with their symbols and images. (p.117)

As an indigenous scholar, the guiding appreciative reflections that continued to frame my scholarship regarding the river and the river language were about how each one is a system with connecting stories involving old and present ways of understanding the ecology of the land, people and environment. I understood that answers to my deepest concerns regarding a living system for a healthy river and everything that is sustained by it, would take me on a journey back to the old stories. The direction for a return to these teachings did not come instantly. It took time, reflection, deep wonder within my heart, spirit, emotions, and mindfulness. Ermine (1999) describes what is congruent about an Aboriginal epistemology formulated by oral narratives representing and connecting story:

Aboriginal epistemology is grounded in the self, the spirit, the unknown. Understanding of the universe must be grounded in the spirit. Knowledge must be sought through the stream of the inner space in unison with all instruments of knowing and conditions that make individuals receptive to knowing. Ultimately it was in the self that Aboriginal people discovered
great resources for coming to grips with life’s mysteries. It was in the self that the richest source of information could be found by delving into the metaphysical and the nature and origin of knowledge. Aboriginal epistemology speaks of pondering great mysteries that lie no further than the self. (p.108).

The oldest Stó:lō narratives are a place or point from which the stories of the river people originates, the language takes form, and the culture develops and grows. My questions were layered and positioned in an ecology that is framed biologically, linguistically, and culturally. In order to build a platform of hope and renewal for the river, language and culture, I would re-orient my worldview towards the stories of transformation found in the oral histories of the past. I trusted what I knew instinctively. First, I would go to the shoreline of the river and listen. I asked the River, “What is it you would like to share with me?”

A subtle notion that came in reflective thought was the River’s name. The Stó:lō. An Indigenous word defining a culture and a magnificent waterway. One word, an indigenous expression, that ties a river and a people. Gardner (2002), describes the matrix of river and worldview in this way:

River people believe in a Creator who created us and our environment, including a protocol of respect for interacting with that environment, an environment of shared power. Our Halq’eméylem language was born out of our interconnecting interrelationship with the River environment which defined us, gave us our identity. The interconnecting relationships between River people and our River
environment permeates our Halq’eméylem language, in our terms for world, S’ólh Téméxw, in origin stories, or sxwówxwiyám, in ‘time’ terms, in ‘body’ terms, in ‘house’ terms, and in smestíyexw, the shared power of vitality and thought which requires a protocol of respect in “all our relations.” And so it is, that for River People to speak our Halq’eméylem language is as natural as it is for the Robin to sing its own song. (p. 109).

Over the course of many decades, I observed changes on the Fraser River, the Stó:lō, that included loss of habitat, decrease in salmon runs, industrial and agricultural practices that impacted negatively on the river system to the point where the health of this river system was challenged season to season. At the same time, a “call” for language revitalization of the Halq’emeylem language, the language of the Stó:lō, was also increasingly addressed in aboriginal education circles as critically endangered.

My reflective thought was directed at renewal of all things that connect indigenous learning to place: by the river, with the language and strengthened by the culture. At the heart of this query was, “what is it that makes Stó:lō unique in language and culture?” Why is it important to understand indigenous language and what does this have to do with knowledge, culture, and a way of looking at the world? Instinctively, I knew the answer. Everything.

Wade Davis (2009) describes the “wake up call” to why ancient wisdom matters in the modern world this way:
Just as the biosphere, the biological matrix of life, is being severely eroded by the destruction of habitat and the resultant loss of plant and animal species, so too is the ethnosphere, only at a far greater rate. No biologist, for example, would suggest that 50 percent of all species are moribund. Yet this, the most apocalyptic scenario in the realm of biological diversity, scarcely approaches what we know to the most optimistic scenario in the realm of cultural diversity. The key indicator, the canary in the coal mine, if you will, is language loss. A language, of course, is not merely a set of grammatical rules or vocabulary. It is a flash of the human spirit, the vehicle by which the soul of each particular culture comes into the material world. Every language is an old growth forest of the mind, a water-shed of thought, an ecosystem of spiritual possibilities. (p. 3)

The Stó:lō, People of the River, have understood the interconnectivity of all things along and within the Fraser Valley watershed. The Halq'eméylem language describes every protocol, ceremonial song, fishing artifact, weather climate, and seasonal nuances and onward to all expressions that link relationship and communication. Willett (2001), in Battiste, M. (Ed.), *Indigenous Knowledge and Pedagogy in First Nations Education* describes the importance of indigenous language and culture:

Language is by far the most significant factor in the survival of Indigenous knowledge. Indigenous languages and their symbolic, verbal, and unconscious orders structure Indigenous knowledge; therefore, educators cannot stand outside of Indigenous languages to understand Indigenous knowledge. Where
Indigenous knowledge survives, it is transmitted through Aboriginal languages. Where Aboriginal languages, heritages, and communities are respected, supported, and connected to elders and education, educational successes among Aboriginal students can be found. (p. 17)

Education research regarding Indigenous pedagogy is pushing the waters of knowledge ever deeper in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The time has come to give a place “at the table of knowledge” for a pedagogy of story. At the heart of all indigenous understanding, reflection, exploration, and worldview is a story. At the core of indigenous philosophy are storytellers. How else to understand the oldest stories of myth and wonder? It is this exact place of intersection where western education philosophy has needed to make a giant leap. For many Indigenous scholars, receiving acceptance of narrative exploration into the mega shifts and upheavals that formed mountains, valleys, floods, have been most challenging. The story of floods that have overwhelmed the Fraser Valley were accounts written by western educated geologists, historians, scientists, biologists.

The stories of the First People’s narratives rarely, if at all, entered into the dialogue regarding the oral history of such events. Was it too simple to include what at first hearing might seem like a tale for children? Yet, deeper investigation into the history of earth shifting events can be found in the oral histories and stories that have been past down through the generations. Stories of geological time events in the Fraser Valley can be found in the River oral histories, art forms, dance, songs as well as in the
written language. How different would our research (both western and indigenous) stories of the cosmological and geological epochs along the river be if a holistic research was informed by a joining of these two epistemologies? The resulting research would embark on a learning arc where emerging methodologies would be about “river connectivity.” The wholeness of a living river system is in direct communion with the biodiversity, linguistic and cultural diversity of all living systems along and within the waterway.

In the Journal of Environmental Education, (Spring 2002), edited by Dr. Bob Jickling, the entire issue is titled, “Telling Our Stories.” Cheney (2002) reflected on the importance of narratives in Aboriginal cultures and the epistemology that informs storytelling:

While Euro-American philosophers have for the most part paid scant attention to the moral dimensions of epistemology, First Nations peoples, on the other hand, can readily be understood as having paid close attention. Imagine a deep practice of universal consideration for all living things, a consideration that is not instituted as a moral principle or rule governing behaviour, but rather, a dimension of one’s very perception of the world. Such a conception is present in the notion of “respect” for all beings that is pervasive in First Nations cultures. To western ears, the term respect may have overtones of hierarchically-structured relationships, or it might have a Kantian flavor of obedience to moral law. But to indigenous ears it signifies a mode of presence in the world the

central feature of which is *awareness*, an awareness that is simultaneously a mode of knowing – an epistemology. (p. 91)

The rugged beauty of the Stó:lō is a story of renewal that informs a greater narrative of instinctual and cultural inheritance. To understand the River, the People and the Language, it is time to listen to the oldest stories of transformation and change. These narratives unfold right at the river’s edge. Stories have the power to transform our thoughts and deepen our sense of place. In order to restore a nearly extinct language, it is time to re-story the land, language, culture and environment.

How will the living system of Indigenous knowledge be renewed? Can the Halq’eméylem language be brought back from the brink of extinction? Can the old traditional stories work their magic of understanding and respect once again in this twenty-first century? Will hearing the words from a Stó:lō Narrative inspire a fresh dialogue on the rich links that connect linguistic, cultural and biological diversity? In the words of Maori Scholar, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), the decades ahead are vital:

In the new century indigenous peoples will continue to have to defend and seek to protect indigenous knowledges and cultures. At the same time, indigenous peoples offer genuine alternatives to the current dominant form of development. Indigenous peoples have philosophies which connect humans to the environment and to each other and which generate principles for living a life which is sustainable, respectful and possible. (p. 105)
It is the intention of this narrative research to focus on indigenous stories, specifically, the stories along the river told by the Stó:lō, the People of the River. The value of narratives to indigenous methodology will be made clear through indigenous voice, song and language. The importance of personal discovery and identity will be told through a river “lens” found with a river, culture and language. The purpose of the research will be to add to the body of knowledge being built by Indigenous scholars for the health and well being of our blue planet, the earth. A main thread woven throughout is a “call” for deep appreciation, with little time to delay, for revitalizing our environment, our cultures and languages. For in creating intersections of understanding between all citizens along the river, a new and bold vision for sustainability of life will be ensured for future generations. Wade Davis (2009) voices the urgent need to revitalize the legacies of cultures this way,

... culture is not trivial. It is not decoration or artifice, the songs we sing or even the prayers we chant. It is a blanket of comfort that gives meaning to lives. It is a body of knowledge that allows the individual to make sense out of the infinite sensations of consciousness, to find meaning and order in a universe that ultimately has neither. Culture is a body of laws and traditions, a moral and ethical code that insulates a people from the barbaric heart that history suggests lies just beneath the surface of all human societies and indeed all human beings. Culture alone allows us to reach, as Abraham Lincoln said, for the better angels of our nature. (p. 198)
The seasons are passing as renewal is held in a protocol of respect. Hope opens a door for language renewal, where new edges are carved out of wild places as traditional ways of knowing and innovative forms of learning are changing the river language again. The Stó:lō is a river of knowledge and Halq'eméylem is a river of stories.

Come sit by the river with me.

Clay, Silt, Sandbars and Currents

Photo 2: An Eagle View of the River from Mt Woodside near Harrison Bay

Siyá:ye, “my dear friends,” see how the movement of the river is made by the motion of my hands: wide, swirling, weaving arcs in a large wave pattern. The motion
begins at a distance and continues a swirling journey as my hand stretches into open space. This is the journey of the river, the Stó:lō through the territory.

In the Fraser Valley, the big river carves the clay sandy banks to form new patterns and sand bars from the town of Hope, British Columbia, flowing past the township of Mission towards the joining point of river and ocean at the Salish Sea. The River transforms landscapes as the water moves silt and soil in a whirl of movement and motion for sand to form in the curve of the valley floor. The stories connecting the living systems to the river reflect the transformative nature of the big water. Where the old stories inform, instruct and guide so too, this narrative embraces storytelling as a journey on the river, through time past, present and into a renewable future. A beginning narrative informs the context of a “coming to know” philosophy that “invites reflective understanding” for the stories that follow.

This is a story of change. For millennium, the river: the indigenous river language, Halq’eméylem, the people along the waterways, and the biodiversity of plants, animals, fish and birds have responded to a myriad of climate conditions, social and economic developments. Language, culture and environment tell a story of thriving that goes back 10,000 years ago. However, the impoverishment of cultural ties and language damage is a recent story told through the unrelenting legacy of residential

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12 In the fall of 2009 and winter of 2010 the Washington State Board on Geographic Names, the Province of British Columbia Geographic Names Office, the U.S. Board on Geographic Names and the Geographical Names Board of Canada each approved the name ‘Salish Sea’ as an official designation for the inland marine waters of Washington and British Columbia. http://myweb.facstaff.wwu.edu/stefan/SalishSea.htm


schools\textsuperscript{15} that betrayed Canada’s Indigenous children in the early years of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century and lasting through to the nineteen nineties.

The draining of swamp lands and lakes (most notably, Sumas Lake),\textsuperscript{16} the constructed waterway diversions, the clearing forests and wood lots as well as intensive farming practices and industrial run off have created erosion of native plants and habitat on, near and within, the Stó:lō’s waterways.

\textsuperscript{16} The largest single flood control measure to take place in the Fraser Valley was the draining of Sumas Lake. This 10,000 acre lake, that swelled to 30,000 acres during spring flood periods, stretched across the Valley. The Chilliwack/Vedder River system and other rivers flowing in from Washington State fed it. In the early 1920s engineer Fred Sinclair developed a plan to drain the lake. By 1924, the Vedder River was diverted into the Vedder Canal, and water from the lake drained into the Sumas River and Sumas Drainage Canal, and was pumped over the dykes into the Fraser River. Habitat for fish and waterfowl was destroyed in creating this additional farmland. Chilliwack Archives and Historical Museum http://bcheritage.ca/chilliwack/history/theland/drain.htm
Listening at the Edge of the River

I looked at Sumas mountain one day and wondered, “how long has it been since that mountain heard its name?” Not Sumas, but, “Kw’ ekw’e’ iqw.” A mountain is not inanimate, and like the river, it too is in motion, it has songs, art, drawings, stories told about it. Sumas mountain holds one of the oldest Stó:lō narratives regarding the Great Flood. The epic stories of the flood describe the mega geological shifts that shaped the Fraser Valley. The origin of the Flood narrative emerged through Halq’eméylem and the language itself built the bridge for understanding relationships, metaphors and the knowledge that informed a coherent environment. In the oldest stories, Kw’ ekw’e’ iqw, Sumas Mountain, secured a community, safely in its embrace.

Kw’ekw’e’iqw: Sumas Mountain and the Great Flood

Come closely. Here is that old story told by one of the greatest Stó:lō Storytellers:

Dan Milo.

(The Flood)

My dear friends, whoever will be listening to this story. I suppose you all know me. During the flood here in this valley, the whole place in the Fraser Valley was drowned - supposed to be drowned, at that time.

Well, there was a man telling each one of his people: “Build up a good canoe. There will be one mountain that’s going to be clear – the top will be there, and that’s where the people going to be saved, those that going to have a canoe.” But

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17 Kw’ ekw’e’ iqw. Halq’eméylem name for Sumas Mountain.
18 Wells, O.N. Myths and Legends of South Western British Columbia: STAW-loh Indians (Sardis, 1970).
a lot of them people didn’t believe that at all. “There’s a lot of high mountains; we can climb up there,” that’s what other people said.

Well, when the time comes, the flood started. They began to follow that Sumas Mountain. The Indian calls that mountain, Kw’ekw’e’iqw. That was the name of the mountain that didn’t go out of sight during that flood.

Well, they got up to the top of the mountain and they had a long rope that the Indians work, braided of some kind of skin and trees, and they tie up themselves there. The story said there’s three canoes went lost from there, that broked off and nobody knows where they went to.

For so many days, they were up there; then the water began to come down. They got down, about half way down, to the lower land. They stopped in a place, and there’s a cave into the mountain. So they stay there, right there, to be dry.

And, they had that long rope coiled up inside the cave. And they stayed there, those people, stayed right there. They could see the lower land was dry. The grass began to get green. Then, they began to come down.

And that long rope and other stuffs that they had there, that’s left there. Anybody can see that coil of rope inside the cave. Whoever will see it, it will be either good luck or bad luck, whoever will see the coil of rope and the stuffs that’s left in there. And, then they began to come down. They got down there, and the place was all dry.

Well, the story is that’s why our language changes.

The old Sts’elxwíqw language, what the White man calls Chilliwack, that all died out; and they began the language that we use today, Halkomelem.

That’s the end of the story.

**A River Language Evolving**

Dan Milo’s story of the “Flood” informs the listener that a community had the opportunity to respond to transformative events. As the storyteller, he unfurls the narrative in a way that puts the listener into the time and place where memory is guided to understand the response, action and timely movement for safety. One mountain, a canoe and a rope figure in the telling. As listeners, we learn how powerful
the flood is in transforming the landscape, the people, the environment, and the language.

At the end of the story, we gain the knowledge of, “that is why our language changes.” Profound in the simplicity of the telling and yet in the narrative of the flood, broader fields of disciplines cross imaginary lines with metaphors, nuances of chaos theory\textsuperscript{21}, living systems, and historical geographical upheavals. A story of transformation informs our new understanding of how a language changes into something new, something quite different.

The Stó:lō ancestors that re-told the story of the Flood were informing their listeners to approach the understanding of events on a mega scale for change. It is important to acknowledge that our river ancestors could be described as scientists, geologists, marine and ecology specialists, Professors of history, and engineers of construction. A storyteller and indigenous scientist, Gregory Cayete (2000) informs his listeners on Native Science of this way:

The understanding of native science requires developing the ability to decode layers of meaning embedded in symbols; symbols that are used artistically and linguistically to depict structures and relationships to places.\textsuperscript{22}

In times past, the Flood story would be told and retold, woven into the language of design, drawn into memory through art, song and dance. This is the way of river stories.


Contemporary times have challenged the river, the environment, the people, and the indigenous language, Halq’eméylem. The biodiversity, the cultural diversity, and the linguistic diversity are not self-sustaining, renewing or being protected in any sensible fashion. The river language, the everyday speech of Halq’eméylem is all but silenced. How to “set things right” regarding the disruption a river’s life and its voice? The answer may be found in “restoring” and in “re-storying” the diversity found within the flow of the river’s current. The river is a teacher. We are all learners in motion.

Photo 3: The Language of a Cedar Basket by the River
Narrative in Context to Indigenous Research

Dwelling in a Place of Knowing

The Oxford Dictionary defines narrative as “a spoken or written account of connected events: a story.” Indigenous scholars such as Smith, (2000), Battiste, (2000), Gardner, (2000), Kenny, (2004), and, Castellano, (2000) have been at the forefront in building research methods that are informed by indigenous world view, historical context and Aboriginal knowledge construction. The story of a River, the People of the River and the River Language, Halq'eméylem dwells in a transformative space written on spindle whorls, art drawings, drums, canoes, weavings, rock paintings, decorative pieces, carvings and welcoming cedar posts. At the core of river narratives, is the “spirit” of oral tradition. This is a renewal of connection. The value of sharing indigenous knowledge is a relationship of mutual respect from both the storyteller and audience. The new web of understanding that Indigenous scholars are setting forth in research is affirming, courageous, illuminating, participatory, and ground-breaking in thought and interpretation. In the Holistic Framework for Aboriginal Policy Research (2004), meaningful indigenous research is described:

Aboriginal scholars know that to create the important discursive practices or conversations that will help in studying Aboriginal worlds in meaningful and enduring ways, they must consider diverse approaches to research that can address the complex worlds we inhabit. Aboriginal people have their own
epistemology or science of knowledge that can only be revealed by a thorough reflection on lives and traditions.23

At its core meaning, research is a “search for knowledge.” The oldest Stó:lō stories invite the listener to dwell in a place of knowing. There might not be immediate understanding for the meaning of the story. It is affirmed, understood and encouraged that the listener “be” with the story. When the storyteller has finished, the listener has been left with understanding, appreciation, humor, and reflection. A relationship of knowledge, renewal, and empathy has been planted.

In Coast Salish tradition, one of the protocols for honoring is to raise our hands in thanks and respect. This is a distinct gesture. It acknowledges the beauty of words spoken, or grace shown through a speech or oratory that lifts an audience whether in a longhouse, or a public presentation, or any place where there are words and story. In preparing for the methodology in this particular narrative research, my first consideration is for the Elders who have inspired me. It is a source of inspiration to hear great oratory from Indigenous women and men who have the gift of speech-making. Throughout countless gatherings and meeting places, it is the oral tradition of storytelling by elders who know the power of words to inspire, and to lift people to confidence, and to remind us that our past is alive within us as we move forward as Indigenous people.

In the words of Aboriginal architect, Douglas Cardinal (1998), he reflects on how elders inspire us to build our creativity:

My Elders said to me, "You know, do you want to play in that small little world of which you know, or do you want to explore the vast universe, that unknown world out there?" They said, "Now where does a warrior play—in this little world here of which you know, or this vast world of which you know nothing about?"

The small little world of which you know is no place for a warrior. A warrior stands on that world and is willing to leap off that world. That's the land of the eagle. That's where creativity occurs, because that's where all possibility occurs. There's no possibility in this world of what you know. There is only tremendous possibilities if you're willing to stand out there and leap off the edge. Because that's where true creativity exists; that's what we have to do to create a new life not only for ourselves, our children, our grandchildren, but to make a contribution to other people living in a small little world. (p. 8)

Many Stó:lō narratives are stories of transformation and change. My leading reflective question involved my own growth as a storyteller, educator, and researcher. How was I becoming an agent for change? Could my stories be understood as a creative process that would help others appreciate the view of a culture, of a language and of a way of looking at and living with the modern world through an Indigenous lens? How would I write a story of connectivity? In what ways could I dwell in the “land of the eagle?” I am concerned over the future sustainability of the river, the river language, and the citizen's living alongside the river as well as, all habit connected to the waterway. How could I develop my creativity to promote a culture that is rich in ideas, wealthy in language and story, and purposeful in attuning to a knowledge system that values wholeness and health. As I “sat with” my questions, I understood how
challenging it would be to write a narrative research. Stories are embedded in our river worldview. This is an oral tradition.

Margaret Kovach (2010) wrote about oral tradition and indigenous research in this manner:

The conversational method is a means of gathering knowledge found within Indigenous research. The conversational method is of significance to Indigenous methodologies because it is a method of gathering knowledge based on oral storytelling tradition congruent with an Indigenous paradigm. It involves a dialogic participation that holds a deep purpose of sharing story as a means to assist others. It is relational at its core. (p. 40).

Edwards (2005), furthers an indigenous education learning process towards connectivity this way:

indigenous epistemologies enrich the lives of individuals and groups by providing education in the form of teaching and learning that increases people’s understanding across multiple contexts, for example, understanding of order and inter-connectedness between things in the universe, discipline to learn and respect for knowledge and people. (p. 11).

The “search for knowledge” of this river narrative will be found in the quiet solitude of reflection, the possibilities of metaphor and in memory of place. It is my intention to follow the connectivity of a river epistemology and to allow my orality to grow in a creative expressive manner. In positioning research as ceremony, Wilson (2005) encourages an emerging style of indigenous story-research:
An integral part of Indigenous identity for many Indigenous people includes a distinct way of viewing the world and of “being.” Indigenous people have come to realize that beyond control over the topic chosen for study, the research methodology needs to incorporate their cosmology, worldview, epistemology and ethical beliefs. An Indigenous paradigm needs to be followed through all stages of research. (p. 15).

The River, the Stó:lō, has its spirit marked on the hearts and minds of those inhabiting its river banks for thousands of years. The River is carved into the memory of our ancestors and they in turn have nurtured the stories, the language, the knowledge, and then re-storied its meanings back into the oral narratives. We are becoming listeners. We are becoming storytellers.

**Storyteller as Researcher**

At the river’s edge, the grey blue water splashes over rocks and old stump logs as it finds the path of least resistance. In each season, the water will flow down the valley floor from swift torrent to slow current. Stories have helped our ancestors to “read” the river. What is the advantage of observing the changes on the river? Evolving knowledge. When the currents change and the tides turn, when a specific type of dragonfly appears to herald the coming of the fish, the sighting of abundant eagles, the propensity of animal tracks along the river bank, the sweet smell of the cottonwoods in bloom all are part of a relationship of connection. These are indicators of the change of season, the movement and cycle of salmon, signs of flooding and the appreciation of biodiversity within the river system.
A storyteller has a deep appreciation for observation. All manner of insights settle within the narrator’s memory from remembering the sounds, sights, smells, taste, and touch of both day to day occurrences as well as ceremonial events. A story of the oolichan run will begin with the sights, sounds and “feel” of the river and the sound of the word, “swi:we.”

A storyteller will describe what she or he sees on the river, what birds are near or soaring above the mud flats, and what is the scent of the river at that season.

Now, when I sit by the river and remember the oolichan (swi:we) runs of the past, the little candle fish fill my memory. They were so abundant, running in swift schools, and so readily swept up by a net and emptied into a waiting bucket. They had the scent of freshness, oily and tender tasting. It was a spring tonic for the body as well as the senses. The candle fish, the eulachon, the swi:we are now all but gone from the valley waterways. Their story lives on in memory, through the telling and through remembering. The oolichans have a story to tell as to why they are no longer abundant, vanished from the river. How does the disappearance of the candle fish effect the river’s diversity? When was the last time the oolichans were called by their Halq’eméylem name? Is the health of the river connected to knowledge of the sustainability of waterways, culture, language and environment? Who remembers the stories of the “grease trail” and how does this knowledge inform our valley history?

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24 Swi:we is a Halq’eméylem word for “candlefish” and/or “oolichan.”
25 To: Lmels Ye Siyelyolexwa: Wisdom of the Elders. (1980). Chilliwack, BC: Coqualeetza Resource Centre Publisher, p. 68. Oolichan or eulchaon or candle fish is from the Chinook Jargan. In Halq’eméylem the word of oolichan is swi:we.
26 A grease trail is an overland trade route, part of a network of trails connecting the Pacific coast with the Interior in the Pacific Northwest. Trails were developed for trade between indigenous people, particularly the trade in eulachon oil. The grease from these small fish could be traded for furs,
As I reflect on my role as a storyteller, a woman of the river, I am struck with the insight that all the storytellers of the past, present and certainly into the future share a bond of protocol. There have been storytellers that have sat by the river, observing all of life for over thousands of years. This is known because of the oral histories that have been retold, of art restored, and of songs re-sung. An indigenous search for knowledge about the importance of stories about the river will reveal an intimacy and a connection to river culture, a river language, and to the environment. When sharing a story, there are a myriad of emotions that embody the storyteller. In the pursuit of building a research for indigenous narrative study, a place must be made for a protocol that honors the vulnerability of the narrator. The intimacy that a storyteller has with the land, the environment, in all its diversity with the people, and with the elements of earth, water, fire and air profoundly inhabit memory and place. They dwell in the heart spaces of the speaker. A storyteller also embraces a fifth element, that of spirit.

**Stó:lō Shxwelí Wiyotha**

A story works through a storyteller. There is a protocol to share the story in a good way, a respectful manner. This is a spiritual inheritance – the ability to experience something fragile and yet strong to connect the human condition and the human spirit to the narrative. This is a gift. It is also a responsibility. Elders are listening, children are listening, all visible as well as invisible forces of nature are listening. The storyteller

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copper, and obsidian, among other things. The Stó:lō people of the Fraser River simply ate the fish, either fresh or smoked, but the people of the interior used the oil as a condiment (similar to butter) and in various other ways. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grease_trail
engages the heart in sharing memories, personal observations, and is aware of honoring the stories given with permission to orally share them in the spirit of the giver.

In the following river song, “Stó:lō Shxwelí Wiyotha”27, the Halq’eméylem language sings that the Spirit of the Stó:lō Lives Forever. In conversation with the narrator of this song, Tit’elem Spa:th, Mr. Eddie Gardner, he acknowledged that he was inspired by the river, the elders, the people of the river and everything that connects to the Stó:lō. This song came through him, it engaged his heart, mind, body and spirit in a way that would “lift up” the people to the strength of the river. The song honors the river, the Stó:lō, that has flowed since time immemorial through the heart of the Fraser Valley.

In honoring the song, Tit’elem Spa:th demonstrates a protocol of respect for the elders that assisted in translating the song. The dedication goes to five Stó:lō language speakers, storytellers and respected elders of the community: Ts’ats’elexwolt Elizabeth Herrling, Yomalot Rosaleen George, Tseloyothelwet Shirley Julian. Siyamiyateliyot, Elizabeth Phillips and Xwiyolemót, Tillie Guiterrez.

A relationship of respect was in place for this song to be “brought forward.”

Tit’elem Spa:th reflects on how he initially started to learn Halq’eméylem.

When I heard about the program to revitalize the language, I went to see Shirley Julian. I asked if I could become part of this and she encouraged me, invited me to join. The time spent with linguist Brent Galloway and all those elders was the

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27 Translated as The Spirit of the Stó:lō Lives Forever, by Tit’elem Spa:th, Eddie Gardner. This song was recorded by lolehawk Laura Buker, November 2002 at Seabird Island and given permission to publish in this text by Mr. Eddie Gardner.
beginning of a lifelong path of learning and respect for our Halq’eméylem language.

Those elders, were great teachers and I and others learned because of their dedication and love of the language. They showed great patience and gave everything of themselves to pass on the language to us. It is the beauty of these elders, their legacy of generosity that has kept the flame of learning alive.²⁸

Tit’elem Spa:th is generous in his sharing of this song and it’s story. Stó:lō Shxwelí Wiyotha could be defined as a way of expressing the beauty that is unique to the river, the Stó:lō. Aesthetics is a branch of philosophy dealing with the nature of beauty, art, and taste, and with the creation and appreciation of beauty.²⁹ This song could be described as a “Stó:lō aesthetic,” one that is it is immersed in a philosophy, a way of understanding and seeing the world, through a Stó:lō lens. A lens that honors a river, that comes out of a respect for culture, knowledge of the environment and way of perceiving the world. This is an Indigenous worldview.

²⁸ Private conversation with Eddie Gardner, Friday November 26, 2010 – from Thunder Bay, Ontario to Chilliwack, BC.

An Indigenous Paradigm

Photo 4: Stó:lō Shxwelí Wíyotha - The Spirit of the Stó:lō Forever

Written by T’ít’elem Spath, Eddie Gardner

Wey ho wey o wey hi o
Ay lexw te Stó:lō Shxwélí       The spirit of the Stó:lō lives
Wey ho wey o wey hi o
Ay lexw te Stó:lō Shxwélí
A’A’ siyaye, Yes my friends
Ay lexw te Stó:lō Shxwélí

Photo by Author (June 2007)
Constructing Meaning, Building Relationships

In a groundbreaking book on indigenous research methods, Shawn Wilson (2008) states that,

research is all about unanswered questions, but it also reveals our unquestioned answers. It is my intention to build a relationship between the readers of this story, myself as the storyteller and the ideas I present. This relationship needs to

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30 Song by T’it’elem Spath, Eddie Gardner. Honoring: Yomalot (Rosaleen George); Ts’ats’elxwót (Elizabeth Herrling); Tseloyóthelwet (Shirley Norris) and Xwiyolemót (Tillie Gutteriez). Translation and permission granted November 2010.

be formed in order for an understanding of an Indigenous research paradigm to develop.

The narrative of the river is a presentation of an evolving indigenous research paradigm. At each place by the river, it is my intention to invite the reader to reflect, construct meaning, and to build relationships with the living systems: of the river, the language and the environment.

Where does a language begin? What is distinct in the diversity of the environment, the river, and the culture that is core to the origin of a language? How does a story of change, of transformation, continue to evolve, engage, and express the importance of “keeping the language in motion?” Why is knowledge building central to revitalizing a language? How does this relate to the appreciation of a river, the environment, and an Indigenous culture? Is it possible for an “emerging approach” to land, language, and cultural renewal to be found in bringing together the “living systems” of linguistic, cultural and biological diversity? If so, what is this new story? What do we call this new narrative? Could this be called, or named a Stó:lō Narrative Aesthetic?

**Passage by Canoe: In a River’s Flow Across Relationships of Knowing**

The river, the river people, the river language and the river environment embody a living story of change. For millennia, the hearts of the dwellers by the river have wept, laughed, sang, harvested, fished, wove, carved, paddled, birthed and died beside the big water. Storytellers embrace a peaceful vulnerability to feel that a river has a memory, a soul, that it is a living system. They have been moved to re-tell that
story to others so that they too would find the beauty and understanding of a river, its people, its language and a diversity of knowledge. A storyteller carries memory, shares words and understandings that are in motion across relationships of knowing.

The time has come in this narrative to enter the river. As a guest of this telling, you have been invited to view the river at the edge of the shoreline, to sit and observe, to reflect on a very old story. It is time to journey by canoe on the river.

The passage into the river brings to the fore an immediate response to balance self with the canoe to move forward with symmetry in the flow of the current, to flow with the motion of wind, paddle and water. A precise sense of harmony aligns one to an intimacy with everything on and with the river. In the canoe, I am a Stó:lō Navigator, *ila’q ‘stern of canoe, stern person among the paddlers.* It is time to paddle with stories of the river, language, environment and culture. The cedar canoe cuts through the water, with each stroke of the paddle a way emerges, and a "lens of knowing" is brought to focus. With each “pull” of the paddle, the view from the cedar canoe is different from the perspective of the shoreline. The river has its own motion and with the way forward, awareness is awakened to the closeness of the mountains, to the colors reflecting off the sand bars, the dead-heads sticking up from the water and the shore birds as well as other flyers that accompany our journey. The sounds are everywhere. The wake, splash and “thunk” of the paddles on the side of the canoe. The wind as it brushes off the top of the water and on to our faces, the cottonwood fluff like dandelion seeds are catching the breeze and floating towards the river. The language is a living

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32 I found tháyelets ‘steer a canoe’ and iláq ‘stern of canoe; stern person among paddlers’. I give the second word because the stern crew person is the one that steers the canoe (of course with the help of the paddlers). I hope this answers the question. To steer is to navigate but the Elders never translated the word as navigate, just as to steer. Personal Communication with Linguist, Dr. Brent Lawe’chten Galloway. December 10, 2010.
system, the river is a living system. Travel with me, as we move ahead, let me share with you four stories.
Four Narratives

A River Language in Motion

The Halq’meylem language has always been in motion. For thousands of years, the Stó:lō (the river) has been in motion winding its path through deep gorges, large alluvial mounds and coastal mountain ranges. The People of the River, the Stó:lō, defined an epistemological sustainability for a way of life that respects the fish within the river and the big cedars, diverse indigenous flora and fauna all coexisting along and within the river system.

A distinct settlement grew along the River, its tributaries, nearby lakes and freshet streams. This is the home of my ancestors and the stories that are integral to the place known as Xá:ytem.33

The narrative will follow the river through the passing of the seasons and of great transforming events beginning with the story of Xá:ytem, Hatzic Rock. The oldest stories found along the banks of the Stó:lō are narrative epochs connecting a river philosophy that is transforming, changing and renewing memory in this present time into the future and beyond.

A Stó:lō narrative aesthetic is about building knowledge systems that are framed in environmental awareness, ancestral pedagogy and a “coming to know” philosophy that is steeped in a complexity of environmental relationships. The aim of this narrative

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research is to impress the reader on the importance of building strong relationships across many diverse knowledge systems resulting in a new dialog.

The people of the river have an appreciation of living in a “good and prosperous” manner for thousands of years. The living systems of the river, language, environment, salmon have been held in oral histories and are constantly being renewed for deeper understanding and wisdom keeping.

First Nations of British Columbia have relied on – and helped to sustain – biodiversity in their home territories for at least 10,000 years and probably even longer. Over 30 linguistically distinct indigenous groups have resided here, often in dense populations, especially along the coast and the major river systems. Many of these peoples still live in communities within their original territories. Although they have distinctive languages and cultural traits, they also share many similarities in their cultural practices....The knowledge of the ecological and morphological characteristics of plants and animals is immense in First Nations’ knowledge systems. Many species serve as ecological or phenological indicators in peoples’ seasonal rounds. The flowering of certain plants, the songs of certain birds, or the appearance of certain types of butterflies or other insects, are signs of seasonal change or of the time for some important harvest event.34

A listening with heart, mind and spirit may open the door for a new story. With so much change in this first decade of the twenty-first century, it is imperative that those who hear the “call” to remember the river stories, make every effort to share the narratives, make meaning of the stories in order that a new paradigm of learning will

take hold for the generations to come. So much is at stake: everything is connected: the language, culture, environment. In all places of learning and policy making, it is time to bring to the “table” a consciousness that “brings together” rather than one that separates and divides solutions. The story of transformation defines the four narratives that will follow. In a time ordered manner that is perpetual, timeless, cyclical, the story of change is all about “setting things right.”

Listen closely now.

In our Stó:lō culture a special link exists between the past, present and future. We express this connection in many ways. In our Halq'eméylem language, for instance, we have the word tómiyeqw which translates into English as both great-great-great-great-grandparent and great-great-great-great-grandchild. The relationship expressed in this word connects people seven generations past with those seven generations in the future. The connection between the past and future rests with those of use living today, in the present. Our heritage stems from our occupation and use of S’ólh T’éméxw since the beginning of time, as the first inhabitants of this land. Our world, unlike that of many of our present-day neighbours, includes inseparable spiritual and material realms. The transformation events of Xexá:ls and Tel Swayel (Sky-Borne People) created places that prove our direct link to Chichelh Siya:m.

We view our place and actions in our world as the center of a continuum extending seven generations past and seven generations forward. We live today in the world of both our ancestors and relatives yet to come. Our heritage -
including our land, resources, people and ancestors - is ultimately all that we are. Our heritage must be treated with respect.35

Ecological Kinship with a River, a Language, a Culture, a Biosphere

The four narratives are a model for respectful ecological kinship with a river, a language, a culture and the environment. As an observer, a reader of this story, an invitation is offered to approach this narrative as a guest, such as an honored guest at a feast. River protocol is mindful of addressing guests in a respectful manner, to make guests comfortable and to give generously with food, honored traditions and with story.

Figure 1. Model of the Four Narratives

As the storyteller, my first acknowledgement is that the Creator, my Ancestors, the River itself, would understand that I come to sharing this narrative in a humble

manner. I am profoundly aware of the importance of “setting things right” and the honor and responsibility that comes with storytelling.

I have learned to listen to stories with both my ears and also with my heart. In this manner, a deeper memory will take root. Reflection will guide me towards understanding of how the past epic stories continue to teach, model and direct change in this present time and place. Xe: ylt, th’a sle₃₆

Photo 5: A Story of Transformation

Xá:ytem (Hatzic Rock)

₃₆ Translation: “To write on my heart”.
This narrative research is about stories, specifically, a vision of how “the stó:lō is a river of knowledge and halq’eméylem is a river of stories.” The river is the teacher. We are the learners. At the heart of this relationship is respect. One important teaching for cultivating knowledge is to honor the connections we have towards the environment, our culture, our family, and traditional language. The stories of the river and the river people embody an indigenous epistemology that celebrates linguistic, cultural, and ecological diversity. The world is appreciated and looked at through points of connection and wholeness. A sacred ecology defines the relational joining of a river, the river people, and the river language.

As an indigenous education scholar, I have a vision for a way to approach teaching and learning. We need to tell our stories. As educators, it is vitally important that we deepen our own learning by spending time with stories. How else will we “make meaning” from our traditional narratives? I believe one way to experience this is to listen deeply in reflective practice. The times I have spent by the Stó:lō, have been spiritually moving experiences. In my earliest memories, the “play,” fishing and paddling on the river breathed life-stories into my spirit and defined my way of learning. In mature years, I have grown to appreciate the cycle and seasons of the river, and how the “ebb and flow” are teaching metaphors for a philosophy of life.

The art of storytelling is a lifelong, creative process. It connects the past, present, and the future. In this narrative research, it is the great ancestral stories, myths, as well as, the personal histories that we take with us as we, “walk backwards into the future.” Our stories are all about a life of relationship and connection to places of hope, renewal,
vision, and healing. These spaces are personal and are the tender ties that our human spirit inhabits in a world where everything is in motion and change is constant. Into this world of transformation, our stories can guide our way and teach us the value of a practice for appreciation. We are spiritual beings, having spiritual experiences gifted by the stories from our ancestral and cultural traditions.

It is my intention as an educator, to mentor a “river of storytellers.” The new indigenous scholars entering into the teaching profession will need to hone a toolkit for digital learning, as well as, be strong, confident storytellers that motivate and engage learners. There is no time to waste in building capacity of indigenous teachers. Our young children are waiting to experience new ways, where they too, can tell the story of their learning. But first, indigenous teacher practitioners must be nurtured in the practice of storytelling. The apprenticeship of oral tradition values learning as an experience that is tactile, sensory, intelligent, and highly complex.

If narrative practice is to be valued throughout indigenous education, how do personal and cultural ties connect to teacher education programs? Cajete (1994) offers this insight:

The connection between personal mythology, cultural mythology, and education process is complex and dynamic. Since our personal stories fuel our emotions and shape our beliefs, as we come to understand the principles by which our personal mythology operates, we will become more able to participate consciously in its development. This is equally true of one’s personal educative process, since the two types of understanding are intimately intertwined.
Integrating personal and cultural mythology through imagery is a primary component of the Indigenous education process. (p. 118).

The river culture, river language, and river ecology are concentric circles that spiral out from the oldest stories found in Stó:lō territory. It is from our ancestral stories that we encounter myth, metaphor, and memory. An indigenous story, told in an engaging fashion, can situate a learner in the field of intuition and imagery. Why is this of value to indigenous ways of knowing and learning? Why is it so important to hear our stories in English, as well as, in our traditional languages? Can indigenous stories transform our approach to curriculum strategies, innovative teaching practices, and lifelong learning? In the book, “Look to the Mountain,” (1994), Tewa Educator, Dr. Gregory Cajete from Santa Clara Pueblo in New Mexico, describes how as Indigenous people, our lives are expressions of the stories that we embrace and take into our hearts:

Myth presents a doorway through which human and natural energy moves in the expressions of human culture. A key to expressing Indigenous education in a contemporary sense includes attempting to influence the way Indian people construct their understanding of themselves and their place in a contemporary world. This understanding stems from their Indigenous mythic language (both personal and cultural) as it finds contemporary expression in ritual, dream, art, dance, music, social interaction, and learning. Tracking the way myth acts to motivate people and communities is an important first step in learning how to use myth effectively in the context of teaching. (p. 119)
What does this mean to “track a myth?” The “track” of the narratives came as I traveled along the river and understood the importance of linguistic, cultural, and biological diversity as connecting links within the river system. This research narrative, will start with sharing a very old story that comes from a site on the Fraser River, near the place of my birth. This story opens a “doorway” for a personal exploration of my Stó:lō identity. I grew to understand that the river is a teacher, that an indigenous language honors the People of the River, and that storytelling is a way to keep the old ways alive and renewed. In the context of teaching, I would learn how to “make meaning” of the old narratives and follow or “track” this approach into the innovative places of higher education.

Indigenous culture and language are important to our traditional stories. The story of Xá:ytem, at Hatzic Rock, is a teaching story for respecting cedar, salmon, and the written river language. The path of my learning was to situate myself in the “land of the eagle.” This is the place of creativity and imagination. In honoring Indigenous ways of knowing and understanding, I would engage my heart, mind, emotions, and spirit to create three narrative poems around the teachings of the old story of Xá:ytem. The narratives are stories that define the indigenous teaching found at the “Transformer Stone”: that all People of the River have a sacred responsibility towards “setting things right,” for the care of salmon, cedar and the written river language.

I began with walking on the land at Xá:ytem, situated at Hatzic Rock. In visits to the “transformer stone,” I allowed my senses to be filled with the sights, sounds, and quiet reflection of this teaching story. In time, observation gave way to conversations with Elders, and what followed was a deeper appreciation for the meaning “of change.”
My creative self opened to the storyteller within where I see the world through a “river lens.” The track of the story continued by integrating the river landscape and river language through photos, narrative poems, and the written word, in both the English, and the Halq'eméylem language. I was shaping my “river voice.”

This way of approaching learning through story is understood in traditional Indigenous spaces, and yet, it is not often incorporated into the education curriculum or school classroom experience. It is the hope that this river narrative will build towards a learning experience where Indigenous educators will wrap themselves in “ceremonial blankets and walk into the future confident of their identity in a modern world,” all the while, anchored in their appreciation of traditional language, environmental diversity, and oral tradition. The story of change and transformation reminds us that our practice of storytelling is a powerful agent for renewal and revitalization of our indigenous languages, philosophies, and innovative education practices.

The narratives in “Walking Backwards Into the Future” invites the reader to the shoreline of the river and then travel by canoe on the waterway. At each new curve of understanding, a guidance or direction is given for deeper appreciation for the story. Indigenous learning values reflection.

The first narrative begins at Xá:ytem, and is titled, “The Story of Hatzic Rock (Xá:ytem).” From this site, the story invites the reader onto the land and to the river that flows through the Fraser Valley. Stó:lō stories begin with the relationship to the land, named, S’olh Téméxw. The importance of this word is described by, Gardner (2005):
S’olh Téméxw refers to our relationship with the land, a relationship that has been evolving for at least 10,000 years. Our stories show how we, the land and the language are bound together by smestiyex w, a powerful spirit that permeates all of nature.37

The oldest stories of the great transformational narratives, are the opening to the first quarter of the stories. The Stó:lō Elders describe the relationship of the land to the two differing types of stories from the River People, (2003):

Since the time of sxwôxwiyám, time immemorial, we, the Stó:lō, have occupied our territory – S’ólh Téméxw – what is now known as southwestern British Columbia and northwestern Washington State.

Stó:lō” is the Halq’eméylem word for “river” and also for the Halkomelem-speaking people who live within the lower Fraser River watershed. We, as the Stó:lō, are a collective community who hold rights and title within all of S’ólh Téméxw – “our world.” In the past, we moved freely amongst the villages according to where our extended family members lived. We were put here by the Creator, Chichelh Siya:m, but the world was chaotic. So, Xexá:ls (the Transformers) and Tel Swoyal (Sky-Borne People) came to make the world right and transform it into its present form.”38

The second narrative, is titled, “Ímex Xwéhèyethet xwèlá te shxwèwas sq’os te s’olh Sxwóxwiyám,” Walking Backwards Into the Future With Our Stories.” This


narrative poem is a journey to the places and to the forces on the river where I deepened my personal relationship to S’olh Téméxw. The narrative poem, “walking backwards into the future with our stories,” is an honoring of “all my relations.” I wrote this narrative story to express my love of family, and to honor the generations of grandparents and ancestors that have lived and practiced a way of life along the waterway. It was through conversations with Elder, Elizabeth Phillips, Siyamiyateliyot, where I first heard the indigenous words of our river culture. A joy came into my heart at hearing her voice and the words she shared and the expressions of knowledge that define our worldview. The stories of the Stó:lō came alive in deeper ways. I felt the river in motion through the language.

This second narrative poem is also translated by Siyamiyateliyot. It has always been the River Elders who model a respect for learning, especially knowledge building with the words of the Halq’eméylem language. The second narrative lifts up the spirit of a family for healing, beauty, and for the continued preservation and love of all things connected to the river.

The third narrative poem is title, “Ghostly Ancestors.” This narrative poem recalls a time of great storytelling along the river. A time when transformation and change were taught, celebrated, and honored in story, art, and the attunement to the natural world. The “Ghostly Ancestors,” re-story the importance revitalizing the Halq’eméylem language, the river, salmon, and the Stó:lō culture. Do we want our grandchildren and great grandchildren to wonder in despair how we “let go” of the need to sustain all the parts of S’olh Téméxw to renew the environment, language,
salmon, land, and culture? The message from the narrative poem is a “call” to those who love the land, to those who are teachers, storytellers, elders, and policy makers, that we must try and build a personal integrity into all we know and respect about the river and the river language and the river culture.

The fourth narrative is titled, “Salmon Shxwelí.” Here the narrative poem continues the story thread about “setting things right.” How has Salmon shaped our Stó:lō worldview, or as Gardner (2005) so perfectly described our place as a “riverworldview?” Salmon bones are found in the river and in the deep clay mud of the oldest Stó:lō heritage sites, such as those found at Xá:ytem. This narrative poem describes the cycle of salmon and its return to the Fraser River. The oldest story told at the place of the “transformer stone,” reminds all citizens of the river, that salmon brings health to the people and we are all responsibility is to ”set things right” for the sustainability of salmon now and into the future for the generations to come.

The four narratives are “woven” together somewhat like describing the story found within the metaphor of a cedar basket. The weaver has a relationship with the cedar and proceeds to create a basket, naming it for its usage and creating a pattern with dyes and color. The basket is a story and the narrative has many meanings. Xá:ytem is the container for the stories of change and transformation. Four narratives weave connections for sustaining linguistic, cultural, and environmental diversity on the Fraser River. It is our stories of the past that have the power to inform a healthy sustainable practice for living in present day and into a future era. In Stó:lō and Coastal Salish cultures, Archibald, (2008) shares about preparing to listen to stories,
Patience and trust are essential for preparing to listen to stories. Listening involves more than just using the auditory sense. We must let our emotions surface. As Elders say, it is important to listen with “three ears: two on the sides of our head and the one that is in our heart.” (p. 8).

It is now time, to walk to the river and hear the stories.
Narrative One

Photo 6: Xá:ytem Hatzic Rock

Xa:ytem
Photo By Author, July 2010

Photo 6: Xá:ytem Hatzic Rock
The Story of Hatzic Rock (Xá:ytem)

LINNEA: Hello! Welcome! My name is Ai:yametkwa, "she who brings the sun."

What I am going to do for you today, I'm going to tell you the story of the sacred transformer stone. Long, long ago, in the age of transformation, the Creator looked down, and he saw that the people weren't living right. He said, “They're not feeding their children right. They're not, they're not clothing themselves properly. They have power, but they're abusing their power.”

So, the Creator transformed Himself into four bears at the head of Harrison Lake, one female bear, and three male bears. He walked through the territory. He said, "I want to give that good woman the gift of the cedar," because we need clothes and shelter, our people, “and provide their cooking utensils for all time. There is a particularly good man, I'm going to turn him into salmon, so I can feed our people for all time.” So, in this manner, Xa:als walked through the territory, leaving gifts, telling them to share their gifts, telling them how to live right.

When He got here, the Xaxa:als, the Creator, saw there were three good men. “So those are three good men, those Siya:m are three good men. I will give them a special gift of the written language.” So he sat for a few days, taught them the written language, and they travelled to the ocean, got into a canoe, and went to Vancouver Island. They said, “One day, we will come back, and see if our people are using the gifts, if they are sharing the gifts, and if they're living right.” So, when they found the appointed day, they said, “Well, we will leave first thing in the morning, when the sun comes up from the east.”
So when the four bears faced east and the sun came up, they turned into one man, and that was Xa:als. And he walked though the territory. Yes, they were using the cedar for their shelter and for their clothing, and for their cooking baskets. They saw that they were sharing the salmon. There was this one woman, she didn’t share the first salmon of the season. Pff! He turned her into stone. So, as Xa:als walked through the territory, whoever wasn’t living right, or wasn’t sharing their gift, He would turn them into stone.

When Xa:als arrived here, he saw that the three Siya:m hadn’t shared the written language. He said, “You haven’t shared the written language. I will turn you into stone.” But before he could turn the three Siya:m into stone, one started crying, one stared singing, and one started teaching people very fast. From that day forward, the song, that song is still trapped in this rock. And I say, “We’re like the third Siya:m. We are teaching people very fast about our culture and our spirituality.” That’s what we do here all day long, at Xá:ytem. I’d like you to all come, and listen to the song in the rock.”

A Story of Change and Transformation

The story of Xá:ytem is not only the beginning place of the four narratives, it is a major story that defines the core, the DNA of river stories to the cycle of change and transformation. Our Stó:lō oral histories are teaching narratives. When I first visited Xá:ytem, the rock gave meaning to my understanding of river pedagogy.


Sxwôxwiyám oral histories that describe the distant past “when the world was out of balance, and not quite right.” Sxwôxwiyám account for the origins and connections of the Stó:lō, their land, resources and sxoxomes (’gifts of the creator’). There are many heritage sites throughout Stó:lō Territory that relate to sxwôxwiyám. These sites are among the most culturally important Stó:lō heritage sites and continue to function as essential parts of the contemporary Stó:lō world.41

The mystery of the rock “singing,” what is shxwelí and what is the meaning regarding the “written language?” For some time, I reflected on these questions after I approached the rock and saw its location in relation to the water and the bend in the river. My birth home was so close to this mystery. If I closed my eyes while standing by the rock, I could sense that I was learning a profound inner language of spirit and river knowledge. I was “with” the questions until the answers came to me from more than one source and over many years.

In February 2005, I had a conversation with Archaeologist, Heritage Advisor, Dr. Gordon Mohs on the story of Xa'ytem. In a paper presented at a conference in 1993, he included a speaking by Stó:lō Elder, Aggie Victor,

Everyone Listen. You children here, it’s time you listened.

Because you people are young, you don’t understand why the rock is singing. Why is he singing? Can you answer that? He wants something, that’s why. He wants something from somebody. Somebody that used to be a relative years ago. You’re supposed to give an offering, say a little prayer for the rock, or whatever

you think. Just thank the rock that he’s here for you children to see it. And, enjoy looking at the rock. It’s a Great Spirit that’s been left behind for you children. I talked to the rock already. I thanked the rock for coming to see it.

Anything that’s spiritual, you thank them and you talk to them. That’s the way it goes today. You just don’t climb around on it. You just don’t play with the spiritual things. You got to talk to them, thank them.

Thank them for coming to see it. It’s not something to play with. That’s something that’s very important to us Elders. It really is spiritual. You children should learn all of these things. You’re taking over what the Elders are doing. Very few of us are here to say these things. Talk to the rock and thank him for everything, that you enjoy at it. That’s all I’ll say.42

I returned to Xá:ytem many times over the past decade. One memorable visit was on the Summer Solstice in June 2004. Elder, Storyteller, tel Ta:l, Mrs Zena Buker came with me to the rock along with the summer students in the Aboriginal Education course I was teaching that season at Simon Fraser University. My students showed enthusiasm and respect for the time shared that evening. Our time together included storytelling, and as guests of Xá:ytem, we had “hands on” experience carving a dug out canoe, pounding cedar strips with a stone artifact, making cedar bracelets and weaving wool on a Salish loom. My students were generous with their care of the Elder, my mother and she encouraged each of them to continue well with their studies at the University.

As I stepped back to that memory, I realized it was also an opportunity for my ta’tel and I to view each other in different lights. As a small community, we began our evening with a song, protocol of welcome to Stó:lō territory, good words shared back and forth with our Xá:ytem guides and words of thank you for generosity of spirit and good heart of that evening. I will carry knowing that my ta’tel has witnessed my guidance over higher education students and to witness that I am learning the protocols, the stories and a respectful manner to approach all teaching and learning. I will hold this in my heart, forever.

**Shxwelí**

The words, “generosity and spirit” travel through all teachings of Xá:ytem, Hatzic Rock. It is good to offer tobacco, a song or something respectful from your heart when listening to the story of Xa:als.

The “spirit” in the sharing of this research narrative is an invitation to “set things right” in all areas of our environment including the cedar, the salmon, the language, and our own promise to respect the workings and interconnection of all these teachings. How does this word, spirit, or shxwelí make meaning in our Halq’eméylem language?

McHalsie (2007) shares this insightful reflection:

The sturgeon isn’t just regarded as food and a resource, it’s like an ancestor.

There’s a connection there, and that connection is known as shxwelí. Shxwelí is what’s referred to as the spirit or the life force, and everything has that spirit and everything’s connected through that.
It wasn’t until Xá:ytem – the rock down there at Xá:ytem – was first talked about that I began to pay more attention. That’s when our elder, the late Aggie Victor, said, “The shxwelí of those siya:m43 - those three leaders that were transformed into stone there – The shxwelí of those men are still in that rock.” So, I went to see the late Rosaleen George and I said, “what is shxwelí?” I’ve never forgotten her answer, and I always tell people because I think it’s probably the best way to explain it. She put her hand on her chest and she said, “shxwelí is inside us here.” And she put her hand in front of her and she said, “shxwelí is in your parents. She raised her hand higher and said, then your grandparents, your great-grandparents, it’s in your great-great-grandparents. It is in the rocks, it’s in the trees, it’s in the grass, it’s in the ground. Shxwelí is everywhere.”

What ties us? What ties us to the sturgeon? It’s the shxwelí. The sturgeon has a shxwelí, we have a shxwelí. So we’re connected to that.44 (pp. 103-104)

Shxwelí is a Halq’eméylem word that has the power to change the way others look at language revitalization, enhancing aboriginal pedagogy into the curriculum and reinforcing a resilience in all agreements to sustain our forests and fisheries.

The Stó:lō language has always been in constant motion and is still evolving even through these years of decline of use and formality. How much richer would education curriculum be in content and pedagogy if Halq’eméylem would be included in place based learning? The study of history, biology, botany, forestry, geography, geology,


literature, mathematics and the arts hold unexplored interdisciplinary approaches to knowledge building and reflection when the indigenous diversity of land, environment, language and oral histories are in the framework of the curriculum.

The story of Xá:ytem is reminding us all that in this new decade of the twenty-first century, our language, cedar forests, and salmon fishery still need vigilance and strategic practice of sustainability with the goal to “set things right.”
Narrative Two

Photo 7: “Epoch”
Ímex Xwéhèyethet xwèlá te shxwèwas sq’os te s’olh Sxwóxwiyám

Sts’its’et’es te híkw th’eqwelhcha stolös kw’e steltolô
Te tsemeth’ tsexwikw’siq’ syíts’em
T’et’elem qasu xwà tl’epstexwes ta’ sxelxeyltel
Tl’epel, tl’epel xwèléla te shxwtl’ep leq’s te hakw’leses te stolô.

Te ñêyqeya te sth’olems ye sth’oqwí,
Skwehtkwetha sqí te lexwom qo:
Siq te xòtse’ala e’ siséxèylemlexw ye swelo:qw.

Sxe’elxeyltel tl’o xa:lelh qas sqel’aleqel
Ihe’a te stolô.
Te wet’ot’ stolô skwala:lex ste’ikw’elo ite th’eqwelhcha.
Qe ste’a ye sgegelxeyltel e’ thexw late sqí’.
Ye hakw’eles st’elt’ilem, skwalexs ye skwaliwex stalem qastu
Stolô e’ kwelatem lite shxwtl’ep shxwtl’ep thà:t

Íkw’elo te sxelxeyltels thel sisela.
O:legetes ye skwowech, stheqí qaste sth’eth’qway.
Yewa te st’ilems tel síla lhолhekw’ chelholwelh ye chewölhp.
Shxwèlís kwes woqw’ litè tete’al kwayxthet th’eqwelhcha.
Tedxí ‘okw’elo te shxwès tutl’o ite sth’omileps te qo:umexw.

Lheq’lexwes ye mestíyexw. Kwayxem te mekw’ stam.
Ste’a tetha tèlí kw’elalo.
kweselh xwèmàqetes ta sqeweqs te xepay kw’oxwe qasu oxwestoxwes
Te syoqwem, te sk’w’exos qas ye kwòlesel.

Teli kw’e chokw kweses íyothet te tet’al kwoyñhtet th’eqwelhcha qasu
leq’aleqels xwela te híkw tsemeth’ iyelths te sqemel.
T’ilem ye mestíyexw te st’elt’ilems íkw’elo, q’eyq’esetsel te sweltels.
O’lhet te yewal sth’oqwí qesetu xwoyiwelmet

Te swiwe, tem qw’iles swiwe.
Shakw’ íkw’elo. E’sxèkw’xakw’ siq te
Syíts’em te semíkw’ kwayxthet qo:
Shxwhakw’les tl’oses ye kwayxthet te híkw th’eqwelhcha
Mekw’ stam ye kwayxem.syelaw, Tl’oqays qaste xwèwà.

Tset stolô xwèxwímexws te híkw th’eqwelhcha. Ye stolô

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45 lolehawk, Laura B. (2002). *Walking backwards into the future with our stories.* (Elizabeth Phillips, Siyamíyatellyot, Hålq’eméylem Trans.). Chehalis, BC.
Walking Backwards into the Future with Our Stories

By the Big Muddy River of Rivers
The blue gray clay silt
sticks and brings down your footprints,
Down, down into the deep layers of the river’s memory.

The old sth’o’:qwi, the salmon bones,
lay piled under the great moving water,
under the river bed that shifts with each watershed year.

Footprints are paths and journeys taken
along the river,
The old Stó:lō names are here in the great muddy,
And like the footprints that disappear into the clay,
the memory songs, the names of the wild things and
the river itself is held in the deep, deep, dark.

My grandmother’s footprints are here,
she fished for sturgeon, sockeye and trout,
Even my grandfather’s songs soar above the cottonwoods
Where he drowned in the great moving muddy.
His spirit is here in the bone yard of the water creatures.

The People know. Everything is in motion.
It has been since time immemorial.
Since Raven opened the cedar box and gave us
the sun, the moon and the stars.

The great moving Muddy begins far away and
journeys towards the Big Blue coastal tides.
The People sang songs here, wove nets for fishing,
gave away the sth’o’:qui bones from the first run and welcomed
back the swi’:we, the spring eulachons.

Memory is here. It is layered under the
silt of an ever moving water.
Remembering is why the Big Muddy moves.
Everything is in motion. Past, Present and Future.
We are the River People of the Big Muddy. The Stó:lō.46

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Reclaiming an Identity from the Edge of the River

In the early autumn season of 2002, I walked near the waters edge of the Stó:lō near Xá:ytem and left my footprints in the blue gray clay. The cottonwood’s leaves were drying, maples turning rusts and yellows, cedars and fir trees moved their green boughs and branches in the wind. The fall salmon run was well underway. Leaping silver and flash of fin could be seen out into the far current of the river. In contrast to the force of the salmon run was the slow giving way to the cycle of life, as spent salmon, having given their all to spawning, now allowed the current to embrace their bodies as the life force gave way to death. The smell of salmon carcasses scattered the shoreline. Foot prints of otter, fox, coyote, bear, raccoon could be seen at the edge of the waterline. Two eagles witnessed this scene from nearby cliff outcrops and a fallen tree stump. A family of ravens flew over and across the waterway making a ruckus and a display of their presence.

I was profoundly aware of the interconnectedness of all I was witnessing. A memory returned and took me back to 1956, to a time when I fished with my Grandmother Theresa on this river. She told me that salmon have a cycle and that everything, humans and birds and animals and even invisible things, are part of this cycle. She told me to respect the salmon. It gave much so that a way of life could be sustained. Not only us humans gained from the food of salmon, but all creatures, both along and within the river. The memory of her steady hands and her manner came into me. I saw myself connected to my grandmother, my grandfather, my mother, my father, salmon, the Stó:lō, the People of the River, and all manner of connections in and with nature.
I was born near Xaytem around the bend of the Stó:lō (commonly known as the Fraser River), in rural Dewdney, B.C. The river language, Halq’eméylem, is not my first

47 I am very happy to see you, to meet you. Lolehawk is my River name. Laura Buker is my Christian name. I am Stó:lō, Babine Corridor and Scottish. Lyle Buker is my father. Zena Hairsine is my mother. It is our tradition to introduce ourselves in this way, by identifying the families with whom we are related.

48 Xaytem is a 9,000 year old Stó:lō Transformation Site located in the Fraser Valley, on the river near Hatzic, B.C. Journey into Time Immemorial. http://www.sfu.museum/time/en/glossary/84/
language. It was lost to my family the same way many communities lost language to colonial laws, legislation, eurocentric policy, and discrimination. I grew up within a family that still lived off the land through farming, fishing, crops, hunting, harvesting and canning of foods. I had elders near to listen to and I watched the ways they lived off the land. The early development years living within an extended family impressed upon me the importance of the land, respectful listening, observation and hard work.

I grew up in the 1950’s and 1960’s. My mother, Mrs. Zena Buker, remembers the evidence of Stó:lō artifacts, such as stone tools, grinding rocks, arrowheads on my grandmother and grandfather’s land. There was a particular landform, a high ridge about ten feet in diameter that was known to be a winter house, a pit house. Some called it an oolichan camp. This geographical evidence of our river ancestors was told in story. Later, when the land changed ownership, this ridge was plowed over and with it went a richness of river history. It never occurred to our family to “dig up” the history. It belonged to the land and the stories of the land belonged to our River Ancestors.

I choose the title, “Walking Backwards Into the Future With Our Stories,” for the second narrative in a twofold manner. Firstly, as a storyteller, the growth experienced in appreciation of Stó:lō identity is about claiming my personal story as a river woman. As an indigenous woman who “walks two worlds,” I have a lifetime of experience in making a way through an academic western culture that is currently “making a place at the table of higher learning” for a spirited river woman who is deeply rooted in a pedagogy of respect for land, river, language and elders. This “balance” of being “with” the river stories and great narratives has taken time, the passing of many

49 In Halq’eméylem known as Swi:we and also named candle fish.
seasons, to forge a steel within me, so a confidence would be tightly fastened to my beliefs and knowledge. Many times, I wondered if I would ever have the sureness of being in the world as my Grandmother, Theresa had with all she overcame in her lifetime. One thing that I believe to be most true is that every storyteller has a path to walk and that the “road” has challenges, mysteries, healing and an ever changing understanding that must be met with a brave heart.

The words for “walking backwards into the future with our stories” came as a result of a convergence of confidence in seeing how all the pieces fit into place. Literally. My sense of place, belonging, acknowledgment of my river ancestors and the profound knowing that what I was feeling was a sense of recognition, validation that I am a river woman, Stó:lō, and I am home. The second understanding was that stories connected me to the way I learn, live and belong in the world. The quest for weaving a narrative of appreciation included the great past stories of the Stó:lō, the story of Xá:ytem, my family narrative, spiritual recognition and respect for all living systems. Walking backwards is about how all the stories connect to the past, the future and present.

Tafoya, (1995) states about narratives:

Stories go in circles. They don’t go in straight lines. It helps if you listen in circles because there are stories inside and between stories, and finding your way through them is as easy and as hard as finding your way home. Part of finding is getting lost, and when you are lost you start to open up and listen.50 (p.6).

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Throughout my growing years in Dewdney, I lived close to the river, I walked in fields where our family harvested wild berries, mushrooms, herbs, flowers, hazel nuts and canned fish and vegetables. As a young person, I watched and observed this seasonal storing of foods that could be stored for many years in a root cellar. Learning was taking hold in my memory. As a young person, I was eager to participate in learning about the wild plants, berries, and fishing. Born out of this wonder, out of the questions, out of the connecting, came a narrative of knowledge. I see how important the closeness to my elders was in listening to their words, hearing their laughter, watching the strength that they demonstrated in providing for a family and the tasks and responsibilities of completing those seasonal harvests. A body of knowledge was shaping my perception of a worldview and how learning “works” for me. As I become more conscious and reflected on learning and teaching practices, and slowly there emerged an understanding that an Indigenous pedagogy of learning was natural, narrative, and observational.

If there is a protocol for learning, it comes through story. What is told is as important as how it is told. When the storyteller and the listener share a respect, the learning stays and the knowledge can deepen. When we “put away” the stories of the land, of our ancestors, of the river and of the language itself, we ensure the future is connected to the past.

The narrative, “walking backwards into the future with our stories,” empowers reflection for other Indigenous scholars to embrace story as a protocol for learning, for sharing a way of life, for connecting not only the past but for creating bold new
narratives that will define the future. Kenny (2000) describes the importance of memory and process this way:

Through the enactment of rituals, we have been able to keep our sacred stories, to keep remembering “who we are.” Aboriginal researchers are part of these stories, too. We have many stories, even if our own people have been almost destroyed, even if we don’t know our Aboriginal languages, even if we sometimes feel lost. The sacred stories are still part of our collective memory. Maybe, we have a kind of amnesia from time to time. How can we access this collective memory and allow it to inform the diverse aspects of our lives, including the research process?51

Research by indigenous scholars has only begun to make a “course change” in the depth and amount of investigative work in Faculties of higher education. At the forefront of our research agenda will be our stories. Narratives that are direct teachings from our communities embedded in philosophies of diversity that anchor our proposals, reflections, and creation of bold new ideas. We have not forgotten our ancestor’s ways of knowing. We are re-membering and that is a process in itself.

It is my hope and encouragement that this second narrative of “walking backwards with our stories,” will inspire other indigenous scholars to write research narratives of this process of reclaiming identity and ancestral wisdom. We owe it our great, great, great, great, great, great, great (seven generations back) grandmothers and grandfathers to honor the love of the land and bring the stories of the past, forward.

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Narrative Three

Photo 9: Return to Hatzic Rock by Stan Greene Mural on the Xá:ytem Interpretative Longhouse
Ghostly Ancestors

Dusk falls quickly as the pacific storm
surges on to the land,
Scented cedar releases as the green capes of
the Giant Standing Ones, sway to the old warrior’s song.

Heavy the rain, as the River Elders arrive
on the westerly wind.
The Old Ones are here. Make a way for their Returning.
Remember.

The cedar plank doors of the great longhouse open to warmth
as the golden light from the candle fish illuminate the
salmon dripping grease on to an open fire.
The gathering begins.

Woven mats and mountain goat blankets comfort the
River Ancestors.
Honoring prayers, a welcome song, and with smiling eyes,
the feast begins.

Steady the droplets fall against the poles guarding the
longhouse entrance,
Bear and Raven, Earth and Sky,
Keepers of tradition and the honor of protecting the People.

The Ghostly Ancestors tell the stories that are older than
the mountains, still further back than the Stó:lō, to the
time of the great Transformations.
The Old Ones know change is part of the great mystery. So, too,
is movement and also, stillness.

The rainforest night lengthens, candle fish flicker, soon,
a deep resting within the coastal plank house.
The Old Ones gather the prayers of the People,
for a destiny is ahead. A will to peace and a new dawn of hope
for the children and the generations to come.

So silently, the Elders gather the prayer bundles in eagle-down
filled baskets, and return to a waiting canoe, then into the mist
of time immemorial.52

The “Call” for Renewal

The story of change and transformation has been active in our river environment, river language, and river people beyond ten millenniums. We are the children that our ancestors have “dreamed” and “carried” forward in the hope for many generations ahead and for millennia years forward to prosper, be healthy and continue to live with sustainable stewardship. Stó:lō Heritage Policy manual approved by the Stó:lō Nation Lalems ye Stó:lō Si:ya:m (LYSS), in May 5, 2003, states this about narratives:

The narrative of Xexá:ls through Stó:lō living systems of the river and on the land built a relationship of responsibility to achieve stability of our language, salmon and forests. The health of each system is tied to the other in a circle meant to coexist in a living environment. Again, this story looks back, to go forward, to remember what our ancestors believed to be necessary for our natural world and for survival. The Stó:lō heritage policy manual, (2003), states this in a narrative way,

In their travels through our territory Xexá:ls punished many of the hurtful and inconsiderate people responsible for the chaos affecting our world. Some of these people were turned to stone and remain, to this day, in this form. To complete their work Xexá:ls changed some good people into valuable and useful resources like the cedar tree, salmon, beaver, and black bear. Some, like Lhilheqey (Mt. Cheam), were transformed into mountains. We have depended upon these and other resources for our survival and prosperity. These resources
were used in a way that was consistent with the special bond that exists between them and us. Due to the way our family tree connects the past and future generations, we regard these transformed ancestors as still living with and amongst us. In today's world as in the distant past, their shxwéllí - spirit or life force - inhabits the resources in our territory. Before we change or alter our environment we must consider the way our actions will affect these resources - the living spirits of our ancestors. The way we use the landscape must be consistent with our beliefs, our relations and our general world view.53 (p.1).

The Ghostly Ancestors is a narrative that developed from a reflection of “what does it mean to keep faith for seven generations ahead?” For if I am “dreaming” a prosperous future for a child in my family seven generations ahead, a dear one that I will never meet, then it is also true that an ancestor in my family “dreamed me” ahead to this present world, time and space. From an imaginative edge of knowing, I thought about what my ancestor guardians would wish for me, the environment, a way of living abundantly with the natural world. The richness of spirit that they infused into a way of life, the seasonal cycles and the ceremonies that tied closely a circle of kinship with every living system that came their dreaming.

Seven generations back would connect me to the ‘Bay Boys’ of my family (Hudson Bay Adventurers in Ft. Babine and Ft. Langley) and my Ancestor Grandmothers, P’ook’rah’tah of the Babine Corridor Nation and S’alemiya of the

Stó:lô. Life certainly was harsh and immediate for those ancestors yet their spiritual understanding and appreciation for love of family must have guided their hopes towards a continuous bond linking generations into the future.

Seven Generations

The value of considering “seven generations ahead” is needed to affirm new approaches and new connections to revitalizing our indigenous cultures, languages and environment. In a “call to witness ceremony” that concluded the Salish Sea conference in 2009, the importance of many generations ahead was emphasized,

If a new generation comes forward every 22 years, seven generations back would put us in the year 1855. We learned at this conference that the 1850s was the era in which large-scale logging and resource harvesting began in the Salish Sea. The tribes of Puget Sound were signing treaties in 1855 to reserve their rights for hunting, fishing and gathering in perpetuity. Vancouver Island was leased to the Hudson Bay Company, and Aboriginal people were being decimated by smallpox and measles. The Salish Sea was on the threshold of unimaginable cultural and ecological change.

Seven generations later, in 2009, it feels once again as though we are on the brink of precipitous change. The climate is warming up, and so are the open waters of the Salish Sea. Many species that form the basis of traditional foods and important economic sectors are disappearing.
What does the future hold for the Salish Sea – particularly for people of my generation and generations to come? If we think seven generations ahead, we’re talking about the year 2163. As Billy Frank, Jr. said at the beginning of this conference, we need to “point the canoe in a different direction” than we did seven generations ago. We need to paddle together in a way that is intelligent and efficient and we need to paddle hard.54

Is the new direction that our canoe is taking about entering into the current with renewed vitality for the importance of place? The Stó:lō is the main waterway and watershed that flows into the Salish Sea. Is this the time for a bold re-claiming of indigenous knowledge to define all living systems found within this newly named boundary? Chief Shawn Atleo, A-in-chut, Hereditary Chief of the Ahousaht First Nations and Nation Chief of the Assembly of First Nations holds to the belief that long term sustainability of our languages, cultures, environment is needed now and the generations ahead:

Indigenous peoples have solutions to offer based on our traditional knowledge which include observations about how climate change is effecting our environment and changing the ecological balance we depend upon by altering habitats and biodiversity. By offering insight on sustainable practices, conservation in terms of natural resources management, we can play a vital role

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in mitigating climate change by protecting the environment for future
generations. 55

It is impossible to compare the life events of the past seven generation ancestors
with today’s mach one speeds of everyday digital communications and yet, change and
transformation continue to inform and to define each generation. The teachings of
Xexá:ls live on through each storyteller with a direction of hope and determination to
continue this important work. Dr. Nancy Turner, ethnobotanist and ethnoecologist,
emphasizes the importance of indigenous knowledge transmission:

Embedded within the stories, and the information about seasonal rounds,
ecological indicators, fishing and berry picking, is a reflection of values and
ethics that have been imparted by generations of ancestors to these skilled
Indigenous teachers of today’s parents and grandparent generations. Hopefully,
now, future generations of all British Columbians will be inspired by these
fundamental teachings that will help to guide our relationship with our
environment towards one of respect and appreciation. May these words, values
and ideas help us to stop careless behavior and to focus our actions on ways to
strengthen the health of the lands and waters and their biological heritage, in so
doing, build up our own well-being and that of the generations to come. 56

Our canoe presses on with knowledge of the ancestors and their deep enduring
love of family and kinship with all living things. The past is what it is and the present is

Nations fundamental truths: Biodiversity, stewardship and sustainability (p.x). Victoria, BC: Published by
Biodiversity, BC.
here and now. If “knowledge is power” then it is time for Indigenous knowledge to inform an “emerging narrative approach” to walking backwards into the future with our stories.

A new story of learning emerges. An narrative framework forms that is place based, a model of river pedagogy built on respect and a generosity of spirit that includes all living systems.
Narrative Four

Salmon Transforming

Photo 10: Salmon Transforming

Photo by Author  December 2010
Salmon Shxwelí

The cold winter ripples over the valley and water ways. It would seem that life is still and not in motion. This is not so. The Big trees are moving their green capes and dance with swaying boughs in the breath of the westerly wind.

A fresh snow melt restores the mountain source and it splashes and tips its way over the stream bed. Below, hidden deep in the gravel, memory is awakening. The round pink eggs stir and with the dancing light, life begins.

The tiny fragile alevin move, respond and breathe in the fresh nutrients of the plentiful and abundant water. Cool and clear, this sparkling has its own syntax, its own language. The tiny salmon know the voice of this stream. It is their language of origin. It is home.

The language is in the rocks, the algae and the roots from the trees for the stream is filled with fragments of organic life. The language of the water is embedded in the young salmon. Remembering takes hold. No two streams are alike. The awakened salmon remember and never forget.

The journey home will take two or more years and travel thousands of miles in both fresh water and ocean. Until the day, when Salmon leaves the great blue salt water and returns to the river and to the stream of its birth.

The spawning salmon empty their remaining shxwelí, life force, into the stream for the new ones. The “redd” is the language nest holding the beauty of the new fry, A returning completes as the new eggs transform into life. The salmon is home and so the cycle begins again.57

Salmon Is in Our Bones

Now it is time for the fourth narrative. Our stories began in the time of of Xexá:ls,

in the time where respectful teachings emphasized the importance of using the cedar (the forests), maintaining the health of the river as well as the watershed, and also to instruct on the written language. As we continue our paddle, in the deep water the gift of the river is swimming beneath. Salmon.

The narrative of salmon continues to be one of change and transformation. In the time of early settlement in Stó:lō territory, salmon gave its full bounty to the people, the animals, birds, and in its final generosity, its bones enriched the river and all waterways. Thousands of years of direct living by and with the Stó:lō and salmon, the ancestors were able to thrive in a robust environment from a steady food source:

We know this because of archaeological discoveries of the early 1960’s in the Fraser Canyon, just above Yale, B.C. The man in charge was the late Dr. Charles Borden, then Professor Emeritus of Archaeology at the University of British Columbia. He told how they had been able to develop a cultural sequence of seven phases and support it by radiocarbon dates, encompassing 9,000 years until the historic period – one of the longest sequences anywhere in the New World. "We had no idea," he said, “that occupation of this area extended back that far.” And it has important implications, because the interior had not become ice free until just about the time when the earliest occupation occurred there; and this very strongly suggests that the people came from the south. They were descendants of people who survived south of the ice front and were moving into British Columbia again.

The discovery of these middens has resulted in a new awareness of the evolution of cultures in this area, as well as the great age of the human presence itself.
Layer upon layer, phase upon phase of stone age knives, scrapers, choppers, projectile points have told their story. All because of salmon. This particular locality is a very narrow stretch of river, where the salmon have great difficulty in making their way up; they have to utilize every eddy, and to rest up, and then make another short spurt up stream. The great annual migration reaches the vicinity of the canyon in the latter part of the summer, and by then their flesh is lean and in its prime. And so, for countless centuries they gathered here from all around the Lower Fraser Valley and even beyond.58

My family has a love of salmon. Perhaps, like salmon, we, too, have a memory that reaches back to the beginnings of when our ancestors settled along the river. I grew up watching the harvesting, cutting, canning and preserving of the roe and salmon steaks. My cousin, Maureen Swanson (Riley), has been a record-keeper for the family. She found that our river ancestor grandmother’s Stó:lō name was written in a baptismal and found in genealogy records. Her name is S’alemiya. It means, “little gaff hook, little spear.”59 When I hear her name and its meaning, I wonder if she might well have been a skilled fisher of salmon? Certainly, she would have learned through observation how salmon migrated, spawned and pooled in deep channels. Her name reflects the skill of hooking and spearing and it is an empowering name for a “river woman.” I like to think that this “river ancestor” dreamed ahead a life of abundance for both her descendants

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59 S’álemiya. <s’álem>, dnom /s=§lm//, [§lm], FSH /’spear, shaft (of spear/harpoon/gaff-hook), gaff-hook pole/ , HUNT /’spear, shaft of spear/ , (<<>> nominalizer), probably root /’ál/ pole/shaft/length?, possibly <<=em> place to have/get, syntactic analysis: nominal, attested by BHTTC, (compare with <<=éts> bottom of a tree, trunk of a tree with same possible root (<<ets ‘on the bottom’)), also <<=álem>, /s=§lm//, [§lm], dialects: Cheh., attested by EL. So the meaning ‘little gaff hook’ or ‘little spear’ is S’ailemiya.

Personal Communication December 12, 2010 with linguist, Dr Brent Lawéchten Galloway.
and for salmon’s relatives, too. S’alemiya would have understood the seasonal migrations of the different salmon up the Stó:lō. Boxberger, (2007) describes the different salmon runs on the Fraser River:

The Fraser River Sockeye appear in regular four year cycles of abundance, providing a mainstay of economic life for many Coast Salish. Sockeye, however, are just one of the species of salmon that are indigenous to the Coast Salish area. Pink salmon (“humpies”) appear every odd year. The fat Chinook (locally known as “springs”) come early in the spring to provide fresh food high in oil content. The sleek coho (silvers) are prime eating when fresh. The lean chum (“dogs”) are available late in the fall and into the winter, when they can be taken in abundance to smoke-dry to last indefinitely. Steelhead, while not as numerous as other types of salmon, can, in some streams, provide fresh fish as late as December and as early as February. Salmon are the symbol of the relationship of the Coast Salish to natural, cultural and intellectual resources.60 (p. 58).

Salmon is unique to the Fraser River and as such, is honored in Stó:lō narratives, ceremonies, in the spindle whorl designs, house posts, songs, dances and regalia. All of the salmon is useful, healthy and rich in nutrients from the bones, gills, eyes and flesh. For instance, the roe is not only delicacy, it was dried as a food storage and before modern refrigeration, it was preserved underground. Duff (1952) described the preservation of salmon roe this way:

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Spring Salmon roe was preserved in two ways. One was simply to hang it on the rack to dry like the rest of the fish. In this case it was soaked or boiled before being eaten. The other involved burying it in the ground over the winter. The fresh roe was placed in a deep hole about 4 feet in diameter lined with several inches of maple leaves. Holes were punctured through the leaves to allow the oil to drain through. The roe was covered with more maple leaves and then earth. When taken out, it had the consistency of cheese. Formerly called “hum eggs” or “Fraser River bacon,” it could be eaten raw, boiled for soup or applied to sores as a poultice. The same product could be made in a bag with holes in the bottom. 61 (p.66).

In my family stories, the salmon roe was a special delicacy appreciated by my elders, especially, my great grandmother Mary Louise, my grandmother Theresa Louise and my mother, Rozina. The flavor is rich, and the color of red-orange roe stirred in a batch of mashed potatoes is truly a gift from salmon.

Sharing Indigenous Protocol

Now Salmon’s story continues. When Xexá:ls taught the River People the honor to bestow upon salmon, it was to maintain a way of life. The respect for Salmon is found in the narratives and songs. The First Salmon ceremony reflects an indigenous epistemology towards a basic truth: sharing is a value, a personal commitment to sustaining a community and a cultural resilience.

Let’s now drift to shore in our canoe and listen to the story of the First Salmon ceremony as remembered by Siye’mches te Yeqwyeqwi:ws, Chief Frank Malloway of Yakweakwioose:

the First Salmon Ceremony. I questioned Ed Leon about it, and he told me about the teachings behind it and the prayers...He said, “Us Indian people in the Fraser Valley and the tributaries of the Fraser never ate meat very much, We only ate meat when we ran out of salmon.” He said, “That’s when the creator first made mother earth, he had all kinds of meat around here, bear, deer, elk. When you eat meat you get that heavy feeling and you don’t want to move too much because meat weighs you down.” He said that one of the shxwla’:m (Indian Doctors) had a dream that the creator was sending something up the river and told him to go down to the river and scoop their dip nets, and it was the salmon. They told them how to respect the salmon and thank the ones that sent the salmon. The salmon people out in the ocean, you pray to them and thank them for what they sent. He used the word, children. I don’t hear it often but, he used the word children.
You have to just thank them; take the bones and send them back after you have eaten the first salmon. He said it was done by the Chief and the whole village was included in the ceremony. The ceremony happened when the first fisherman went out and got a fish. When you went out and caught your first Spring salmon of the season you never kept it for yourself. You always gave it away. If you didn’t give it away then you’d be unlucky for the rest of the year. You really had to practice that.\textsuperscript{62}

The story of change can be told through the past and present narrative of salmon’s survival on the Fraser River and Salish Sea. The resilience of salmon is legendary with equal parts distress and peril that coincide with integrity and strong recovery capacity. Salmon’s story is parallel to the adversity that Stó:lō culture, language, and biodiversity have experienced in loss of indigenous knowledge, habitat and \textit{Halq’eméylem} language loss. In a timely historical “teaching,” fisheries advisor to the Stó:lō Tribal Council, Ernie Crey recalls:

The concept of an Indian “food fishery” always has existed only in the minds and laws of government and non-aboriginal fishermen. Courts not only have upheld the aboriginal right to fish, but they have said that right must be interpreted in a contemporary manner.

Aboriginal people have had a salmon fishery since the first salmon appeared in the Fraser River watershed over 9,000 years ago. For the First Nations, the right to harvest salmon has always carried with it moral and spiritual imperatives of

stewardship and conservation, whether the salmon was harvested for social, ceremonial or economic reasons. There was no historical distinction between a salmon caught for one’s own family, to feed guests at a potlatch, or to barter for goods or cash.63

The old story of Xá:ytem is re-told again, and the lessons of “respecting” salmon for its abundance, diversity, and return are made succinctly precisely in this second decade of the twenty-first century. A new commission, the Cohen Commission64 is in place as an “inquiry into the decline of Sockeye Salmon in the Fraser River.”

Setting Things Right

In the Hatzic Rock narrative, Xexá:ls is emphatic about the care and use of salmon by and for the people of the river. The harvesting of salmon emphasizes that in order to perpetuate an abundance of salmon a unifying approach is needed. The sustainability of salmon must be based on a system that is ecologically sound, holistic, and spiritual. What Hatzic Rock uncovered is a narrative of the connection to the river’s linguistic, cultural, and biological diversity. Indigenous river knowledge has always been at the shoreline of education curriculum, language revitalization and treaty rights. Most importantly, our river stories have held the knowledge of the relationships of

64 Cohen Commission. (2010). Order in Council : Her Excellency the Governor General in Council, on the recommendation of the Prime Minister, hereby pursuant to paragraph (b) of the definition “department” in section 2 of the Financial Administration Act, designates the Commission of Inquiry into the Decline of Sockeye Salmon in the Fraser River as a department for the purposes of that Act; and a, pursuant to paragraph (b) of the definition “appropriate Minister” in section 2 of the Financial Administration Act, designates the Prime Minister as the appropriate Minister with respect to the Commission referred to in paragraph (a). Cohen Commission Website : http://www.cohencommission.ca/en/
environment, language and salmon. And so, as the river flows, so has this the intelligence for living sustainably - it has never gone away.

In leaning into the sacred trust of “looking ahead seven generations,” the Cohen commission on the “inquiry into the decline of sockeye salmon on the Fraser River,” has an opportunity to position indigenous knowledge, story, language, and culture on the compass points of this Federal initiative. Cajete (1994), describes direction this way:

Orientation is more than physical context and placement. In its deeper meaning it is about mindset, ways of thinking and knowing, origins of communication and a sense of direction. It is about how the human spirit understands itself.65

In the Cohen Commission proceedings, First Nations presented in Panel Number 6, crafted a flawless moment that imbedded the understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing and knowledge appreciation in the following dialogue:

(PROCEEDINGS RECONVENED)

MR. WALLACE: Ms. Gaertner.

MS. GAERTNER: Commissioner Cohen, Brenda Gaertner, for the First Nations Fisheries Coalition, and with me is Ms. Leah Pence. And for the benefit of the panel, I know that in most fisheries meetings that I’ve been attending, we often spend our time introducing each other so that we know who we speak from, so I want to let you know who I’m speaking for.

I represent the Haida, three of the Douglas Treaty communities, and then from a title and rights perspective, I pick up on the Fraser at Chehalis, and I move from Chehalis up to the Secwepemc, and the Northern Secwepemc to both the Secwepemc and the Shuswap Tribal Council, the Northern Secwepemc Tribal Council in Adams Lake, and then all the Upper Fraser,

including the Carrier Sekani. And then I also represent the First Nations Coalition, which is the large provincial organization, and the Fraser River Aboriginal Fishing Secretariat, which is the secretariat on the Fraser River that provides technical support to the watershed, and the Fraser River Aboriginal Fisheries Society, which is in the lower Fraser, and is responsible for the catch monitoring in the lower Fraser.

So that will give you a little bit of help on who I’m representing. And so far, to date, my instructions really are to participate in this inquiry in a way that facilitates dialogue about where we are, now, in the challenges around fisheries, and what we can help Commissioner Cohen learn so that his recommendations can help all of us move forward.

...Q Thank you. All right, now, turning specifically to what you knew already and what you learnt during the development around First Nations concerns. I’m going to say it was a pretty open door, talking to most First Nations around an ecosystem holistic approach. This is something that they’ve been pushing for, for decades, it’s something that the ethic of their relationship to fisheries is most comfortable with. And so when we say it’s new in science or it’s new for "us," it’s not really new for First Nations; would you agree with me?

MR. SAUNDERS: I don’t think I’d be qualified to say whether it would be new to First Nations, but I think I would say, yes, it was new to -- new to the department heading down this road. 66

It is time to rest our canoe once again, in order to reflect on the struggle and the appreciation of living in a sustainable manner. Our river ancestors understood the truth and reasonableness embedded in a philosophy of relationships. The connections can be described in many ways:

the links between language, culture and the environment suggest that biological, cultural and linguistic diversity should be studied together, as distinct but closely and necessarily related manifestations of the diversity of life on Earth.\textsuperscript{67}

The story of being “keepers of the salmon family” is an oral history told with clarity and with purpose. The bones of salmon have been offered for tens of thousands of years in appreciation for giving health and nurturance to the people of the river. As a community of this new century, the citizens of the Salish Sea are all part of this generosity of salmon. New conversations must take hold now, for we are nearer than ever before to re-storying the gift of salmon. The health of the river is in direct relationship to the health of all living along and within the river’s path. Our fourth narrative ends with this reflection,

“\textit{Ewe chexw qelqelit te mekw’ stam loy qw’ esli hokwex yexw lamexw ku:t}”.

(Don’t ruin, waste, destroy everything; just take what you need). \textsuperscript{68}


Let’samot: “Everyone Working Together”

Photo by Author, May 2010

Photo 11: Cedar Weaving a Story

The journey on the river is nearing completion. For now, we rest by the shoreline near the cedar canoe. The air is calm with just the sound of the water, the breeze and the trees rustling to fill our listening. A moment of introspection takes hold
as our gaze looks to the hill and location of the Xay:tem and we remember the old story of Xexá:ls from time immemorial.

The teachings of the Hatzic Rock narrative orient our knowledge towards the genesis of “setting things right.” Each of the four narratives are stories about transformation. The river is change, the salmon runs change, the people of the river change, Halq’eméylem, the river language is caused to change and so too the environment, and through it all, our stories survive. In the curve of the river’s embrace, a question is asked regarding how well are we doing as citizens in “setting things right” for the appreciation and revitalization of the environment, the salmon, indigenous knowledge, language and culture? Are spaces of dialog, discussion, inquiry, research and reflection being actively opened in education reform, fisheries and community policy that actively invites indigenous perspective?

The four narratives stand at the Stó:lō’s edge. At each beginning place, an invitation is extended at the point of entry for the reader to walk the shoreline, sit by the edges, enter the canoe, drift with the current, and paddle hard for momentum and direction. The river language, Halq’eméylem, speaks words of mountains, rivers, land, transformers and floods that are new to our ears. We settle into the resonance of the words as they sound in reflective tones of beauty. What we learn about the language is also true and that is, the river language is nearly silent. At the water’s edge, our reflection turns to hope for the action of returning the river’s stories back to the people by speaking Halq’eméylem.
An “eRiverworld Transformational Pedagogy”

The language is slowly renewing as new programs invite learners to become confident in the everyday words of the river language. This narrative is about transformation and change and how action can turn events around to a positive perspective. In 2005, a paper was presented at the WIPCE – World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education. \(^{69}\) The paper reported on an innovative approach designed to reverse the trend toward extinction of the Stó:lō Halq’eméylem language. The research collaborated with Stó:lō Nation and matched fluent-speaking Elders with moderately fluent Halq’eméylem learners and language teacher trainees. The new communication to emerge from this study were digital learning tools. The aim of the study was to determine how digital computer skills, digital video communication, and presentation software could serve as an effective pedagogical process for language renewal. It was at one of the learning sessions of the e-Master Apprentice research program that an inspiring word came to “lift up” the participants.

The e-Master Apprentice students had successfully completed a session on learning to create “digital stories” through software called, iMovie. Each participant was in the process of using digital photos, video with over-layers of speech using Halq’eméylem for their short documentaries. I asked the learners what “river word” we might use to keep the momentum going forward through learning the language through digital stories? The answer came right away. The late and beloved elder, Klala May, May Rae, from Kwantlen, said, “the word is lesa’mot.” It means, “everyone working

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together.” There were smiles and nodding heads and then an “ah ha” moment of understanding. At the immediate level, a river word described what we were accomplishing with our digital stories. And, at the invisible level of spirit and heart, we were acknowledging one of the oldest ways that bind our ancestors to us – a sustainable living system is made whole by everyone working in harmony and in unity. In the ways and means of river protocol, we were “setting things right” for learning the beautiful river language.

A growing number of speakers continue on the path of learning Halq’eméylem. The revitalization of Halq’emeyelm as a living system is vital to the identity and culture of the Stó:lō nation. In 2010, the status of Indigenous Languages in British Columbia report gave a moderate tone of hope for Halq’eméylem renewal. The first Developmental Standard Term Certificate (DSTC) was a first of its kind in B.C. This program was a partnership between Simon Fraser University and Stó:lō Nation.  The report stated,

Stó:lō Shxwelí offers the first DSTC programs in B.C. This program allows First Nations language learners and speakers to receive training and certification under the Ministry of Education, and the opportunity to teach First Nations languages in schools and communities in B.C.

There have been eight graduates of the program and though there are no new fluent speakers yet, the instructors who have completed their studies know

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70 The Developmental Standard Term Certificate lead for the program was Dr. Ethel Gardner, Lecturer, Laura Buker, and Faculty Coordinator, Kau’i Kellipio.
enough of the language that they can instruct classes and hold conversations with fluent speakers.

The Halq’eméylem language represents an excellent example of people doing everything they can to not let their language disappear. The communities of the Halq’eméylem language have demonstrated great perserverance and collaboration. By working together, sharing resources and planning between communities, they have begun to carry out many language revitalization initiatives. The work is far from finished. They continue to need funding, time, capacity building and resources.\(^7\)

The canoe still rests at the river’s shoreline. There is an underlying tension that builds when there is a hesitation in making the next move. Many elders have a talent for breaking the tension – the tool is laughter. I can almost hear my elder’s say, “so what are you waiting for, the salmon to jump in the canoe? Time to fish or cut bait!”

Everything Is Connected

As the storyteller of this narrative, the quest of this work has been to connect all learners to the river. A river that is rich in stories, has a distinct Indigenous language, culture, and a community that has inhabited the Fraser Valley for thousands of years. The process of reclaiming this knowledge was generously demonstrated through the early years of living with extended family and the hard work that it took to keep a family healthy through the land and river’s bounty. I am looking at this reflection from the recognition place of my own mortality. A new generation is coming along, and I, like the elders and ancestors before me, feel an urgency to teach with deeper meaning, enlighten and encourage my young family relations and my students to press into the questions of respect for all living systems. We are not separate from our natural environment. The oldest indigenous stories have made it clear that everything is connected: land, language, people, animals, with the river.

A strength of purpose has come out of struggles with loss, change, transformation that I have observed and experienced through five decades plus of identifying with the river, the Stó:lō. The landscape has change from an abundance of wild plants, trees, shrubs, flowers, berries, as fields, land and mountains near and by the river have been plowed under to make way for rock and gravel, corn, cattle, industry, logging and housing. The connection to this “progress” has brought a loss of habitat for species of birds, animals, insects, fish that no longer are observed along the Fraser River waterways. The teachings of Xay:tem return to the narrative for a renewal of questions – how will our river stories bring renewal to the language, environment, the salmon?
The old narrative of Hatzic Rock spoke about the importance of respect. Respect for teaching, learning, listening and acting with integrity. Of all the voices that have shown the citizens of the Salish Sea that our coastal stories are valued, it came from Hereditary Chief of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation, Chief Dan George, Geswanouth Slahoot (Thunder Coming Up Over the Land from the Water),

Of all the teachings we receive this one is the most important:

Nothing belongs to you of what there is, of what you take, you must share.72

It is time to bring our river stories to all places of engagement. There is no time to waste – it is time to share. Each indigenous educator brings stories with them about the land, family, community, health, resources, environment, language and learning styles. In a world of indigenous language, environment and living systems recovery, renewal and revitalization, it will be our stories that join people around the table.

When we recognize that new connections can be made with each other around learning and sharing of an indigenous way of knowing, way of looking at the world, points of connection can be made. Our communities can find common ground – first find the places that everyone respects and loves. This is the beginning place for our stories. David Orr (2002), shares thoughts on our human connection to nature:

Ecological design is the art that reconnects us as sensuous creatures evolved over millions of years to a beautiful world. That world does not need to be remade rather revealed. To do that, we do not need research as much as

rediscovery of old and forgotten things. We do not need more economic growth as much as we need to re-learn the ancient lesson of generosity, as trustees for a moment between those who preceded us and those who will follow. Our greatest needs have nothing to do with the possession of things but rather with heart, wisdom, thankfulness and generosity of spirit. And these virtues are part of larger ecologies that embrace spirit, body and mind – the beginning of design.\textsuperscript{73} (p.32).

The beauty of this passage is made ever more clear, if you substitute the word “story” for design.

In the Shxwelí of Living

I have heard Elder’s say, “what matters in our lives, is how well we have loved.”

How well have we loved a river? How well have we loved a river language? How well have we loved the salmon? How well have we loved the majestic mountains that look over the river and the people of the river, all citizens of the Salish Sea?

Have we shown compassion, empathy and respect for all the living systems that connect to the river? In our everyday conversations - to the places of environment policy, academic research and teaching, business negotiations – how well have accomplished the work of “setting things right” for a sustainable healthy river and all the citizens and living beings along that waterway?

At last, it is time to move along the river. A renewed hope rises with the incoming tide that the canoe of learning will enter the waterway of the Stó:lō once again and others will take the steering towards the future. A future rich with stories of recovery, renewal, responsibility and respect.

The dreams of the Ancestors would want nothing less. Our stories inform our past as we walk into the future.

Stó:lō Shxwelí Wíyotha, The Spirit of the Stó:lō Forever

Ya’lh yex wkw’as ho’y, Thank you
Epilogue

At the beginning of this thesis, I had a dream. Bear entered my dream world and by appearing, initiated the start of the stories that followed. In the dream, Bear and I were passing through the territory. Bear, somewhat like the Academy, has a distinct set of guiding compasses for defending an area. In building on this metaphor, the University Academy can be an intimidating world to Indigenous scholars bringing new or different theories to scholarly and academic research.

At the end of the prologue, the Bear vanishes in the mist. At the moment the Bear disappears, I find my storytelling voice. I know in my heart that there is room for both Bear and me to share the same space and territory. I am a storyteller. I realize that I have a theory. I can now walk confidently and freely on the land to share the theory through stories. It is my purpose and intention to “allow the river to flow in everybody.”

I am an educator, and Indigenous scholar in the field of Indigenous Teacher Education. As a Stó:lō woman, the river stories have shaped my worldview through the Halq’emeylem language, culture, community, and environment. What do our stories give us? How does an emerging theory for a way to interpret indigenous stories instill a new confidence for learners in our classrooms and researchers in higher education?

Our Stó:lō stories are the connections to the past, and give meaning and direction to the present and into the future. Our river narratives give us language, culture, worldview, identity, purpose, and agency. From writing this thesis, I have
learned that a “Restorative Indigenous Research” can emerge from interpreting our stories. In order to understand the teachings and knowledge found within the stories, a reflective, deep internal listening must take hold. The inner work of letting the stories settle “within” informs cultural identity and builds a confidence towards all forms of literacy. The way forward is to allow, “the stories to speak to us.”

At the core of Restorative Indigenous Research is the relationship between the story and the individual. An indigenous narrative is a moving thing. The story’s meaning unfolds over time. Restorative research seeks to honor a place where a story is interpreted over time by an individual, as well as, how the individual changes over time by living the interpretation of the story.

The craft of teaching in a restorative manner gives way to revitalizing indigenous ways of knowing and learning, language renewal, rich epistemological curriculum, and “setting things right” for our Aboriginal students in the classroom. In doing so, all learners have opportunities to “give voice” to how they interpret a story. This creative process connects the learner, the researcher or the educator, to the narrative where a hierarchically structure of understanding is pushed aside and in its place is a weaving of knowledge that is circular and connected with land, environment, citizens, ecology, and a way to make sense of the world.

The methodology for narrative research is advanced as a social science movement through scholarly papers brought forward by D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly (2004), and Elbaz-Luwisch, F. (2010), in that they articulate the many possible “maps” for research in narrative inquiry. Archibald, J. (2008) and Smith, L.T.
(1999), have offered substantive theoretical ideas that extend indigenous methods into western academic research spaces and further the dialog on indigenous methodologies. It is only in recent years, that indigenous methodologies are gaining a significant foothold to move beyond the “western research template” to enter into a renaissance field that pushes out the boundaries of narrative inquiry.

Indigenous researchers such as M. Kovach (2010) and S. Wilson (2008), are placing new approaches to methodologies on the “academic platform” and building emerging creative research paradigms of thought that inform others on indigenous knowledge systems and worldviews. It has been my intention with this thesis to arrive at this renewal space for indigenous research. At the core of *Walking Backwards Into The Future With Our Stories*, is how the oldest stories of the Stó:lō are about change and transformation. It is offered as a methodology for renewal that stays true as best it can, as an oral tradition written down, as a river storyteller would share in sacred ceremonial space.

Every indigenous scholar, researcher, educator, and learner that comes to this work – is like someone on the threshold of his or her stories. It will be the collective voices of the storytellers that will bring a new dawn for change, hope, and renewal for communities of learning. I believe a new confidence is “lifting up” in this new decade of the twenty-first century. Change, transformation, and renewal are the words driving a new indigenous research agenda. This is the time and place that the “talking stick” belongs to those throughout Indigenous education that welcome change, build
partnerships of knowledge across disciplines, and value the need for vision and action.

The education horizon awaits the arrival of the new learning canoes.
References


Appendices

Appendix 1.

Four Generations Family Photo Collection

Great Grandma Newton

Grandma Theresa Hairsine

Zena Buker, Mother

Laura Buker, Author
Appendix 2.

Hairsine-Cromarty Photos: Family Collection

Hairsine – Cromarty – Lacroix
Circa 1920’s

Great Grandmother Mary Cromarty
Circa 1890’s  Sto:lo Territory

Grandfather Gowan Hairsine & Uncle Don Hairsine
Circa 1940
Appendix 3.

Family Roots and Friends

Lyle Bucer, Father
WWII Veteran
Circa 1944

Author, Dr Stelomethet Ethel Gardner, &
Karen Bourne (sister) attending
The World Indigenous Education
Conference in New Zealand,
December 2005.

Elder Elizabeth Phillips,
Siyamiyateliyot Teacher,
Mentor, Friend, Elder
Map 1: Seasonal Availability of Important Resources in S’olh Témmexw

Map 2: Transformer Features in in S’olh Téméxw

Map 3: Halkomelem Dialects

Map 4: The Xwélmexw World

Figure 2. Season Rounds

Appendix 4.

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Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Centre
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